

OUR VIEW

The mystery of the bills with no sponsor

We would like our Oregon legislators to join us in a whodunit. The mystery is: Help us find out who are the legislators behind certain bills.

Most bills this session or any session have a chief sponsor, maybe even a bunch of regular sponsors. They make it clear which legislators wanted their fellow legislators to consider a bill. Their names are right there on the bills.

But there is a subset of bills without any such clarity. The residents of Oregon can't know by looking at a bill who is behind it.

We went through the bills that were scheduled for some mention during the legislative session on Tuesday, Feb. 1, and found three, Senate Bills 1521 and 1522 and House Bill 4031.

SB 1521 would prohibit a school district from firing their superintendent for acting in compliance with state or federal law. This bill was introduced, at least in part, to prevent superintendents from being fired for complying with pandemic restrictions, such as masking and distance learning. It was apparently introduced at the request of the Senate Interim Committee on Education. All the members of the committee? One of them?

SB 1522 has so many disparate pieces it's hard to sum up. It's 20 pages long. It also has to do with education. It covers access to contact information for graduate students, requiring school districts to allow students to apply certain credits toward graduation, requirements for homeschooled students to participate in athletics and more. It was also at the request of the Senate Interim Committee on Education.

House Bill 4031 establishes a state goal that the percentage of diverse employees employed by the Department of Education reflects the percentage of diverse students in public schools. This one comes from the House Interim Committee in Education at the request of the Department of Education.

Now why would legislators allow bills to be introduced without putting a legislator's name on it? It's not because legislators are dissolute, lazy and work-shy or too busy.

It's, in part, because they can. The rules of the House and Senate allow it. It's Rule 12 in the House Rules. But legislators make those rules for introducing bills. So they must want it.

We aren't particularly worried about any of these three bills. The concern is the mystery that enables legislators to conceal what they are doing from their constituents. The power to act in hiding and set in motion new laws in secrecy is great power. And that has no place in a government that is supposed to be transparent. It has no place in the Oregon Legislature.

EDITORIALS
Unsigned editorials are the opinion of The Observer editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of The Observer.

LETTERS
• The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.
• Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish

anonymous letters.
• Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
• Longer community comment columns, such as Other Views, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. Like letters to the editor, columns must refrain from complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Submissions must carry the author's name, address and phone number.
• Submission does not guarantee publication, which is at the discretion of the editor.

SEND LETTERS TO:
letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

America's Winter Olympics



I'm always rooting for the underdog



BILL ANEY
THIS LAND IS OUR LAND

This year, I want to see a white-headed woodpecker.

This medium-sized woodpecker is a handsome bird, with a fully black body and striking white head, and the males sport a red nape patch. They have been recorded in Umatilla County, but it is one of those species that is rare enough that local birders get excited when a sighting is reported. The Pendleton Bird Club keeps a running list of birds reported by their members each year, and in 2021 there were 268 species recorded in the county. But no white-headed woodpeckers.

Why? It's been reported in the past, and it uses ponderosa pine forests, which are abundant on the Umatilla National Forest. So why is it so hard to see one?

As with a lot of wildlife questions, it comes down to habitat. The preferred habitat is not just pine forests, but a certain type of ponderosa pine forest that is in short supply due to current management practices.

These birds build nest cavities close to the ground in large dead trees (average 26 inches in diameter) and feed heavily on ponderosa pine seed — meaning they require stands of large mature or old growth

ponderosa pine. These are economically valuable trees, and past logging has made them rare on private timberland and not very abundant on the National Forest. That's one of the reasons that there has been a general prohibition on logging large ponderosa pine on National Forests in the Blues since the 1990s. These old growth forests are much less common than they were before European settlement, with all sorts of effects on wildlife species that use this habitat.

More than just large pine trees, the white-headed woodpecker prefers open stands. Forest inventory records from the early 1900s commonly described pine stands so open that one could easily drive a horse and buggy through the forest. Try that nowadays and you'd soon get bogged down in dense growth or high-centered on logs. Our century-long war on wildfire coupled with timber management practices has left an unnaturally dense understory.

Why do these woodpeckers prefer open habitat? One theory is that areas with undergrowth provide cover for squirrels that prey on woodpecker nests. An open forest floor makes squirrels more vulnerable to their own predators (hawks, owls, cats, coyotes) and so less able to search and destroy white-headed woodpecker nests.

See, it's complicated. Complicated ecosystem man-

agement principles can sometimes be boiled down to a few guidelines — like rooting for the underdog, following nature's lead, and keeping all the pieces. To root for the underdog in this case means paying special attention to species that are rare or declining in numbers, like the white-headed woodpecker.

Following nature's lead means understanding how natural processes, like fire, create habitat. It is easy to visualize how frequent low intensity fire can create and maintain open stands of large diameter ponderosa pine. Happily, this is the type of habitat that management can help create by heavily thinning out smaller diameter trees, leaving the big old trees and applying fire.

So this spring I have another reason to head into the Blues, as if hunting turkeys, searching for morels, or getting in an early season camping trip weren't reason enough for getting out of town. I'll have to fine-tune my search image for the right habitat of open stands of large pine, but I can already think of a few places that fit that description. Maybe, just maybe, fortune will smile on me and I'll spot a white-headed woodpecker.

Wish me luck.

Bill Aney is a forester and wildlife biologist living in Pendleton and loving the Blue Mountains.

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

GOVERNOR

Kate Brown
160 State Capitol
900 Court St.
Salem, OR 97301-4047
503-378-4582

REPRESENTATIVES

Bobby Levy, District 58
900 Court St. NE, H-376
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1458
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

Greg Smith, District 57
900 Court St. NE, H-482
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1457
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

SENATOR

Bill Hansell, District 29
900 Court St. NE, S-415
Salem, OR 97301
503-986-1729
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:

Monthly Autopay\$10.75
13 weeks.....\$37.00
26 weeks.....\$71.00
52 weeks.....\$135.00

THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Phone:
541-963-3161

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

Toll free (Oregon):
1-800-781-3214

Email:
news@lagrandeobserver.com

The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Observer,
911 Jefferson Ave.,
La Grande, OR 97850

COPYRIGHT © 2022

STAFF

Regional publisher..... Karrine Brogotti Home delivery advisor Amanda Turkington
Interim editor Andrew Cutler Advertising representative Kelli Craft
News clerk Lisa Lester Kelly Advertising representative Amy Horn
Reporter Dick Mason National accounts coordinator Devi Mathson
Reporter Davis Carbaugh Graphic design Dorothy Kautz
Multimedia journalist Alex Wittwer Page design Marthia Allen

