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Cattlemen question federal river bill

Act could make hurdles for managing land

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

PENDLETON — Eastern Oregon ranchers said they are wary of federal legislation that would add nearly 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers statewide, despite assurances the proposal will not affect existing private property or water rights.

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats from Oregon, introduced the River Democracy Act on Feb. 3, which calls for dramatically expanding wild and scenic river designations in all corners of the state to protect water quality, enhance outdoor recreation and mitigate wildfire risks.

Oregon has 2,173 miles of wild and scenic rivers. The River Democracy Act would roughly triple that number.

The bill also expands wild and scenic river corridors from a quarter-mile to a half-mile on both sides of the river. For 4,700 river miles, that amounts to slightly more than 3 million acres of protected land — an area about the size of Connecticut.

“It’s a huge, vast amount of land,” said Todd Nash, a Wallowa County commissioner and rancher. “That alone is of huge concern.”

Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1968 to shield certain waterways from development. In 2019, Wyden invited members of the public to nominate new streams and rivers for protection, which led to the River Democracy Act.

“Oregonians made it loud and clear: they cherish Oregon’s rivers and want them protected for generations to come,” Wyden said in a statement. “More protected rivers and clear management objectives mean more jobs, improved wildfire resiliency and a guarantee for the livability of Oregon.”

However, Tom Sharp, president of the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association, said the bill caught him off guard.

Sharp, who ranches near Burns in Southeast Oregon, said many producers in the

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Alex Wittwer/The Observer

La Grande High School Assistant Principal Eric Freeman inspects a frame of the school’s images of the graduating class of 1924 in the high school’s library Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021. It is the oldest graduation presentation in the school’s collection. Freeman and Kathy Rudd, a La Grande High School graduate, are working to restore missing photos of some of the school’s graduating classes.

RESTORING THE PAST AT LA GRANDE HIGH

Project aims to fill gaps of missing graduate photos

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande High School alum Kathy Rudd recently made a startling discovery — her school’s history is vanishing.

Rudd, with the help of Eric Freeman, the school’s assistant principal, was examining framed collections of LHS graduating class photos from 1924 to 2001. All had been taken down from the walls near the school’s main entrance so their condition could be examined. Rudd, a 1969 La Grande High graduate, found 33 picture frames present and 23 missing.

The good news is La Grande High’s extensive yearbook collection will help fill a big part of the graduate photo void.

The school has yearbooks for 18 of the years the senior photo collections are missing. Rudd and Freeman plan to

LHS GRADUATION CLASS PICTURE PROJECT

- La Grande High School has framed collections of graduating class photos spanning 1924 to 2001.
- Missing from the series are 23 of the graduating classes.
- Yearbook photos can fill in 18 years’ worth of the missing photos.
- Yearbooks are needed for 1940, 1949, 1955, 1958 and 1971.

make copies of the photos of the seniors in those 18 annuals and put them in frames for their class so they can be on display at the school.

The disheartening news is La Grande High has no yearbooks for five of the missing frames — for 1940, 1949, 1955, 1958 and 1971 — meaning it may be impossible to make photo frames for those classes.

Rudd and Freeman are undaunted, though, and said they hope to find copies of yearbooks for those years as part of the Graduation Class Picture Project they are launching with major help from 1969 LHS graduate Nan Fordice. The trio aim to create a group of volunteers who will restore the frayed senior class photo frames and create collections for the missing graduating classes.

Freeman is excited about the prospect of heightening the visibility of past graduating classes.

“We want to share LHS’s history,” the assistant principal said.

The restoration work would include having the picture frames’ plastic glass replaced with a type that will help protect them from ultraviolet light to prevent the photos in the frames from fading.

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All adults OK for vaccines by July 1

Oregonians 65-69 now can seek COVID-19 shots

By **GARY A. WARNER**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Every adult in Oregon will be offered a vaccination against COVID-19 by July 1, with the two-shot vaccines reaching all adults who want it by August, Gov. Kate Brown said Friday, Feb. 26.

“Come summer, any Oregonian who wants the vaccine can receive it,” Brown announced at a virtual press conference.

It was a surprisingly optimistic forecast after recent estimates that the vaccination of the entire state would stretch into autumn or even early 2022.

Oregon has had one of the lowest COVID-19 infection rates in the nation, with 154,878 infections and 2,206 deaths through Friday. Nationwide, there have been just under 28.5 million infections and 510,089 deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

The shorter timeline announced Friday is based on reports from the Biden Administration that Pfizer and Moderna, the maker of the two currently available vaccines, will hit their production targets, which would increase the number of doses coming to states.

Johnson & Johnson is developing a third vaccine that requires just one inoculation, though initial reports show its effectiveness is somewhat less than the Pfizer and Moderna doses.

Logistical bottlenecks are being cleared, and Biden is bringing in more help for states.

In Oregon, Phase 1 vaccine eligibility, which covers about 1.36 million people, reached its last eligibility milestone Monday, March 1, allowing those age 65-69 to make appointments.

The state then plans to use most of March to catch up with some of the Phase 1 backlog.

Phase 2 eligibility begins March 29, when residents 45-64

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What to do when the letters fall off the page?

Concussion leaves Joseph children’s writer with disorder

By **ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP**
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — In 2018, Joseph children’s writer Catherine Matthias suffered a fall. She hit her head, hard, and had a brain concussion.

“After that,” she said, “I couldn’t stand, and I couldn’t handle glare or bright lights.”

But Matthias, whose grandson suffers from Irlen Syndrome, recognized these effects as symptoms of the same little-known brain disorder.

“Irlen Syndrome is not a vision problem, it’s a brain processing problem,” Matthias said. “It’s a perceptual disorder caused by the brain’s inability to process specific wavelengths of light.”

“People who have this syndrome get

headaches. They get nauseous or dizzy,” she said. “They may look at a page and what looks like an orderly column of numbers or letters to you may appear to them as random figures spread all across the page.”

Irlen Syndrome sufferers often have trouble reading conventional text — black type on white paper. Instead of nice, orderly text, they see swirls of sentences or letters that move, appear in columns, vibrate or literally fall off the page.

Matthias now is a certified Irlen Syndrome screener. But her personal experience made her acutely aware of the devastating effects this rarely recognized condition, found in an estimated

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Ellen Morris Bishop/For the Wallowa County Chieftain

Catherine Matthias of Joseph is a children’s writer who has Irlen Syndrome and is an Irlen screener. Her book about the condition, “Word Gobblers,” is due out in mid-March 2021.

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