

Senator to host virtual town hall discussing River Democracy Act

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden will host a virtual town hall to discuss his bill that would designate 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers statewide.

The proposal, known as the River Democracy Act, was developed based on more than 15,000 public nominations — hence its name — to extend protections for waterways under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

If passed, the River Democracy Act would roughly triple the number of wild and scenic rivers in Oregon.

Several counties in Eastern Oregon, however, have raised objections to the bill, arguing



Sen. Ron Wyden

it would add new restrictions on livestock grazing, timber harvest and recreation, hindering their local economies.

Critics say the bill also wrongly applies the National Wild and Scenic River Act by including small and intermittent streams. According to one analysis by the American Forest Resource Council, a timber lobbying group, just 15% of the waterways listed in the bill are actually labeled “rivers.”

In a resolution passed July 21, the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners

requested that all river segments in Wallowa County be removed from the legislation. The Union County Board of Commissioners also sent a letter July 6 to Wyden outlining its concerns.

Rep. Cliff Bentz, who is Oregon’s only Republican member of Congress and opposes the River Democracy Act, said he spoke with all 63 commissioners in 20 counties that make up his district. Of those, he estimated all but 10 were “adamantly opposed” to the bill.

Representatives of Wyden and fellow Democratic Sen. Jeff Merkley, the bill’s co-sponsor, were supposed to meet Aug. 10 with the Eastern Oregon Counties Association in Pendleton. Wyden

spokesman Hank Stern said that meeting had to be canceled while the Senate was working to pass the \$1 trillion infrastructure bill.

Instead, Wyden will hold the virtual town hall at 1 p.m. Aug. 31 to talk about the River Democracy Act. Stern said the senator’s staff will continue to meet one-on-one with county commissioners to hear their feedback and suggestions.

“From the first river and stream nominations more than a year and a half ago to this virtual town hall, this legislation has been shaped at every step by the best of the Oregon Way, namely taking good ideas at the community level and working through a public process and

ongoing conversations with all Oregonians to find common ground,” Wyden said.

Created in 1968, the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System calls for preserving certain rivers with “outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values.” Oregon currently has 2,173 miles of rivers designated as wild and scenic, or 2% of all rivers across the state.

The River Democracy Act also would widen protective buffers from a quarter-mile to a half-mile on both sides of the designated streams. That would add up to approximately 3 million acres, an area about the size of Connecticut.

Wyden said the bill ensures that only federal lands are

protected, and will not interfere with existing water rights and grazing permits.

Land management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, would have up to six years to write a comprehensive plan for the newly designated corridors, working with local, state and tribal governments.

The bill also requires land managers to assess wildfire risks in the corridors, and develop strategies to mitigate the damage if a fire burns near a wild and scenic river.

The virtual town hall meeting will be hosted by People’s Town Hall on Facebook Live, and can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/3xT11am>.

IDWR: Spring, summer driest in 97 years

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The Idaho Department of Water Resources reports the March-July period was the second-driest in state history, behind 1924.

IDWR said 80% of snow telemetry stations set minimum-precipitation records from March through July. Sixteen of the state’s 44 counties are in an “exceptional meteorological drought,” and the Big Wood, Big Lost and Little Lost river basins in the central mountains may set water-year records for lowest runoff.

Irrigation supplies were expected to be adequate in many basins given decent snowpack, but “shockingly low precipitation this spring caught forecasters completely by surprise,” the report said.

“This year was a combination of a bunch of bad things,” said IDWR hydrologist David Hoekema, who wrote the report. “We knew of the dry soil underneath. We didn’t account for the lack of spring rains.”

A typical spring storm adds to snowpack at upper elevations while its low-elevation rain flushes snowpack to rivers, aquifers and reservoirs — minus whatever water fills the soil profile.



Brad Carlson/Capital Press
A canal near Kuna, Idaho, in mid-July. Demand for irrigation water has been strong this year, one of the driest on record.

IDWR said this year’s runoff was well below expectations.

Natural flows fulfill water rights until runoff ends and users rely more on reservoirs. An early end to runoff has made junior water right holders turn to stored water sooner.

“Storage is being used much earlier,” Hoekema said.

Even in the Boise River Basin, where snowpack was around 90% of normal, the drop in natural flow and shift to reservoirs occurred about a month early, Hoekema said.

Meanwhile, prolonged hot weather in June and July — with

more expected this month — has kept demand high.

“Farmers got hit on two sides,” he said. “Crops were more thirsty than normal, and they were not planning on this low water supply.”

Most Boise-area crops have had sufficient water to this point, but with reservoir levels dropping faster than usual due to high demand, there is concern that storage water may run out while it’s still needed, Hoekema said.

Some producers will be able to get by on groundwater, he said.

The report said the state’s aquifers likely will be hit hard this year, and reservoirs that store more than a single season of water “may be depleted to levels that may take several years to recover.”

“There is growing concern among water managers that Idaho may be entering into a multi-year drought period,” the report said.

Drought has hurt non-irrigated farms.

“This drought is really unprecedented in that we had a reasonable snowpack in the winter, but the record-setting heat and dryness of spring resulted in an unforeseen extreme drought,” the report said, “especially in the dryland agricultural regions of northern Idaho.”



WSDA
An Asian giant hornet attacks a paper wasp nest at a home in Blaine, Wash. The Washington State Department of Agriculture identified the hornet Aug. 12 from a photo sent in by the resident.

Asian giant hornets proving elusive

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Two Asian giant hornets gave the slip to the Washington State Department of Agriculture over the weekend, foiling an attempt to electronically track them to their nest in Whatcom County.

The department captured one hornet Aug. 12 and a second one Aug. 13 near Blaine, where a resident last week reported a hornet attacking a paper wasp nest, about a quarter mile from the border with Canada.

The department tied electronic devices to the hornets and released them Friday. The hornets hung out for a couple of hours before finally flying away, department spokeswoman Karla Salp said.

The hornets went into heavy vegetation, and their pursuers lost the signal, she said.

Efforts to pick up the signal resumed Saturday. The department found one electronic device, but the hornet was no longer attached. “The hornet got out of it,” Salp said.

The department was continuing to search for a signal from the second device Monday. The battery on the device should last about two weeks, Salp said.

The Asian giant hornet photographed by the Blaine-area resident was the first live sighting this year. The hornet was about two miles from where the department eradicated a nest last October.

Asian giant hornets, which prey on pollinators, were first spotted in North America in 2019 — in Whatcom County and across the border in British Columbia.

The state agriculture department and USDA are out to eradicate the pest.

OSU appoints new leader for statewide outreach and extension programs

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

CORVALLIS — Oregon State University has appointed a new leader to oversee statewide outreach and extension programs.

Ivory Lyles was named Vice Provost for University Extension and Engagement and director of OSU Extension Service, effective Sept. 30.

He takes over for Anita Azarenko, who served for more than two years in an interim role following the retirement of Scott Reed in 2019. Azarenko is now retiring after nearly 35 years at OSU.

“I am very pleased to join OSU and I look forward to helping support the needs of Oregonians and communities statewide by working with university colleagues, the Oregon Legislature, local counties and community partners throughout the state,” Lyles said in a statement.

OSU’s Division of Extension and Engagement includes the Extension Service and Office of Professional and Continuing Education, serving all 36 Oregon counties and the Confederated Tribes of Wamwapa Reservation.

The division’s programs are built around seven focus areas including 4-H youth development; agriculture and natural resources, including the Small Farms and Master Gardener programs; family and community health; forestry and natural resources; OSU Open Campus; Outdoor School; and Oregon Sea Grant.

The university also runs 11 agricultural research and experiment stations, strategically located in different growing regions around the state.

Lyles comes to OSU from the University of Nevada-Reno, where he had been the associate dean for engagement and director of extension since 2017. He oversaw about 300 employees and a budget of \$40 million. Previously, Lyles was a professor, dean and director of land grant programs at Alcorn State University in Lorman, Miss., and led the cooperative



Ivory Lyles



Silvia Rondon

extension program at Tennessee State University in Nashville — both of which are historically Black colleges and universities. Lyles has also served as associate vice president for agriculture and director of the cooperative extension service at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and held extension leadership roles at Ohio State University and University of Tennessee.

He is a member of the National Association of County Agriculture Agents, National Association of Extension 4-H Agents and national 4-H Diversity Design team, and serves as program committee chairman for the national Extension Committee on Organization and Policy.

“Dr. Lyles has a long history of outstanding leadership in extension and engagement positions in universities in multiple states, and he is a national leader in this domain as well,” said Edward Feser, OSU’s provost and executive vice president. “I’m delighted he is joining OSU’s leadership team.”

Lyles has a doctorate in agricultural education, community and rural development from Ohio State.

Rondon named interim HAREC director

OSU has also appointed a new interim director at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

Silvia Rondon, a longtime professor and entomologist at the station, will take over the position previously held by Clive Kaiser, who recently stepped down to join the faculty at Lincoln University in New Zealand.

Kaiser was named interim HAREC director in September 2019 after former director Phil

Hamm retired. A national search will begin this fall to fill the job permanently.

HAREC serves 500,000 acres of irrigated agriculture in Oregon and Washington’s Columbia Basin, where farmers produce more than 200 different crops.

The station’s research primarily focuses on finding ways to make growers more efficient and profitable. This includes identifying new crops and growing practices tailored for the region; breeding and evaluating new plant varieties; management of pests and diseases; and other environmental issues, such as water quality.

For Rondon, it is her second promotion this year. She was also appointed director of OSU’s Integrated Pest Management Center in May.

Though the center is based in Corvallis, Rondon has remained in Hermiston and continues to oversee the entomology program at HAREC.

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