

Ornaments

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lamette National Forest was chosen to provide the Capitol Christmas Tree in 2018, ornaments were hidden along the forest trails for people to find.

The hunt's purpose was to encourage people to get outdoors and explore the forest. The visitors association decided to bring it back for a second year.

Those who find an ornament are encouraged to use the hashtags "#FindYourOrnament," "#FindYourTrail" and "#IwonderWV" on social media.

For more information, visit oregonwinecountry.org/ornament.

Abby Luschei is the arts and entertainment reporter for the Statesman Journal and can be reached at aluschei@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6747.

Interested in telling at one of the upcoming Salem Storytellers Project events? Submit your story: www.storytellersproject.com/tell.



People can search for some 200 glass ornaments hidden along non-wilderness trails in the Willamette National Forest for the Willamette Valley Visitors Association's second Annual Ornament Hunt. WILLAMETTE VALLEY VISITORS ASSOCIATION

Appeal Tribune

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Victor Point area farmers and landowners including Jesse Rue, left, Joel Rue, Bruce Jaquet and Lucas Rue, are fighting to keep a proposed dam and reservoir from being built along Drift Creek. SHELDON TRAVER/SPECIAL TO THE APPEAL TRIBUNE

Drift Creek

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After 14 years of battling in venues from state agencies to courts and millions of dollars in public and private money spent on both sides, the proposed dam has finally been defeated by a decision from the Oregon Water Resources Commission.

"Some people say that we won this one, and I personally don't think that we're winners," Rue said.

The major sticking point with the plan was whether the proposal of the East Valley Water District – a quasi-legislative body made up of farmers in a

wide swath around Mt. Angel – complied with Oregon rules that such a project not be detrimental to fish species, specifically cutthroat trout.

East Valley Water District board chair Dave Bielenberg said over the past decade the district followed every step it was directed to by the Oregon Water Resources Department to obtain the water rights and build the dam.

Until the commission's ruling, every major opinion and decision seemed to go in favor of East Valley, and building the dam seemed imminent.

"We've done everything that the law requires of us and the department asked," said Bielenberg, who owns 1,200 acres of land around Mt. Angel where he grows grass seed, vegetables and spe-

cialty seed crops.

The East Valley Water District has 60 days from the Water Resources Commission's decision to appeal it to the Oregon Court of Appeals, according to Water Resources Department spokesperson Racquel Rancier.

"The board has not met since the ruling, so we don't know what we're going to do," Bielenberg said.

Eyeing Drift Creek for decades

Water rights are a commodity in Oregon.

With them, the holders have the ability to transform wide swaths of land into highly-productive farms, growing everything from nursery plants like arbor vitae, commodity crops like corn and blueberries, and newly sought-after items like hazelnuts and hemp.

There are tens of thousands of acres of prime Willamette Valley farmland around Mt. Angel and many farmers in the area own water rights, but those rights are subject to curtailment in times of low water.

Multiple times – including once in the 1950s and in 1993 – farmers in the area considered building a dam along Drift Creek south of Silverton for a reservoir where they could store and regulate the water for their farms in times of low water.

But it wasn't until 2000 that a group of farmers organized themselves into the East Valley Water District.

The geographic boundary of the district covers areas of Marion and Clackamas counties from north of Silverton to south of Woodburn and Molalla, bordered by the Pudding River and the Cascade Mountain foothills.

There are 35,000 acres of tillable land within the boundaries of the district and about half are already being irrigated with existing water rights.

Building new dams in Oregon is difficult, and there are many considerations along the way.

The district considered more than 75 different sites before deciding on Victor Point due to water availability, geology of the area and cost.

But they kept coming back to Drift

Creek, which originates near Silver Falls State Park and meanders 11 miles through rolling hills into the Pudding River, and building a dam just north of Victor Point seemed their best option.

In 2013, the East Valley Water District formally applied to the Oregon Water Resources Department for the right to store water at Drift Creek. The department issued a proposed final order in 2014, recommending approving the dam, but neighbors whose land would be affected and WaterWatch filed protests almost immediately.

In 2016, the Oregon Water Resources Department referred the case to the Office of Administrative Hearings and in 2018, it held a two-week hearing on the matter.

Judge Denise McGorin issued in February 2019 a proposed order recommending approval with modifications, and OWRD director Tom Byler issued a proposed order to approve the proposal in September.

The dam would be near the intersection of Victor Point and Fox roads and was proposed to be 70 feet above the ground, the area submerged was to be 384 acres, it would be able to store 12,000 acre feet of water and cost about \$84 million.

Most of the canyon where the dam would have been created is filled with trees and fields filled with tall grass in the summer.

By all appearances, the dam and reservoir seemed inevitable.

"This thing's been going on so long that a lot of people who were involved from the start aren't around anymore," Bielenberg said.

Generations farm the land

When Joel Rue's grandfather moved to Oregon from Minnesota in the early 1900s, he settled on a hilly plot of land south of Silverton in an unincorporated Marion County community known as Victor Point.

Since then, generations of the family have lived and farmed there.

The 900 acres Rue owns and the

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