

OUR VIEW

Coming clean on gambling in Oregon

The Oregon Lottery and other state-sanctioned gambling has brought more than \$12 billion in revenues to the state since it began in the 1980s.

Big money. It's right behind the state income tax as one of the state's largest sources of revenue. And there is a thirst for more.

Other states, such as Pennsylvania, allow much more freedom for people to gamble on more things — right from their phone.

Why not Oregon?

A new state committee is going to look at Oregon's gambling regulations and its mix of offerings.

There are the usual issues. The committee should also address transparency. Oregonians deserve to know where the money is coming from and how it is spent. There is, at least, a temporary step back from the Oregon Lottery. More about that in a few paragraphs.

The issues that are sure to get the attention of the committee include: What is the right mix of gambling? How much state-sanctioned gambling is too much? Is Oregon doing enough to battle gambling addiction even as it encourages people to gamble? Should gambling machines be allowed at horse tracks? Are Oregon tribes losing out as the state expands gambling beyond their control?

This past legislative session Senate President Peter Courtney tried to get passed a bill to allow state-sanctioned betting on college sports. People already bet on college sports, after all. Why not capture some of the revenue for the state? The proposal was to take the revenue from gambling on college sports and put it into the state's program that provides grants to college students. Legislators balked. It got one hearing and then nothing. Gambling opponents didn't like it. Oregon tribes argued it would eat into their casino revenues.

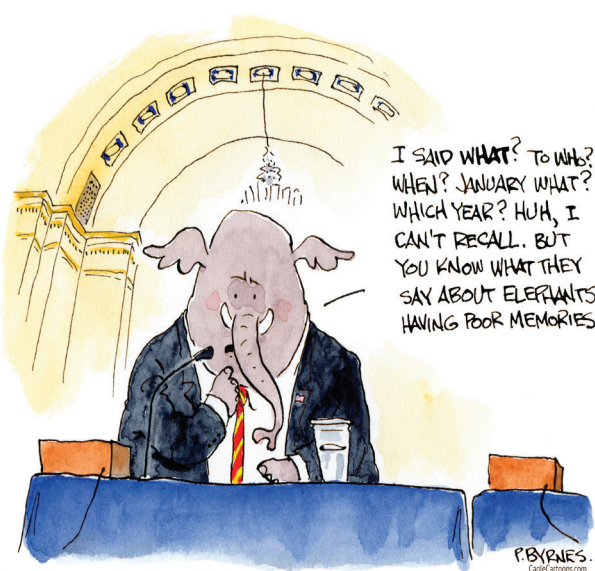
We hope the committee also firmly backs transparency. For instance, the Oregon Lottery recently became less transparent about its money from sports betting. You used to be able to find on the Oregon Lottery's website monthly reports showing how much was bet on various sports from cricket to chess to surfing to football and the state's margin on each. Here's a link to information for August 2021: tinyurl.com/ORsportshistorical.

Now if you want to see that, the website directs people to a public records request. Why the added hassle? We asked the Oregon Lottery. A spokesperson wasn't immediately sure. Understandable. "I do know that our agency philosophy with public records is to be as transparent as possible," Patrick Johnson emailed us. "So I will look into this further."

He also swiftly sent us a link to the files. That's here: tinyurl.com/ORsportsbetting.

So we got them. But there's less detail in the new reports and that added hassle in getting them. Jess Nelson, public records specialist for the Oregon Lottery, later told us there's less detail, in part, because the lottery is transitioning to a new vendor for sports betting, DraftKings. She said it is not the intent to require a formal public records request for the data. The Oregon Lottery just has not gotten around to putting the link on the webpage yet, she said.

Right now, the Oregon Lottery is providing less data and more hassle. It's not the biggest deal, but it should be a reminder to the new state committee that any changes to state gambling regulations should not come with less transparency.



Logging and carbon — another viewpoint



BRUCE WILCOX
OTHER VIEWS

As a young adult out hunting, I still can remember the sounds of chainsaws and timber falling in my favorite hunting area. I was upset: Why was my spot being logged? Now, 45 years later, I can walk through this area to a healthy stand of fire-resistant timber.

In January, I read a column by George Wuerthner (Logging and carbon — The best management for our forests is to stop logging, The Observer, Jan. 22). I felt it was necessary to provide the other side of the story on logging and carbon. I reached out to Healthy Forests-Healthy Communities for help in writing my column. This organization promotes healthy timber management, and through their articles, people are educated so they can develop their own opinions.

George Wuerthner should really see the forest for the trees. Researchers have consistently found that the use of active forest management helps reduce the intensity of wildfires. It also gives firefighters better and safer opportunities to contain fires before they gain strength and destroy our forests and communities.

Thinning is a key management tool, because reducing stand densities to sustainable levels helps promote the health and resiliency of our forests, so they can better withstand fires when they inevitably ignite.

The problem with such agenda-driven "research" that Wuerthner shares is that it fails to account for the carbon losses and emissions that occur from the lack of active forest

management, and when we choose not to plant, grow, harvest and manufacture wood products here at home.

For example, the study cited by Wuerthner doesn't account for carbon emissions that occur when we outsource our timber harvesting and wood products to other countries that don't share our high environmental standards. Would we really reduce our carbon footprint by importing wood from Brazil or Russia, rather than Oregon?

According to the University of Washington's Forest Carbon Study, Washington's private forests and forestry sector are a "Below Net Zero" carbon emitter. Although the processes associated with manufacturing wood and paper products emit some greenhouse gasses, growing trees and using wood products store more carbon than is emitted, reducing Washington's carbon footprint by 12%. Forestry's carbon footprint is further reduced when we convert low-value woody material into renewable energy.

Our Western forests are facing what one scientist calls an "epidemic of trees," where we have more trees than the landscape can support. The intense competition for sunlight and nutrients can weaken trees and reduce their ability to withstand severe wildfires. It can also result in insect attacks and disease, which contributes to high tree mortality and more fuel for severe wildfires.

Thinning forests — yes, that means removing some trees — contributes to the growth and vitality for remaining trees and enables them to sequester and store more carbon. When it comes to thinning forests the only question is why we're not doing more of it.

Research also shows that trees

are dying at alarming rates, due to wildfires, insects, disease, drought and other impacts of climate change. Dead trees do not sequester carbon, they only emit carbon and other greenhouse gasses over time. Walking away from our forests only serves to continue that trend.

One researcher found that wildfires emit greenhouse gasses at a rate equivalent to 48 cars per acre. In this scenario, the researcher suggested we'd need to park 1 million cars for an entire year to account for greenhouse gasses from a 21,000-acre fire. Interestingly, the decay of the dead trees following a wildfire is more significant in affecting the climate than the fire itself.

If we choose not to manage our forests, we may lose 100% of the trees to stand-replacing wildfires, and then we will lose all of that stored carbon over time as trees rot and decompose. The problem is made worse when forests fail to naturally regenerate after a severe wildfire, and instead convert to shrublands that do not sequester carbon at the same rates. Dead trees don't sequester carbon, only vigorously growing trees do. Dead trees and sterilized soils from severe wildfires only release carbon over time.

We have tried passive forest management for the past 30 years, and it has resulted in more severe wildfires, unhealthy forests and more carbon emissions. There is only one "guarantee": Walking away from our forests and choosing not to manage them will result in more of the same.

■ Bruce Wilcox was raised in Eastern Oregon and has enjoyed recreating in the Blue Mountain forests, near Heppner, for more than 60 years. He is very concerned about the future of these forests, hoping they will be around for several generations to follow.

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