

Readers Lend Their Voices...

To the Editor,

As chief petitioner in the successful health district dissolution initiative, I am gathering signatures on a new initiative to increase the Natural Resource Depletion Fee. This initiative is to provide additional money to maintain roads and keep CCRider rolling, otherwise we are going to lose our only reliable transit service.

I am proposing to increase the Natural Resource Depletion Fee from the current 15 cents by 35 cents for a total of 50 cents per ton. The additional 10 cents goes to increase funding for road improvements and 25 cents to get the Rider on a path to stable funding. My initiative states that none of the money in this initiative can be used for other purposes and or uses.

County Ordinance No. 92-6 defines a "natural resource" as coal, clay, soil, shale, sand, gravel, metallic ore, aggregate and any other solid material or substance severed or depleted or proposed to be severed or depleted from natural deposits or dredge spoils located in this county for commercial, construction or industrial use anywhere, or from natural depositions or dredge spoils located outside this county and transported into this county for commercial, construction or industrial use within this county. Depleting means the physical removal of the natural resource from soils or waters of the earth by any means. As we all know, natural resources are not replaceable. When they are gone, they are gone.

When any increase in the fee is proposed, the Rock Corporations threaten to close the pits and leave, or say they will lose their competitiveness. Jobs would be lost, etc., etc. They spent thousands to fight a 10 cent per ton

increase that I proposed in 2005 and this is pure nonsense! The depletion fee has not been increased in 18 years. The cost of gravel, cement and asphalt has increased since the last Depletion Fee increase. So have wages. When there is an increase at the grocery store, Safeway or Fredgies don't close the doors and stop selling their goods! Why would the rock corporations decide that closing up shop would be a good idea?

The answer is that it is a good scare tactic. What about the layoffs at Roads and CCRider? The Roads Department employs 22 people and CCRider employs 24. Do those 46 family wage jobs not count? Are those jobs not important to Columbia County's economy? If costs increase in any business those costs are passed on and the market moves forward. Can you say that the cost of business hasn't increased in the last 18 years?!

Do you really think that the rock corporations would close their business because of modest increase in the depletion fee, when Columbia County has the best and the most plentiful aggregate in the region? Again, the fee has not been increased in 18 years, and we are close to the major market for their product. Also, we have the best and most natural aggregate in the region.

It might seem that the rock corporations are losing money when paying the depletion fee, not so. It has been tax deductible since December 31, 1989 under the Economic Interest Code, Title 26 USC Section 611.

Another issue is that when the 15 cent increase was approved, 5 cents was suppose to be used to make sure rock corporations were complying, but there is no audit, the program runs on the honor system. The rock corporations provide little information

on earnings so we can't tell what amount of aggregate is truly going out of the county. This is a sweetheart deal between the Commissioners and the rock corporations, which costs the county over \$100,000 to run.

I have tried to talk to the Commissioners about funding for roads and CCRider. There seems to be enough funding for everything but CCRider. The priority for services that people like me need and who can't drive, doesn't mean much. My initiative would partially help address the CCRider funding issues. Just a little over a year ago the Rider took a 64% cut in services because they didn't have enough money to draw down their grants. The Rider had to leave \$260,000 in grant funding that could not be drawn down because there was no local money available to match the grants. My initiative would keep CCRider running. In 2010 CCRider provided 105,000 rides, after the cut in service the number of rides went down to approximately 89,000 rides per year. The main cuts were in senior/disables transportation services. There should be no conflict between me and the rock corporations because we should be working together to help the people of Columbia County.

I urge you to support this modest increase in the Natural Resources Depletion Fee to address impacts that rock corporations have on our roads and for CCRider, which would help keep more cars off the road.

We will be out there collecting signatures and if you would like to help or contribute to this effort please call me at 503-397-1873.

Thelma Bonar
Warren, OR

Upcoming Events

Upper Nehalem Watershed Council Board of Director's Meeting - Thursday, December 4th, 6:30-8:30 PM at UNWC office, 1201 Texas Ave. www.nehalem.org, 503-429-0869

Friends of the Library Book Sale - Friday, December 5th, 10:00-5:00 & Saturday, December 6th, 10:00-4:00 at the Vernonia Library, 701 Weed Ave.

The Nutcracker presented by Vernonia Ballet - Friday, December 5th, 7:00 PM at Vernonia Schools Commons.

Spirit of Christmas in Vernonia - Saturday, December 6, 10:00 AM - 9:00 PM. See page 11 for more details.

"Twas the Night" presented by Bag&Baggage Theatre, Saturday, December 6, 3:00 and 7:00 shows at the Vernonia Grange. \$5 admission.

Grace Fine Arts Exhibit - Friday, December 12, 6:30 - 7:45 PM at Grace Family Fellowship, 957 State Avenue. Student art will include sculpture, acrylic, watercolor and drawing. The choir will be performing and a short film highlighting the behind-the-scenes work of the young artists will be shown.

Vernonia's 1st Annual Ugly Sweater Run - Saturday, December 13, 10:00 AM at Anderson Park. Men's 5k walk/run, Women's 5k walk/run and Kid's 5k walk/run. Presented by Vernonia Area Chamber of Commerce and Banc Home Loans. For more info call 503-701-5928 or email nicole.larke@banchomeloans.com.

HOW TO SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vernonia's Voice welcomes and requests your thoughts, opinions and ideas. Please include your name, address and phone number, limit your letters to 300 words or less. Vernonia's Voice reserves the right to edit, omit, respond or ask for a response to letters submitted. We will print letters space permitting. Deadline is the 1st and 3rd Monday of each month. Email: scott@vernoniasvoice.com or mail to: Letters, PO Box 55, Vernonia, OR 97064.

2015 Medical Shuttle Schedule

The attached schedule is for Demand Response Services to medical appointments in Portland and Washington County for the 2015 year. If information is needed regarding cost, please call 503-366-0159.

Please make appointments between 10:00 AM and 12 noon.

January 7, January 21
February 4, February 18
March 4, March 18
April 8, April 22
May 6, May 20
June 3, June 17



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