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OREGON EDUCATION

Lawmakers back \$100 million for Elliott State Forest, \$50 million for UO campus

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The Elliott State Forest is in Coos and Douglas counties and is a rugged landscape with old-growth trees and water.(Tony Andersen/Oregon Dpt. of Forestry)

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The Oregonian/OregonLive

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Oregon will issue more than \$100 million in state bonds to keep the Elliott State Forest in public hands and an \$50 million to help the University of Oregon build a new science complex named after its most famous gradua

Legislative budget writers approved with little comment a lengthy capital construction list Monday which includes more than \$362 million for 29 projects on public university and community college campuses across Oregon.

State support for the Elliott State Forest and the UO science campus were two looming question marks as the legislative session raced to a close.

For the Elliott State Forest, the state bonds will free it of its state-mandated obligation to produce timber revenue for K-12 education. The State Land Board, comprising Gov. Kate Brown, Treasurer Tobias Read and Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, unanimously supported that plan at its May 10 meeting. Less than a year earlier, the state appeared close to selling the 82,500-acre Coast Range parcel to a private timber operator.

Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton, co-chair of the Committee for Capital Construction, said the forest bond measure was one thing in the budget he "absolutely did not want."



"I find it sad that we make it so difficult to harvest timber," he said.

UO had requested \$100 million for its Phil and Penny Knight Campus for Accelerating Scientific Impact after receiving a \$500 million pledge from the Nike co-founder and his wife. Brown's recommended budget called for spacing out state support over several budgets, with \$34 million set aside in the 2017-19 biennium.

But top budget writers disagreed and upped state support to \$50 million this cycle, making the UO project the largest funded university project in 2017.

"This is a wonderful start, and we're thankful for this investment," Patrick Phillips, acting executive director of campus, said in a statement. "This funding proposal is a vote of confidence in the UO and a sign that elected leaders in this state see the Knight Campus as a game changing initiative that will fuel the economy for the benefit of all Oregonians."

The science campus will include three 70,000-square-foot buildings, and construction will begin on the first of fall.

The couple's \$500 million donation will be spaced out over a decade. The school plans to raise another \$500 million from donors, plus the \$100 million requested from the state.

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UO publicized the project last October and immediately asked for state support. The request came after the Higher Education Coordinating Commission had already identified its priority list of projects, and the volunteer board will hold a special meeting to include it.

The state's largest university did not fare as well on its capital construction requests.

Oregon State University had asked for more than \$69 million to help grow its Bend campus. President Ed Ray, longest-tenured active public university president in the state, has said publicly that OSU-Cascades should be treated as though it is the state's eighth public university. But budget writers approved just \$9 million for OSU to prep a pumice mine adjacent to the Bend campus for future growth.

"This has been a session of minimal progress, missed opportunities and unrealized potential," Ray said in a statement. Though he thanked lawmakers for approving \$9 million for a food and beverage studies building in Corvallis for the state's growing beer and wine industries, he was disappointed in the absence of OSU-Cascades support.

"There will not be at least one additional building on the OSU-Cascades campus to serve students. OSU will continue to work with the region as we approach future legislative sessions to impress upon legislators how significant this project is for Central Oregon," he said.



Portland State University won state backing for a public health school, a project being done in collaboration with Oregon Health & Science University, Portland Community College and the city of Portland.

The budget committee approved \$45 million for the PSU-led project at the corner of Southwest 4th Avenue and Market Street in downtown Portland. The project also relies on an additional \$6 million in state debt that will be repaid through rent and lease payments expected from commercial tenants.

The more than \$109 million project will be the new home of the PSU Graduate School of Education, as well as OHSU-PSU School of Public Health. PSU issued a statement saying the building was a "historic project" bringing together the various institutions.

Community colleges received more than \$101.4 million for a number of projects, including a \$8 million renovation of PCC's health technology building.

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