

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM
THE ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Brown should take
carbon case to rural areas

It looks as if Gov. Kate Brown has been preparing for more than a year for the chance that a cap-and-trade bill to lower greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon would not win approval from the 2019 legislative session.

As it turned out, that was a good bet: Despite the fact that Democrats held big majorities in both legislative chambers, the measure (House Bill 2020) stalled in dramatic fashion in the Senate during the final weeks of the session. First, Republican senators boycotted the Capitol (in some cases actually leaving the state so they'd be out of range of State Police efforts to round them up), denying the Senate the quorum of 20 votes it needed to conduct any business.

Then, Senate President Peter Courtney announced, in almost equally dramatic fashion, that the bill did not have enough support from Democrats to pass. The Republican senators returned to Salem and the Legislature raced through its remaining agenda during a frenetic weekend.

The Monday after legislators left Salem, Brown told reporters she was exploring the use of executive action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — actions that would not require any legislative approval. She didn't identify what those measures might be (Brown is notorious for keeping her cards close to her chest) but also said that she and other administration officials would spend time and effort reaching out to the rural parts of Oregon, areas where opposition to the cap-and-trade bill had simmered for months and finally boiled over, leading to highly visible protests in Salem.

But Brown didn't go into that Monday meeting with reporters cold. A news story this week from the Oregon Capital Bureau reported that she had the benefit of more than a year's worth of work from the state Department of Environmental Quality, outlining possible actions the governor could take on her own. That work was put on the back burner during the early stages of the session, when it seemed as if House Bill 2020 was gathering momentum. But as soon as it was clear that the bill was dead, work resumed in earnest on the notion of executive action.

In response to a public records request from the Capital Bureau, the Department of Environmental Quality released 39 emails between the governor's office and the department that outline some of the proposals under consideration. Some of the proposals, such as increasing access to public transit and promoting biking and walking, won't generate much controversy but will be of limited use in rural parts of Oregon; the same likely is true of another proposal, to require newly constructed buildings to include electric vehicle charging stations.

Some of the other proposals that the administration is kicking around, however, could raise hackles in those parts of Oregon that are not the Portland metro area. They include suggestions such as a gradually declining cap on industrial emissions and fossil fuel importers, strengthening Oregon's controversial low-carbon fuel standard, boosting regulations on landfills to lower methane emissions, more strictly regulating dairies and expanding vehicle inspection programs so that medium-duty trucks are inspected twice per year.

Brown's office this week said she's been meeting with stakeholders from the agricultural sector, transportation sector, and wood products industries "throughout the summer and will continue to do so into the fall to ensure that the policy benefits rural Oregon while allowing rural Oregon industries to remain competitive." That's fine, as far as it goes — and we're guessing these discussions tie into her preference that this be handled through legislation rather than executive action. (That's our preference as well; the legislative process usually allows for more flexibility and more public scrutiny of important issues.)

But allow us to suggest that Brown expand those talks by going out into rural Oregon and holding public meetings where she makes her case on carbon reduction. And then she should sit back and just listen. She might be surprised.



Your views

Wolfe: Joseph Branch Trail is a land use issue

To the Editor:

Jacob Losby and Natalie Millar (spokespeople for the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium) recently made statements referring to the Trail project in Wallowa County as being "political." Mr. Losby claims this in his letter to The Observer (Aug. 14). Ms. Millar also makes this claim in her interview with the Wallowa County Chieftain, referenced in their July 31 article. The JBTC trail project is NOT a political issue. No one other than JBTC members consider it to be political, but I can see why they wish to make it so.

The proposed trail is a land use issue. In Wallowa County the property they wish to build the trail on is zoned "exclusive farm use" over the majority of it. The farmers and ranchers submitted extensive evidence of financial harm and disturbance of farm practices this trail would cause to their operations. Homeowners also submitted objections. EFU laws are clear about what is required for a conditional use permit in EFU zoned areas. JBTC did not meet, or even try to meet, the standards affirmed by the recent Oregon Supreme Court decision.

Mr. Losby and Ms. Millar state they are now going to hire a "project manager" to force this project on the adjacent farms and ranches in Wallowa County. They spent two years using grant money and a free attorney writing an application for the CUP, during which time they did not talk to landowners, whose objections they already knew. Now they say they want to "build a relationship" with those same farmers they ignored.

Both JBTC spokespeople gave different explanations for the withdrawal of their appeal. They ignore the fact that both sides of the issue had time to file new evidence sup-

porting their position on the Appeal (at JBTC's request) but that only the opposition took the time to do so.

This special interest group seems to have unlimited resources for grants and free attorneys to continue to harass the farmers of Wallowa County. We just want to be left alone to try to make a living and preserve farmland in Oregon, which is the true reason for EFU zones. Not recreation.

Rebecca Wolfe
Wallowa

Mildrexler: There is a science-based, socially peaceful compromise for Lostine River Corridor

To the Editor:

Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands, sponsor of Wallowology Discovery Center, has watched the Lostine River Fuels Reduction project unfold over several years. The conflation of values, science, politics and strong emotions has left little room for productive dialogue. Nonetheless, everyone agrees they love the Lostine River and Eagle Cap Wilderness. The Lostine provides us with an abundance of cold clean water, rich fish and wildlife habitat, a riverine paradise, and access to our state's largest wilderness area.

It would be beneficial to find a solution to this problem and avoid actions that would cause lasting divisions in our community, or a lost sense of place for the Lostine River Corridor. For whatever reason, relatively low interest in the project resulted in at least one bid that was eventually withdrawn. While a slightly modified version of the sale has already been advertised, there is still time for a different course of action.

In the spirit of solving this problem in everyone's favor, we'd like to proffer a compromise: Move forward with an 8-inch diameter limit and remove the smaller, most flammable trees where appropriate.

Write to us

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This will save the mature and older trees with their thick fire-resistant bark and large carbon stores. It will also protect valuable fisheries and wildlife habitat and reduce impacts on the sensitive forest understory. This way we can move forward, reducing fire risk where it matters most (eliminating small trees and flashy fuels) while retaining the large, older structures in this cool, moist, riparian forest. Fire crews do excellent work removing small-diameter trees and have a budget for this kind of work.

This simple approach could reduce fire risk, provide employment opportunities, and largely maintain the character of the Lostine River Corridor we all cherish. It might also help soothe the wounds and scars many people on both sides of this issue have experienced, and provide opportunities for everyone to move forward together in a more unified manner.

David Mildrexler
Systems Ecologist
Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands

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