

Initiative aims to protect water quality

By John Gunther
Emerald Contributor

An initiative that if passed could have significant effects on the McKenzie River is gaining support and will likely appear on the May ballot, the initiative's petition coordinator said.

The McKenzie River Initiative would amend the Lane County Rural Comprehensive plan, passed in the mid-'70s. Most notably, it would prohibit the construction of new dams on the river, restrict the use of pesticides and fertilizers on public lands next to the river and prohibit mining, quarrying and processing of rock within 100 feet of the river.

The initiative is designed to make sure the river's water quality and recreation, scenic, and wildlife values are protected from damage by economic development, said petition coordinator Paul Hoobyar.

More than half of the 6,263 signatures needed to get the McKenzie River Initiative on the May 19 ballot have been collected, Hoobyar said.

The signatures must be collected by Jan. 17 to get the initiative on the ballot.

"I feel pretty optimistic right now," Hoobyar said. "We have quite a bit of energy and support out there."

Hoobyar said the initiative should concern students and all of Eugene because Eugene gets its drinking water from the McKenzie River.

The initiative would also provide a buffer strip

for development within 25 feet of the normal high water line on the river.

The buffer strip would defer herbicides and pesticides from draining into the river and also stop erosion problems on the bank of the river, Hoobyar said.

Hoobyar says the initiative is important because parts of the Lane County Rural Comprehensive Plan have become outdated, threatening river quality.

For example, Hoobyar said a proposed bridge on the river, called the Bear Creek Bridge, could be a threat to the river's ecosystem. Under the current plan, the decision concerning whether the bridge will be built is totally in the hands of the county commissioners, Hoobyar said.

Although the initiative would not prohibit construction of the bridge, it would let voters, rather than commissioners, decide whether the bridge would be built, he said.

Although the quality of the river is good now, he said, the purpose of the initiative is to ensure continued high quality of the river.

Some opposition to the initiative centers around the belief that the buffer zone would infringe on peoples' property rights by not allowing them to develop their land next to the river.

But Hoobyar said that while the people own the land they don't own the river because it is a public resource.

Hoobyar said the issue of property infringement is for voters to decide.

Low-income utility aid cut

By John Higgins
Emerald Contributor

Fewer low-income renters and home owners will receive help paying their heating bills from a federal energy assistance program.

Last year the Low Income Energy Assistance Program served more than 60,000 households, but only 57,000 will receive help this year because of federal cutbacks.

The program helps offset energy costs for low-income households by making a one-time payment to energy suppliers on behalf of the household.

Last year the federal government gave the state of Oregon \$13.2 million. This year Oregon will receive only \$12.6 million, which will be distributed in average one-time payments of \$220.

However, at least 150,000 households in Oregon qual-

ify for assistance, according to the Oregon Housing and Community Services Department. Program administrators give priority to the elderly and disabled and only make payments as long as the money lasts.

"We'll probably run out by the end of February," program representative Jodie Jones said. Last year the program ran out of money in late March, Jones said.

To qualify for help, households must have a gross annual income less than 125 percent of the federal poverty level. For example, single renters or homeowners who make \$690 or less a month may apply for money. A family of four would have to make less than \$1,396 a month to qualify.

The program is scheduled to run from Dec. 2, 1991, through April 30, 1992. The program's local office is at 155 High St. in Eugene. The phone number is 687-5194.

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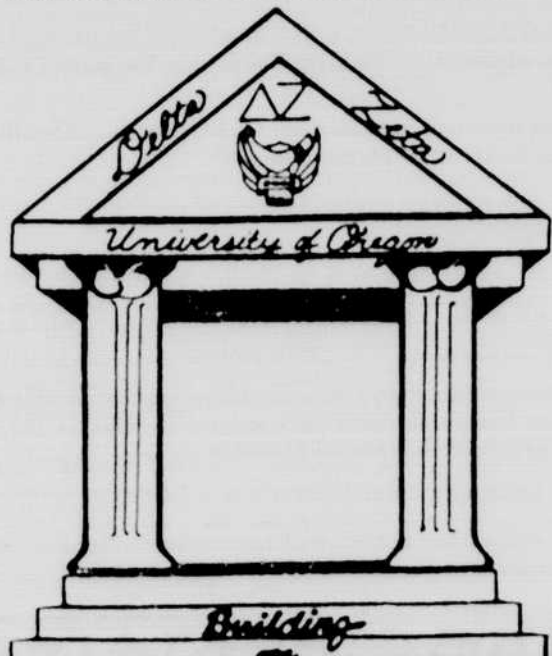
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