

OUR VIEW

Curbing car-animal collisions in Oregon

Most people who have spent much time driving Oregon's highways have felt that twinge of fear when they see a deer or elk standing on the road's fringe.

And some have felt something more tangible. The unpleasant crunch when metal or plastic collides with flesh and bone.

These episodes are costly in multiple ways. The animals rarely survive. Occasionally, the driver doesn't either.

And according to a recent report, the average cost, including repairs, when a car hits a mule deer is \$9,086.

These incidents aren't exactly rare, either. The Oregon Department of Transportation recorded almost 31,000 collisions between vehicles and wild-life (deer being the most frequent species) from 2017 to 2021.

Reducing that toll is the goal of a coalition that includes hunters, anglers, Tribal representatives and members of conservation groups. They are promoting a bill in the Oregon Legislature that would allocate \$7 million to build fences, underpasses and other structures that have been proven, in Oregon and elsewhere, to cut the number of collisions.

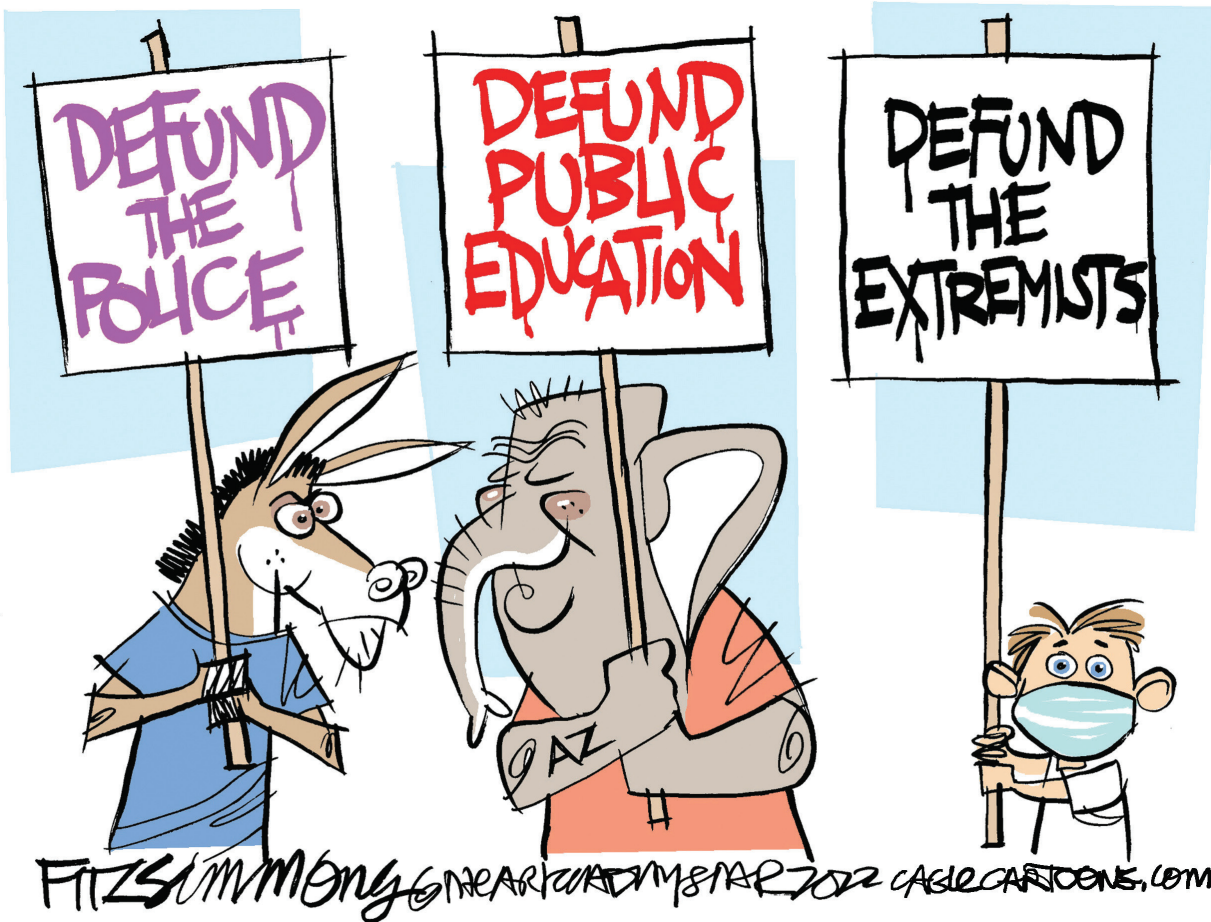
The bill introduced by Rep. Ken Helm, a Democrat from Washington County, has attracted bipartisan sponsorship, including from Reps. Mark Owens, R-Crane, and Bobby Levy, R-Echo. The Legislature should pass the bill — House Bill 4130-01 — before concluding the short 2022 session next month.

Although the \$7 million would help the state start addressing sections of highways where collisions are more common — including Interstate 84 near Meacham, which is along a popular elk migration route — the legislation might be more valuable as a leverage for federal dollars.

The federal infrastructure bill, passed by Congress in November 2021, includes \$350 million in competitive grants over five years to address car-wildlife collisions.

Proponents note that despite the proven benefits of fencing and underpasses — structures installed in 2012 along U.S. Highway 97 near Bend have decreased collisions by 86% over seven years — Oregon has only about five such structures, compared with 50 in Utah and more than 30 in Washington.

Passing Helm's bill would be a substantive start to putting Oregon on the road toward addressing this recurring problem.



YOUR VIEWS

River Democracy Act represents long-range thinking, local knowledge

Like many of our Northeastern Oregon friends and neighbors, we support the River Democracy Act proposed by Sens. Wyden and Merkeley. We offer here a few of our reasons.

Meaningful action addressing life-threatening climate change is overdue. Our waterways pay a heavy price for our drive to squeeze every last penny from natural resources. Centuries of destructive practices have damaged every ecosystem on Earth and threaten planetary life itself.

Our full-speed-ahead enterprise destroys plant and animal species at mass extinction rates, canceling them from our intricate web of life. In light of climate change and biodiversity collapse, destructive "business as usual" practices are worse than senseless. We know better. Passing the River Democracy Act is a modest, yet important, step toward protecting and restoring our natural world.

The River Democracy Act does not "lock up" our public lands. They remain as accessible as ever. Wild and Scenic designation allows restoration of these waterways and protects them from future degradation. Sen. Wyden and his staff have carefully listened to stakeholders and specifically addressed their concerns in the bill.

Despite being reported otherwise, maps of the nominated waterways abound: A statewide map depicting all of the proposed stream

reaches is found at tinyurl.com/rdamap.

The River Democracy Act itself forms an atlas, its stream names and geographic details easily found on any map or GPS device. Acquiring ourselves a detailed map of Kilmacue Creek, we find its reach length is indeed 4 miles, contrary to a public official's complaint it was but 2 miles, as printed in the Feb. 2, 2022, Baker City Herald.

We need long-range thinking to protect the natural systems on which all life depends. Two years ago local citizens, businesses and organizations answered the call for nominations, did their homework and made their recommendations, since reduced to protecting just 4% of Oregon's waterways. The River Democracy Act represents local knowledge and expertise in managing local resources for a sustainable future.

Thank you, Senator. Now is the time to pass the bill. Our kids grandkids, and future generations will thank you, too.

Mike Higgins and Mike Beaty
Halfway

COVID vaccine: Follow the money to see who wants what

I am glad to see more people are having the courage to question our government's reaction to the virus and what they are asking, or mandating, us to do. Is any of this really necessary?

Why is a shot that won't prevent you from getting, transmitting or

dying from the virus called a vaccine? I understand that it might reduce a person's symptoms, but is that what a vaccine is for?

Why are people we called heroes for nearly two years all of a sudden a danger to society and selfish people? What changed?

Why isn't the importance of things like nutrition, supplements and building one's immune system being more widely encouraged to lessen the severity of the virus if contracted?

Since early on there have been doctors who have been successfully treating people with the virus, yet this information seems to be hidden from the public. These doctors and their treatments are vilified and/or ridiculed by the media, the pharmaceutical companies and many of those in our government. The so-called "fact checkers" on social media dispute anything that doesn't fit the proper narrative. Facts don't matter as long as they fit the proper agenda.

Personally I have a lot more faith in people who are actually treating and healing people than I do in corporations and people who have an agenda.

Are they more interested in pushing a shot or in actually treating people with the virus? Follow the money to see who wants what.

So I ask, is this vaccine even necessary when we have any number of effective treatments for the virus?

Mark Barber
La Grande

CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

U.S. PRESIDENT

Joe Biden
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111

U.S. SENATORS

Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-5244
La Grande office: 541-962-7691

Jeff Merkley
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
202-224-3753
Pendleton office: 541-278-1129

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

Cliff Bentz
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515
202-225-6730
Medford office: 541-776-4646

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

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

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)

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.

COPYRIGHT © 2022

Phone: 541-963-3161

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

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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

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 Martha Allen

