

BENTZ

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ask if they supported the River Democracy Act. None responded to requests for comment.

Bentz, whose district represents all or part of 20 counties in Eastern, Central and Southern Oregon, said the majority of county commissioners have expressed serious concerns about the bill, which he called “a flawed proposal based on an exclusive and secretive process that would undermine public access to, and responsible management of, Oregon’s natural resources.”

The commissioners in at least three Eastern Oregon counties — Wallowa, Union and Grant — have

objected to the bill. The American Forest Resource Council, a timber industry group, and the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association have also raised objections.

Those issues were outlined by Bentz in his letter. They range from a lack of consultation with local elected officials and experts, to how the Wild and Scenic river designations might affect multiple land uses including timber harvest, livestock grazing, mining and outdoor recreation.

With half-mile stream buffers on either side, the River Democracy Act adds up to about 3 million acres of protected land, or an area roughly the size of Connecticut.

Union County Commissioner Donna Beverage,

who said the legislation would impact 86,000 acres in Union County, is glad that Bentz is speaking out against the River Democracy Act

“I appreciate that Congressman Bentz is representing us in this important matter on legislation that can completely impact the scope and use of 86,000 acres of land in Union County,” she said. “As I have said before, if there are areas which need federal protection we should start over and use the public comment process involving local people and do a study to show why the land should be federally protected. We have to start over and do it the right way.”

Wyden defended the bill during a virtual town

hall meeting on Aug. 31, assuring constituents the bill contains language explicitly to protect existing private property rights.

Responding to written questions from the Association of Oregon Counties, Wyden said protections under the National Wild and Scenic River Act are not the same as wilderness areas. Motorized access and mechanical forest treatments are allowed, and often encouraged to improve the ecological function of the watershed.

The River Democracy Act actually goes a step further, Wyden said, and requires land management agencies such as the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to assess wildfire risks in each Wild and Scenic river corridor.

A spokesman for Wyden, Hank Stern, said it is puzzling why Bentz would oppose a bill aimed at stepping up wildfire management.

“Sen. Wyden believes this legislation can pass the Senate if it gets a fair review on what’s actually in the bill, rather than meritless and made-up claims,” Stern said in an email.

As for the House, Stern said Wyden has had discussions with members of the House Committee on Natural Resources.

That said, it is not a requirement to have companion legislation in order for the bill to pass both chambers.

Bentz, however, said local elected officials in his district are worried the bill would open the door for

special interest groups to file frivolous lawsuits targeting management activities, while requiring understaffed agencies to produce expensive and time-consuming river plans.

Before the bill moves forward, Bentz said Wyden and Merkley should release detailed maps and analyses of the proposed Wild and Scenic river segments for public review.

Stern said the bill includes legal descriptions of all proposed streams and rivers. Nominations for Wild and Scenic rivers are still being added and removed as staff continues to meet with stakeholders.

“Maps will be finalized well before the Senate votes on the bill, and be made immediately available,” Stern said.

INSKO

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Oveson went on to become an educator and high school coach. He said there have been many instances in which he has encountered issues in coaching and thought back to how Insko handled them. He remembered the compassion Insko showed his players and tries to replicate it. Oveson also recalled how Insko balanced being a competitor without having a triumph-at-all-costs attitude.

“He loved to win, but wanted to do it right, with hard work and intensity,” Oveson said of Insko, who later became an EOU dean instrumental in jump-starting Eastern’s groundbreaking distance education program.

The highlights of Insko’s gridiron coaching career at Eastern included a 21-19 upset over national power Carroll College in Helena, Montana, in 1974. It was the Fighting Saints’ only home loss that season, its first in Helena since 1972.

Insko stepped down as Eastern’s football coach after the 1977 season to become the Mountaineers’ head men’s basketball coach. He guided the men’s hoopsters for the next four seasons, winning 54 games in the process.

His cast of roundball players included Emmett “Rodney” Roberts who played for the Mountaineers from 1978 to 1980.

“He was one of the most kind hearted men I’ve ever met in my life,” Roberts said. “He had a heart of gold. Whether you were on the varsity or the junior varsity, he was concerned and showed compassion. He was such a blessing in our lives.”

Roberts came to Eastern from Bowie, Maryland.

“I was a long way from home, but I never felt alone because coach always made sure I was OK,” Roberts said.

The former EOU player returned to La Grande earlier this year to visit Insko and his family.

“I felt like I was their son because of the way



Eastern Oregon University/Contributed Photo
Lee Insko patrols the Eastern Oregon University sideline in 1971. Insko was the head football coach from 1968 to 1977. Insko died Tuesday, Nov. 16, 2021, at age 86.

they treated me,” Roberts said.

Gary Vaughn of Pendleton, who played football for Insko in the early 1970s, was struck by how Insko treated all of his players the same regardless of their talent level.

“Lee Insko was always one of my favorite coaches because every one of his players really mattered to him, and it always showed,” Vaughn said. “Lee didn’t care if you were the star or the last man on a roster, you were going to be coached hard and taught the game. His humor, decency and kindness was always on display.”

Vaughn, who said Insko won several regional coach of the awards, later served on his coaching staff.

“When I coached for him, he expected the same from his assistants. How we all treated and cared for each other was very important to him. He became family and your players were like family,” Vaughn said.

Insko later served as dean of Eastern’s distance education program for eight years after ending his coaching career at EOU in 1982. Dixie Lund, who worked under Insko while he led Eastern’s distance education program, credits Insko with doing a remarkable job furthering the development of the program, which was one of the first in the nation to allow students to earn a degree without attending classes

on a college campus. Today, it remains one of the most successful distance education programs in the region.

Lund said Insko was a remarkable mentor for her.

“I just had so much respect for everything about him,” she said. “He was a role model for the rest of us to follow.”

She noted that Insko urged her to earn a doctorate degree, which she later did.

“That was the best advice anyone could have given me,” Lund said.

Still she vividly remembers how concerned Insko was about the stress this would put on her family.

“There was always this sense that he truly cared,” Lund said.

To illustrate this point, Lund recalled that once she received a phone call from an administrator at Eastern that sparked an enraged response.

“It lit my fuse,” Lund said. “I was so angry that I slammed down my phone.”

Insko, whose office was next to Lund’s, asked who she had been talking to. When he realized who it was, he urged her to go home early.

Lund said Insko did not ask what had caused her outburst and instead was concerned that she leave before the individual she had been talking to came to her office and gave her a tongue-lashing.

“He wanted to protect me,” said Lund who later twice served as EOU’s

interim president.

Insko, a member of EOU’s athletic hall of fame, came to Eastern in 1968 after serving as the coach of Springfield High School’s football team. Jack Redling, who later played for Insko at Eastern, was one of his players at Springfield High. Redling was a sophomore at Springfield when Insko took over its football program in 1965. Insko inherited a downtrodden program and did not win a game his first season. Two years later, however, Springfield won its district title and advanced to the state playoffs. Springfield lost to eventual state champion Grants Pass in its first round playoff game in 1967 by just seven points.

“(Insko) was a god in Springfield while he was football coach,” Redling said at a banquet conducted in honor of Insko in 2013 at Eastern.

Redling, then a Salem resident, according to a story in an October 2013 edition of The Observer, said that many of the Springfield players who had recently graduated

wished he had come a lot earlier so they could have played for him.

Insko stepped down from coaching in 1982 so that he and his wife, Beth, could have time to attend the high school games of their daughters, Lori and Lisa, and sons, Tom and Matt.

Tom Insko, now the president of EOU, once asked his father if he ever had second thoughts about stepping away from coaching so he could be more involved in his children’s lives.

“He told me that he never regretted it for one minute. He was highly competitive, but his priorities were clear. What he did speaks volumes of his love for his family. It was an easy decision for him to make. To have a father like that is very impactful,” Tom Insko said.

A celebration of Insko’s life will be held Saturday, Dec. 4, at 10 a.m. at Quinn Coliseum on the Eastern Oregon University campus, La Grande. Arrangements are by Loveland Funeral Chapel & Crematory, La Grande.

TURKEY

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Wheeler also made sure to prepare the turkeys at the perfect temperature, so students and staff would not have to worry about baking the turkeys incorrectly.

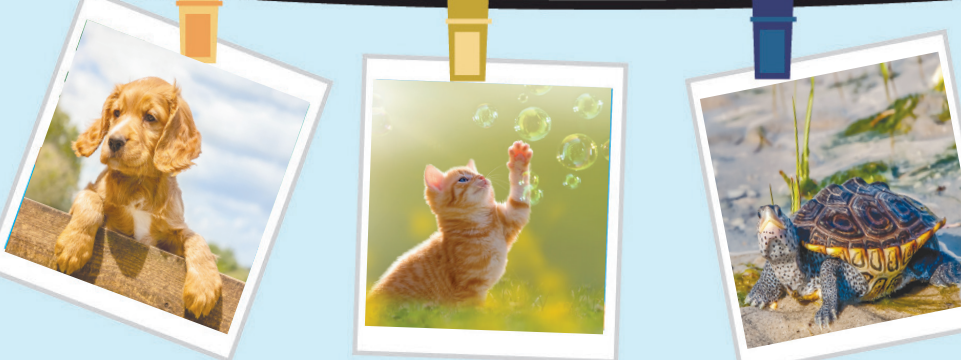
“Ron does an incredible job,” Jones said. “You can really see how much he cares about the students and how much effort he puts into it.”

For the two university employees who play a crucial role to students on campus all year long, Thanksgiving is a time to give back to the Eastern Oregon University community. Between the distribution of Thanksgiving food items and the multiple on-campus festivities, the university made sure its students and staff were taken care of.

“It’s nice to be able to give out some meals and make sure everyone is covered for Thanksgiving,” Jones said. “Students stay on campus for a number of reasons, but we want to help them out if they’re away from their families.”

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EOU

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