

# Critics object to ‘urban renewal’ proposal in rural Oregon

Farmers fear lodge near Lake Billy Chinook would spur development

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

A proposed tourist lodge along the rim of Oregon’s Lake Billy Chinook has unnerved local farmers concerned about potential conflicts between agriculture and increased visitor traffic.

The potential development is at the earliest stages of consideration by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, which owns the property, and Jefferson County, which may enact an “urban renewal” zone to support the project.

Aside from worries about tourists criticizing common farming practices, some local growers are dismayed by the implications of 27,000 acres of rural property being designated as “blighted” for inclusion in an urban renewal district.

“We don’t believe our farmland is a blighted area,” said Gary Harris, who farms north of Madras, Ore.

As part of an upcoming

“master plan” update for the Cove Palisades State Park, which is along the lake, OPRD has floated the concept of building the lodge on its property.

“No decisions have been made, this is an idea that’s part of a larger conversation about the cove,” said MG Devereux, the agency’s deputy director.

The “overnight facility” could operate similarly to the Silver Falls Lodge & Conference Center, the Wolf Creek Inn & Tavern and the Frenchglen Hotel, which are state-owned properties run by third parties under contract, he said.

Such a facility could also be an economic boon to county businesses that rely on tourists, though non-farm economic development must be balanced with the concerns of the agriculture industry, said Kelly Simmelink, a Jefferson County commissioner.

“I find it very hard not to take that opportunity,” he said.

Establishing an urban renewal district that includes the lodge facility would raise money for improving roads, expanding water lines, building horse trails and otherwise investing in infrastructure in



Lake Billy Chinook

that area, Simmelink said.

Under the “tax increment financing” associated with urban renewal, the amount of property tax money directed to existing districts — such as library and fire districts — is frozen within the zone, while revenue increases are devoted to investments within its boundaries.

“We then have a pot of money to pull from to make those improvements,” Simmelink said.

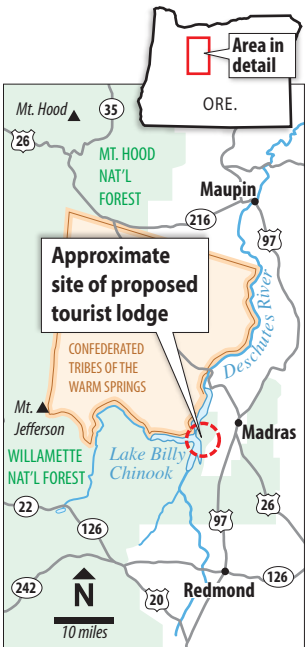
Critics of the proposal worry that an urban renewal district will constrain the amount of property tax revenue available for needed county services, but they also anticipate it will create a precedent for development within the 27,000-acre zone.

“It’s going to set up the desire and anticipation for people who have that scrubland to turn it into home sites,” said Harris, the farmer and vice president of the Jefferson County Farm Bureau.

The county also has a limited number of valuable irrigated acres that should be protected from non-farm incursions, said Mickey Killingsworth, a farmer and secretary-treasurer of the Jefferson County Farm Bureau.

“Once you get this lodge, you’re going to have demand for more development around the lodge in the ag zone,” she said.

Of more immediate concern, it’s predictable that tourists would complain about farm practices they



Capital Press graphic

find annoying, which may result in new restrictions on those agricultural activities, Killingsworth said. During a recent air show over the summer, for example, field burning was suspended to avoid interfering with the entertainment.

“We move big equipment, we have dust, we do aerial spraying over here. There are a lot of conflicts, which is why we’re zoned the way we are,” she said. “They don’t want to listen to balers all night long. A lot of people

are scared of herbicides and pesticides.”

For their part, the county government and OPRD acknowledge that local farmers have legitimate concerns about the proposal, which would be heard during public processes for the master plan and the urban renewal district.

“From my perspective, I get it. Those are conversations we’re going to have to have,” Simmelink said.

On the other hand, Simmelink said the owners of restaurants, gas stations and similar companies have largely expressed support for the proposal.

“We as a commission are going to turn over every rock to get every opinion. We want full transparency so we’re not making a bad decision,” he said.

Any proposed master plan for the park would have to be approved by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Commission as well as the county commission, then would be subject to land use appeals, said Devereux of OPRD.

“If there are issues that are not overcome-able, this is not something where a decision has been made or set in stone,” he said.

# Merkley backs organic hazelnut production

By GEORGE PLAVERN  
Capital Press

AURORA, Ore. — Walking along a muddy path between blocks of organic hazelnuts, Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley listened while Jim Birkmeier talked about the process of replacing older trees with newer disease-resistant varieties.

Merkley visited Meridian Orchards in Aurora, Ore., on Oct. 4, where Birkmeier and his daughter, Mary Birkmeier-Stehman, began harvesting this year’s crop the previous week. The USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service predicts Oregon farmers will harvest 49,000 tons of hazelnuts this year.

Meridian Orchards, a third-generation family business, went organic in 1997. That comes with its own set of unique challenges — such as managing weeds that have grown in thick during this year’s early season rains without the use of herbicides.

As the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, Merkley recently helped secure several provisions for both hazelnuts and organic agriculture. The spending bill passed out of the full Appropriations Committee on Sept. 19, and now heads to the Senate floor.

“There is a good chance it will be the first to go to the floor,” Merkley said in an interview with the Capital Press. “The vast bulk of how much money we’re putting into what, I think, was very bipartisan.”



George Plaven/Capital Press

**U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., talks with Mary Birkmeier-Stehman about growing organic hazelnuts at Meridian Orchards in Aurora, Ore.**

That includes allocating \$17.5 million for a Value-Added Producer Grant under USDA Rural Development, emphasizing the organic hazelnut industry.

Birkmeier-Stehman runs day-to-day operations at Meridian Orchards with her husband, David Stehman. The farm has 80 acres of hazelnuts, mostly Barcelona trees that date back to the 1970s.

However, with the emergence of Eastern Filbert Blight, Meridian Orchards has replaced 30 acres of orchard with Yamhill and Jefferson trees that are more resistant to the cankerous fungal disease.

Replacing trees is not cheap, Birkmeier said. Compounding the stress is lingering uncertainty over trade with China amid the ongoing trade war. China has boosted tariffs on hazelnuts up to 65% since the trade war started.

Stehman said the industry is still working on developing new domestic markets for Oregon hazelnuts, though companies are still hesitant with the fluctuating supply.

“There’s really not enough product to develop any new markets at this point,” Stehman said, though he added there are some bigger producers starting to come on with young, blight-resistant trees.

Value-Added Producer Grants can help farmers to process and market new products. The goal, according to USDA Rural Development, is to generate new products, expand marketing opportunities and increase farm income.

Elsewhere in the agriculture appropriations bill, Merkley touted a \$1 million funding increase for the National Organic Program and \$6 million for Organic Transition Research.

# Washington Farm Bureau seeks role in fish-rule suit

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington Farm Bureau and the wood-products industry are seeking to intervene on the side of the Trump administration in a lawsuit filed by Washington over the state’s fish-consumption rule.

The Farm Bureau and the other trade groups are waiting for a U.S. District Court judge in Seattle to rule on their motion to join the suit. They argue they should be represented in court because their members face unreasonably stringent rules if the state wins.

Washington opposes their participation in court proceedings. The state says the business organizations have nothing to add to the Trump administration’s defense and would slow the case down.

The state’s lawsuit stems from the Environmental Protection Agency this year overturning water-quality standards imposed on Washington by the Obama EPA in 2016. The standards are meant to minimize the risk of getting cancer from

a lifetime of eating fish and shellfish harvested in Washington or up to 3 miles off the coast.

In striking down the Obama EPA rules, the Trump EPA restored standards developed and previously championed by the Inslee administration’s Department of Ecology.

In 2016, Ecology’s position was that it had developed standards that would improve water quality and protect human health, including the health of tribal members who eat a lot of fish.

Now, Ecology’s position is that the Trump EPA violated the Clean Water Act by not consulting the state or tribes before withdrawing the Obama EPA standards.

Washington responded in June with Attorney General Bob Ferguson’s 39th lawsuit against the Trump administration. The number grew to 50 recently with a lawsuit challenging revisions to the Endangered Species Act.

The water-quality standards limit pollutants that factories are permitted to discharge into waterways.

Ecology said the standards it set would raise the risk of getting cancer by one in 1 million for a 170-pound person who ate 6 ounces of fish per day for 70 years. The Obama EPA largely rejected the standards for most pollutants, saying they were not protective enough of tribal treaty rights.

The Farm Bureau says farmers and ranchers would face more restrictions as regulators chase after unattainable clean-water goals.

Tribes and environmental groups support the state’s bid to uphold the Obama EPA rules. The state says its lawsuit is purely a “procedural challenge” to the Trump administration’s handling of the Clean Water Act and not a comment on the merits of the standards it developed, but now wants to see discarded.

The Trump EPA’s action was driven by a petition filed by the Farm Bureau and other business groups. Ferguson accused the EPA of acting “at the whim of industry interests.” Ecology Director Maia Bellon said the EPA bowed to “short-sighted industry desires.”





**Forestry**

North Wind Aviation helps implement best practices for forest management with a focus on resource protection and environmental awareness.

With bases in Oregon and Washington, North Wind has a variety of equipment available to provide you with a wide range of services to support your forestry operation.

Fertilizing | Aerial Application  
Long Line Lifts | Survey

*"Farmers Flying for Farmers"*

Please Contact Us @ 800-590-4143  
or  
fieldstaff@northwindhelicopters.com

www.NorthWindHelicopters.com

41-2/101



www.rmnrw-auctions.com

**FALL 2019 REAL ESTATE AUCTION**

No Starting Bids and No Hidden Reserves!

**FARM, RANCH, AND TIMBER**

*Prices Start at \$400 per Acre!*



- 199± acre Nehalem River Farm with home, shop, and water rights in Mist, Oregon. **\$450,000**
- 723± acre ranch with timber. Vineyard and estate homesite potential. Near Eugene, Oregon. **\$1,600,000**
- 2,620± acre New Valley View Ranch near Drews Reservoir by Lakeview, Oregon. **\$1,050,000**
- Seven timber tracts from 20± to 1,050± acres. One to be sold with **No Minimum Bid!**

**SEALED BIDS DUE NOVEMBER 13, 2019**

Broker Cooperation Invited • Seller Financing Available on Some Offerings

CALL NOW FOR FREE COLOR CATALOG #1904

**1-800-845-3524**

Realty Marketing/Northwest, Broker

522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 725 – Portland, Oregon 97204

41-2-3/106