



FALL • WINTER 2023

# BEYOND TOXICS FALL NEWSLETTER

## OUR MISSION & VISION

Beyond Toxics provides leadership to build a community-driven environmental justice movement for a thriving and just Oregon.

As we look forward, we envision a future where we all have equitable access to healthy communities and a resilient environment.

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## Message from The Executive Director

As we bid farewell to 2023, I'm thrilled to share the significant strides my team has made this year. In this newsletter, you will find a major update on our groundbreaking report, '*Beneath the Pump: The Threat of Petroleum Contamination*,' an in-depth look at the harm to neighborhoods and the environment from gas stations. **Your continued support has made it possible for us to advocate for Oregon's first moratorium on new gas station construction!** We are determined to put a stop to new gas stations in our communities to reduce the risk of childhood cancer while reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

You'll read about a monumental achievement: the Climate Resilience Package, a testament to our relentless advocacy! This legislation, passed by the Oregon legislature last spring, not only secures vital funding to reduce climate drivers but also amplifies our commitment to support those hit hardest by climate change. **Your contribution enables us to make a real impact, uplifting underserved communities to thrive amidst environmental challenges.**

Explore our ongoing advocacy efforts with our article on Public Health Protection Zoning, a solution that breaks the cycle of environmental injustices throughout Oregon. With your support, we won the unanimous Eugene City Council vote to launch this seminal policy to hold industrial polluters accountable for their actions and prioritize public health. **Raising our collective voices to say "No more J.H. Baxters" made a real difference!** Your membership and contributions are vital in sustaining these initiatives.

I'm incredibly grateful to you, our dedicated members and supporters, for making our innovative achievements possible!

With heartfelt gratitude,

# Staff Spotlight

## OLIVIA FARNHAM

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
PROJECTS COORDINATOR



Olivia is a dedicated advocate for environmental justice. She holds a bachelor's degree in Spanish and Sociology from the University of Oregon. Originally from Chicago, she conducted impactful research on low-wage essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. With a background in teaching and community engagement, Olivia brings valuable skills to our team.

## ANA COLWELL

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE  
STATEWIDE POLICY  
MANAGER



Ana, a passionate proponent for the environment and Native American issues, holds a J.D. in Environmental Law from the University of Oregon. As a Native Environmental Sovereignty fellow, she championed environmental causes and received the Wayne Morse Environmental Law fellowship. Ana, a citizen of the Osage Nation, draws inspiration from her multicultural background. Now settled in the Pacific Northwest, she enjoys the region's outdoor lifestyle with her family.



## Public Health Criteria for Land Use Codes Gains Ground

**Due to your steadfast support**, the Eugene City Council agreed that our community deserves **“NO MORE J.H. BAXTERS”** and voted unanimously to direct city staff to draft an ordinance for Public Health Protection Zoning on October 16th! This is a huge win for the city of Eugene, as **we will be the first city in Oregon to embed public health into zoning laws and codes.**

Your collective voices played a crucial role in advancing the value of putting people’s health before corporate profits! The community’s compelling testimonies resonated with our city leaders and ultimately inspired effective action.

Instilling awareness of how land use decisions determine public health is critical, as our goal is to serve as a model for other over-burdened and under-represented communities.

### Land Uses Decisions Shape Community Health

Once formally adopted, this land use zoning code will safeguard our neighborhoods from potential new polluters. **This policy establishes a 1/4 mile buffer zone between industrial facilities and residential areas, schools, and parks**, and also prohibits the most hazardous manufacturers such as chemical factories and paper mills. These development standards ensure cleaner air, water, and soil for our residents. This added level of protection will help folks near heavily polluted areas and build equity into Oregon’s land use laws.

**This policy addresses historical injustices** by preventing toxic land uses near working-class and racially diverse neighborhoods. This proactive approach shields our community and holds companies accountable for their impact on public health.

Integrating public health requirements into city code aligns with our community goals to promote climate change resilience and protect air and water in our communities.

This bolsters our efforts to embed health and justice in all land use policies!



## Bethel Neighbors Light Up For Clean Energy!

The Bethel Clean Energy Project, a collaboration between Beyond Toxics and the Bethel community, is a powerful fusion of environmental health advocacy and transformative climate justice. Although we celebrate the closure of the J.H. Baxter wood preservative facility, we must now confront the extensive neighborhood dioxin contamination documented by the US EPA. Nearly 40 homes will require extensive soil removal and remediation – and the number continues to rise as soil testing expands further into the neighborhood.

### **Dioxin Findings Strip a Community's Sense of Safety**

Recognizing the trauma faced by residents, our mission is to reassure the community and instigate positive, lasting change. In March 2023, we kicked off the Bethel Clean Energy Campaign, offering education, free HVAC upgrades and weatherization. The project is supported by the Eugene Water and Electric Board.

After an overwhelming community response, we're ready to launch our second Clean Energy cohort to extend the benefits of clean energy to more low-income households.

### **Solar Installation Can Power 1,500 Bethel Homes**

Looking ahead, we propose repurposing the 40+ acre Baxter site into the Bethel Solar Project and Emergency Resilience Hub. The solar array can generate 11,800 kilowatts of energy to meet the energy needs of 1,500 Bethel homes.

To build community resilience in the face of climate emergencies and natural disasters, we also recommend constructing large storage buildings for emergency supplies. This comprehensive effort embodies the essence of climate justice, combining advocacy with tangible solutions.



# Beneath the Pump

BY MASON LEAVITT

GIS AND SPATIAL DATA COORDINATOR

Gas stations are a staple of modern American life and their presence across our cities is often taken for granted. The dangers of oil spills and petroleum contamination are well known. Major events, namely the British Petroleum spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, have seared images of animals and plants trapped by oil slicks into our collective memory. However, we are likely unaware of the thousands of spills from leaking underground oil storage tanks contaminating urban communities.

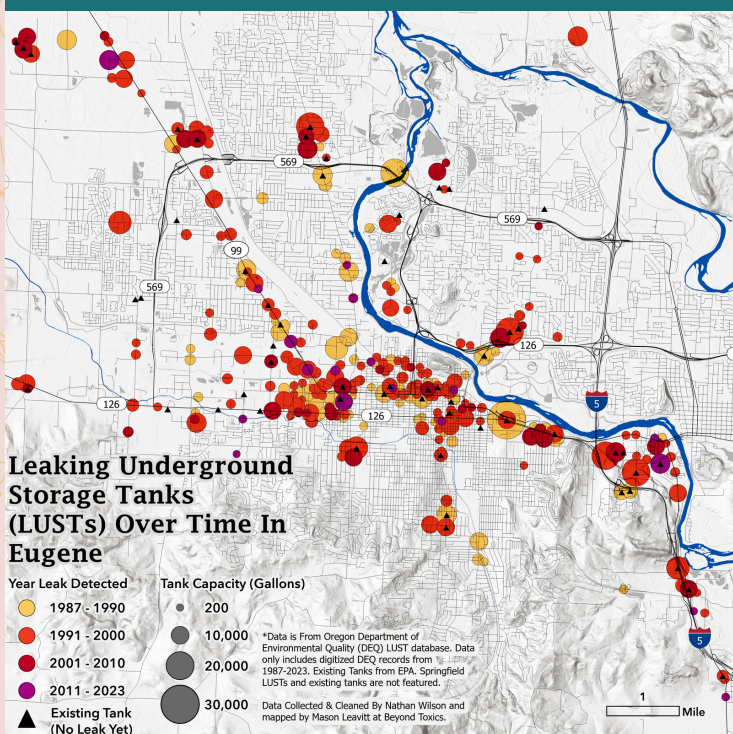
## Addressing Community Impact

Gas stations are not benign business entities. Operations at gas stations pollute nearby neighborhoods with toxic air and groundwater chemicals. To bring awareness of the issue, we poured through hundreds of records from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and read through dozens of scientific papers on the subject of gas station pollution.

Since 1987, **303 Leaking Underground Storage Tanks (LUSTs)** have contaminated air, water, and soil with hazardous petroleum-based toxins across the city of Eugene. Of those spills, 114 are still not cleaned up. The regulatory framework for managing cleanups is flawed at best. DEQ managers and gas station owners often agree to justify public health risks to save money, which often leaves some sort of contamination in place. Occasionally, gas station owners declare inability to pay and abandon the site for taxpayers to clean up.

### FIG. 1. WATER SOURCES THREATENED BY LUSTS

The map features DEQ LUST cases by type of contaminant found in the soil upon the discovery of a petroleum leak. The most common body of water threatened is groundwater wells for drinking water followed by the Willamette River. Data collected and organized by Nathan Wilson and Mason Leavitt.



Spills can also contaminate neighboring properties, and drive down property values for all nearby land uses due to fear of petroleum contamination. Lastly, gas stations constitute a public health concern every day – researchers report substantial evidence that hazardous air toxics are more concentrated closer to gas stations at levels associated with higher rates of asthma and blood cancers in children.

## Shifting Gears

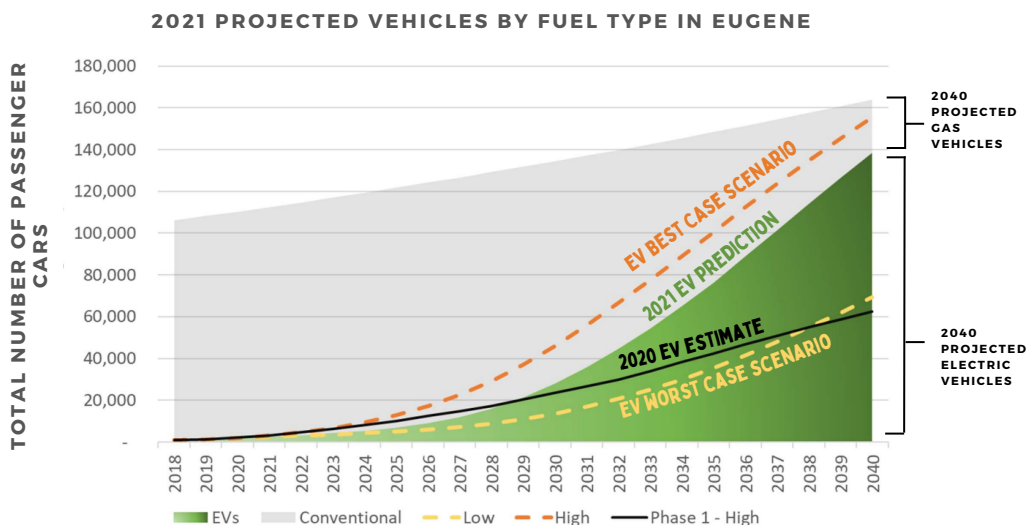
We believe that now is the right time to adopt policies that align with the economics of new and less polluting transportation choices. The Eugene Water and Electric Board (EWEB) and Oregon Department of Energy predict that **64-80% of cars in Eugene will be electric by 2035.**

As drivers transition to electric transportation systems, we simply won't need more gas stations. **It's a prime opportunity to turn off the fossil fuel tap by saying "No" to more gas pumps!**

Join us in a growing movement to reduce public health hazards from gas stations! Together we will empower communities to stand up to fossil fuel greenwashing and embrace the clean energy transition.

### FIG. 2. PROJECTED TOTAL ELECTRIC AND PASSENGER VEHICLES IN EWEB SERVICE AREA BY 2040

EWEB is forecasting a major increase in the number of EVs (green area) relative to gas-powered passenger vehicles (grey area) on the road by 2040. The graph forecasts a massive decrease in gas-powered passenger vehicles (grey area). Eugene's most recent sales are on track for the high adoption projection (orange line). Original graphic is from EWEB's Phase 2 Electrification Report with added notes for clarity (EWEB, 2021).



# Oregon's Landfills: Communities Face Double Impacts of Trash and Toxics



Adair Village is a small city located in the shadow of the massive Coffin Butte Landfill in Benton County. This summer, a Beyond Toxics team canvassed door-to-door there to get a better understanding of the community's perspective on the proposed landfill expansion. We conduct community surveys to allow residents to reflect on their personal experiences and discuss their perspectives with our staff.

## Our Findings

The results of the survey have already helped fight the expansion of Coffin Butte and alert the EPA regarding the landfill's troubling record of failing to capture methane gas. **Methane is a climate pollutant 80 times more powerful than CO2.**

When methane escapes landfill gas capture systems, other toxic and smelly molecules join along for the ride. 60% of residents in Adair village report smelling the landfill on a regular basis, and 20% have felt the need to skip planned outdoor activities because of intense odors and worries about health impacts of inhaling landfill pollution.

The community's experiences, combined with a recent EPA inspection that measured large plumes of methane leaking from the landfill, present evidence that Coffin Butte's gas capture system is likely not meeting environmental regulations. Nearby residents also express concern that the leachate oozing from the landfill leaks heavy metals, such as arsenic, into the groundwater.

## Community Connections

We found that many residents were relieved to know that Beyond Toxics is looking into concerns they care about such as air pollution, leachate, and local water quality. Many residents are seeking information on the landfill, its expansion, and greener alternatives to managing waste.

## Next Steps

We are committed to holding Oregon landfills accountable to the law, and raising standards for environmental and public health stewardship. We will continue to form connections with lawmakers, regulatory agencies, and the community for lasting change!

# Climate Resilience Triumph: A Victory for Oregon's Future

We're excited to share a momentous update: **The Climate Resilience Package** (HB 3409 & HB 3630) **successfully passed in the 2023 Oregon State Legislature**, signifying a groundbreaking win for the state's climate endeavors.

This transformative legislation brings together more than a dozen priority bills under a comprehensive plan, securing an unprecedented **\$90 million in funding to leverage at least ten times that amount in federal funds** for vital climate action initiatives!

Beyond Toxics served on the steering committee of the coalition to help shepherd this bill package forward. This victory marks a significant step toward a greener, more resilient Oregon! **Thank you for your unwavering support** for our staff's successful efforts to shape a sustainable future for our beautiful state.



Photo by: Lisa Arkin

## Key Policy Achievements

### Natural Climate Solutions

Establishes a statewide policy to fund natural climate solutions to mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon throughout farms, forests, urban parks and other natural landscapes.

### Resilient, Efficient Buildings Policy Package

Leverages federal funding to reduce climate pollution while driving down living costs through energy efficiency and affordable renewable energy access. The bill supports healthy communities and family-wage local jobs in construction, energy, and agriculture.

### Community Resilience Hubs

Directs Department of Human Services to provide grants and technical assistance for resilience hubs and networks in Oregon, giving access to vital resources for vulnerable communities during disasters.

### Climate Protection Program

Supports the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's oversight of the Climate Protection Program and ensures that the Community Climate Investments program achieves its intended benefits for frontline communities.



Photo by: Stephen Repickey

## Bee Jazzy Update

This year's 9th-Annual Bee Jazzy celebration was a buzzing success, thanks to YOU! Whether you are a first-time attendee or a familiar face, we're always happy to have so many bee protectors in our community that unify around our efforts to Save Oregon's Bees.

### Funding Crucial Work

Thanks to hundreds of supportive attendees, **we raised nearly \$29,000!** Bee Jazzy funds crucial projects, like bee surveys and public education programs that promote pollinator health and biodiversity across the state. Our gracious business supporters deserve a round of applause for making it possible. Many thanks to co-hosts Mountain Rose Herbs and Café Mam, and allies at Capella Market, Cafe Yumm!, Farmers Union Coffee Roasters, Hummingbird Wholesale, Toby's Family Foods, and Rainbow Valley Design & Construction.

### A Harmonious Gathering

From the musical talents of Halie Loren and Carl Woideck, to the educational efforts of Plan Bees, to culinary delights from B-Heavenly, Tucky's Kitchen, and Sweet Life Patisserie, we appreciate the harmony created between all of these community members. We also extend our gratitude to all the local businesses and individuals who donated to our silent auction and to Silvan Ridge Winery for providing the beautiful backdrop of this gathering and pouring delicious drinks!

### Future Celebrations

Next year will be the **10th-annual Bee Jazzy** event! We hope you'll join us for this Bee Jazzy bash, made ever bigger and more successful with your support. Pollinator work is year-round, though, so be sure to stay up-to-date with our action alerts and engagement opportunities.

# People-Powered Environmental Protections!

The Beyond Toxics team is at the forefront of advocating for healthier, more sustainable, and equitable communities. We work to protect our environment, promote clean air and water, and ensure the voices of those most affected by environmental issues are heard.



**Here are just a few reasons why supporting our work is vital:**

- **Local Impact!** Your support directly benefits Oregon's local environment and the people who call this lovely state home.
- **Environmental Justice!** We are committed to addressing the unequal burden of environmental hazards carried by Oregon families. We fight for the rights of overly-burdened communities, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of a healthy environment.
- **Climate Justice!** Your support helps Beyond Toxics tackle issues related to healthy land use, air and water quality, equitable climate solutions, and the well-being of people and wildlife alike.
- **Advocacy with Results!** We don't just identify problems; we work with communities to find solutions. Our youth education programs and advocacy efforts raise awareness, influence policy, and create lasting change!

## Ways to Support

Learn more at  
[www.beyondtoxics.org/donate](http://www.beyondtoxics.org/donate)

- Become a Member
- Donate Monthly
- Mail a contribution to:

Beyond Toxics, P.O. Box 1106, Eugene, OR, 97440



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- Educate and Inspire



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