

OUR VIEW

# Questions linger over the River Democracy Act

It means a lot when a river gets the federal designation of “wild and scenic.” Stirring views will be protected. Water quality gets armor around it. People can savor that the waterway will be preserved. Wildlife gets a better chance to thrive.

The River Democracy Act would add 4,700 more miles of wild and scenic waterways to Oregon. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, have led the legislation.

The act has inescapable appeal. But there are also questions about what it will mean for property owners in the area designated and around it.

The concise answer: The federal agencies that administer wild and scenic rivers have stated in the past that the government may take action to protect river values. But there is also clear language in the River Democracy Act that should allay many fears.

Now we’ll go through a detailed answer. Feel free to skip to the bottom if you don’t want to wade through details.

How does the federal government regulate wild and scenic waterways? We found some good answers in two places on the rivers.gov website — a document prepared by federal managers of wild and scenic rivers and a search tool.

The document says the wild and scenic act “neither gives nor implies government control of private lands within the river corridor” and that “management restrictions would apply only to federal lands. ... The federal government has no power to regulate or zone private lands under the Act; however, administering agencies may highlight the need for amendment to local zoning.”

So what happens when the federal government believes the uses of private land are incompatible with a wild and scenic river?

“Should some proposed or actual use clearly threaten the values the river was designated to protect, the river managing agency would work with a landowner to explore ways to avert the threat through local zoning, state provisions, land exchanges, or purchases on a willing-seller/willing-buyer basis. Condemnation would be a last resort, would only be feasible if funding were available, and is prohibited on some wild and scenic rivers by their enabling legislation,” the search tool says.

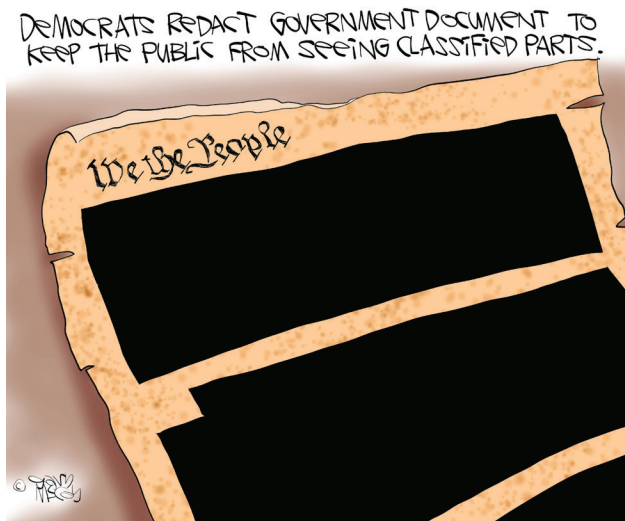
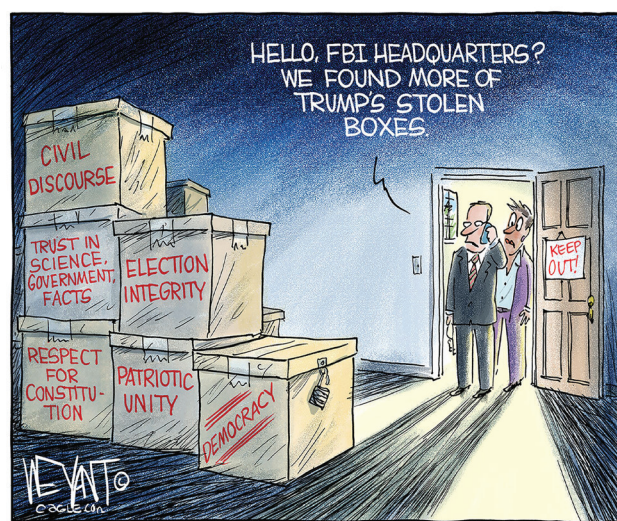
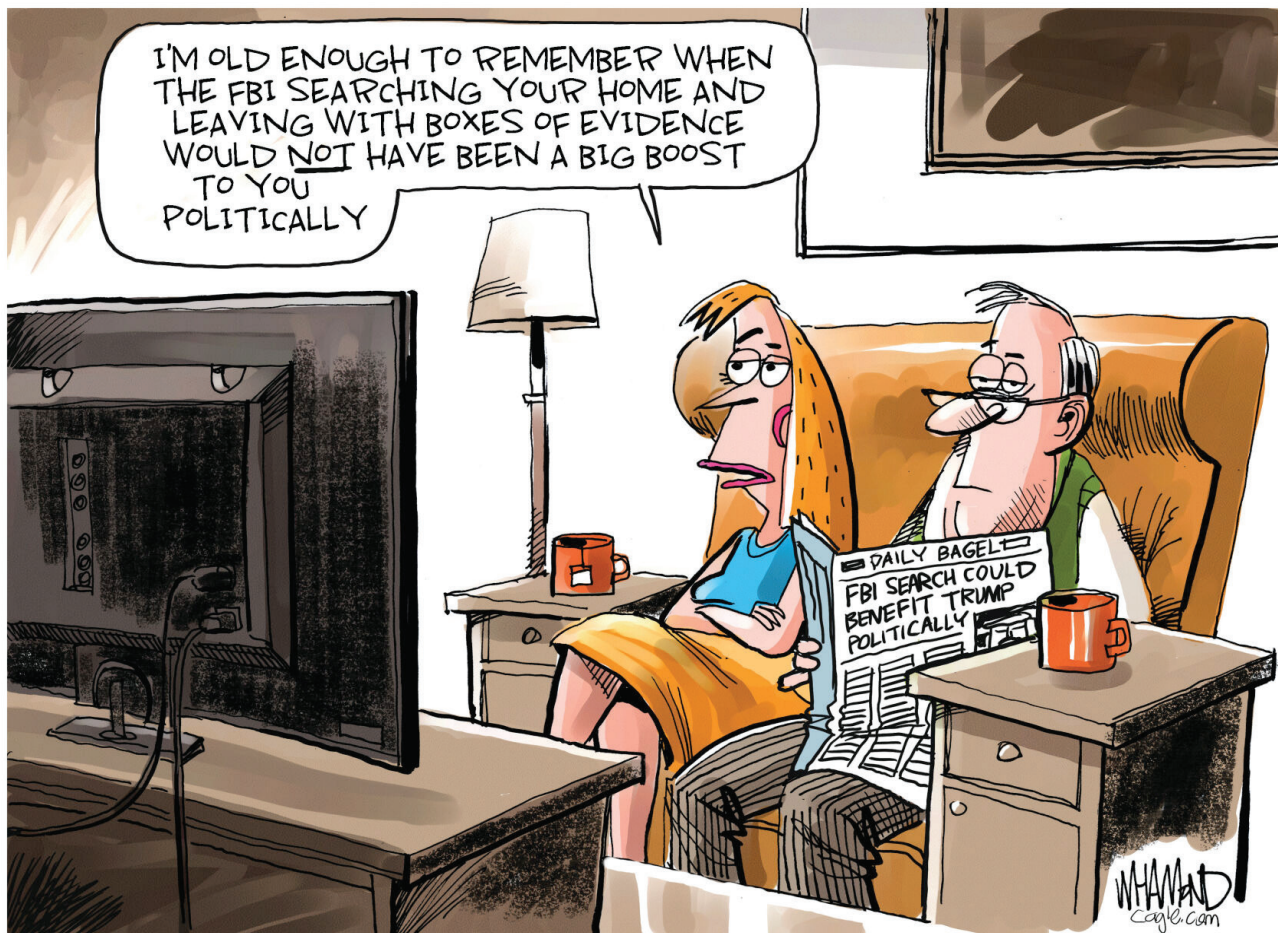
Since condemnation was mentioned, here is a relevant section of the River Democracy Act: “(The federal government) may not acquire any private land or interest in private land within the detailed boundaries of a covered segment without the consent of the owner.”

The River Democracy Act also explicitly states that nothing in the act affects private property rights, which may help some landowners relax. Wyden’s office helped clarify what that means.

“The language is intended to ensure that the designation of any new segments doesn’t affect private property rights whether the landowner lives within the boundaries of the segment or outside of it,” Hank Stern, Wyden’s spokesperson, told us.

Wyden and Merkley have written the River Democracy Act to add more protection to Oregon waterways and to protect private property rights.

But yes, of course, the federal government would take action if it believes river values are threatened.



OTHER VIEWS

## Stand up against B2H on Aug. 29

People of La Grande: Monday, Aug. 29, may be your final opportunity to stand up in opposition to Idaho Power’s B2H transmission line, which is proposed to cross five Oregon counties and pass near La Grande.

Oregon’s Energy Facility Siting Council is meeting in La Grande to review contested case issues that are still pending state approval for construction of the line. The Stop B2H Coalition is asking you to show up for the beginning of the meeting as a statement to the siting council that we don’t want this huge construction project next to our community.

We are assembling at the Gilbert Event Center on the campus of Eastern Oregon University at 3:30 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 29. Parking is free in the lower parking lot (identified as the “Gilbert Lot” on the EOU map). Wear a yellow shirt if you have one.

Please come out and demonstrate your opposition to this destructive and unnecessary transmission line. If Southern Idaho really needs the power, they should build their own generating capacity rather than ship power from 300 miles away at the expense of Northeastern Oregon.

For more details about this meeting (scheduled Aug. 29-31), and about the B2H, visit [www.stopb2h.org](http://www.stopb2h.org).

**Jon White**  
La Grande

## Government: ‘Do as I say, not as I do’

Let’s talk about the article The Observer front-paged on Tuesday, Aug. 9 (“Officials support map reversal”) regarding the ill-conceived Oregon Department of Forestry’s map, a map that identified and threatened landowners with significant financial fines unless they straightened up and started cleaning up their surroundings to prevent the spread of wildfires.

The irony of this action on behalf of the state of

Oregon illuminates the actuality that landowners, local governments, businesses and concerned citizens have been, through several decades, requesting, lobbying, collaborating and even begging state and federal governments to perform cleanup activities and thinning efforts on the lands they have been entrusted to steward. Requests for management have been met with not only resistance but legal action as well.

It is inconceivable that state and local governments take a “do as I say, not as I do” action and propose that private land be subject to legal and or financial punishment.

Lastly, the woke subheading for the article that informed us that the state’s action was to “prepare Oregon for worsening, climate change-fueled wildfires” is as ridiculous and shortsighted as the premise that nothing needs to happen on public land and that years of state and federal mismanagement can take a back seat for the blame of the increasing wildfire devastation.

**Colleen MacLeod**  
Summerville

## If you don’t like our rodeo, stay home

To those people who have issues with our small-town rodeo, I will make this simple: Stay home. I would suggest to head to the other side of the state to Portland, which I hear has lots of downtown activities that are always politically correct.

The attempt at “country folk/rodeo” lingo is condescending.

Thank you, Jody and John. We enjoy the show and appreciate your love of the sport of rodeo, our country and those who serve it, our Lord and Savior and our rural lifestyles.

Most of us are not participating in the slow murder of America. God Bless the USA.

**Lori Butterfield**  
Joseph

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