

## Council Discusses Nehalem River Scenic Waterway Plan

The Vernonia City Council met in a workshop on January 14 with officials from the State of Oregon to discuss a proposal by Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) to designate a 17.5 mile stretch of the Nehalem River as an Oregon Scenic Waterway.

The state is currently studying the proposal, which would add the section of the Nehalem River, starting at Henry Rierson Spruce Run State Park and ending at the confluence of the Cook Creek and the Nehalem River near Cougar Valley State Park, to the Scenic Waterway program.

OPRD is responsible for administering the State Scenic Waterway program, which protects the scenic, natural, and recreation values on 22 designated waterways currently part of the program in Oregon.

The state has completed their initial study of the area and has been working to finalize a Management Plan.

The City of Vernonia was asked to comment on a Draft of the Management Plan because they hold water rights on Rock Creek, a tributary of the Nehalem River, and make their city water from Rock Creek. The City was not given an adequate amount of time to comment and OPRD then chose to delay the process giving the City the opportunity to respond.

According to the Draft Management Plan, the state conducted a field study of the proposed area in May of 2017, followed by a public comment period. Approximately 40 people attended a public meeting on September 12, 2017. A total of 1,409 public comments were received, with 10 in opposition and 1,327 supporting it, with some comments indicating that the program did not offer enough protections. Three respondents indicated they were landowners within the study area, with two opposed and one in favor. The Clatsop County

Board of Commissioners supports the designation while the Tillamook County Commissioners oppose the designation. Columbia County was not consulted in the process.

A stretch of river can be considered for the program if it meets certain qualifications, including:

- The study area is completely free-flowing.
- The scenic quality of the area is pleasing, with areas where the scenery is considered "outstanding," with a rural landscape with a variety of geologic, plant and wildlife features visible from the river. Some cultural modifications are allowed, including a few homes, two bridges, a small rail line, and evidence of logging.
- Natural and recreation values can be maintained and sustained without undue impairment.

The initial study concluded that the Nehalem River study area is a strong candidate for the program. Following that initial conclusion, OPRD held two Advisory Group meetings on May 28 and July 18, 2018, which were open to the public, and included local landowners, recreational users, local business owners, and members of local government. Dale Webb, who took office as a Vernonia City Councilor in January 2019, was part of that Advisory Committee.

Chris Havel, Associate Director of ORPD, and Nikki Hendricks of the Oregon Water Resources Department answered questions from the Vernonia City Council during the workshop on January 14.

Havel explained there are three ways a State Scenic Waterway can be designated: by ballot measure, by legislative action, or through a study process, which was used in this case and is the least used process. If done by a study, the Governor must approve the designation, which is then sent for formal rule



making. There would be a comment period for the developed rules, which would then be adjusted or adopted.

Havel said when a waterway receives this designation it regulates what can be done within .25 mile of a river. If a landowner wants to change the landscape (build, log, etc.) they must submit a request, which is reviewed by OPRD who can recommend changes and then either approve or deny the request. If the request is denied, the property owner can move forward with the proposed plan after waiting one year.

"Any timber harvests over a certain size go through the Forest Practices Act review and approval as well," said Havel in a separate interview. "The Scenic Waterway law is designed around cooperation and negotiation, not compulsion. Ultimately, protecting scenery, recreation, and fish is voluntary under the scenic waterway law. We've found tremendous success in just having a conversation with property owners and recommending options that protect these values."

Hendricks explained this designation will not affect current water rights

but will affect any requested changes or new water right applications. She explained that junior water rights are currently curtailed from August-October, but with this designation they would also be restricted from May-July. She said the Water Resources Department is no longer awarding water rights during the summer, with all new water rights only for winter storage.

When asked about the reason for these types of designations and any side effects on property owners, Havel said that the regulation of property is for aesthetic purposes, and water allocation is to protect water resources and the fish. He said the intent of a designation is to preserve the current condition of the area. He said the majority of requests from landowners for changes are approved and said the effect on property owners is minimal. He said there are typically a lot of denials in the first five years until landowners understand the program better, and then the approval rate increases to roughly 90%.

Councilor J.R. Allen expressed concern that the designation will put

*continued on page 7*

*inside*

7 donations help public safety

9 osu bee school

10 vhs winter sports report



## Racial Incident at St. Helens H.S. Condemned

**Girls basketball contest vs. Parkrose marred by inappropriate fan behavior**

By Scott Laird

A deeply disturbing incident occurred during a girls basketball game at St. Helens High School, prompting St. Helens Superintendent Scot Stockwell to issue a public apology in a statement to the community.

On January 23 KPTV Fox 12 reported the incident that occurred during the January 15 girls basketball contest between St. Helens and Parkrose High Schools, where spectators yelled racial slurs at the Parkrose players.

According to the Fox 12 report, Parkrose varsity head coach Krystal Forthan said spectators made monkey noises and called her athletes the n-word, starting during the junior varsity

game and continuing during the varsity match, and said it wasn't the first time this type of incident had occurred. Student athletes from Parkrose who have played against St. Helens before said it's not the first time this has happened in St. Helens.

St. Helens Superintendent Stockwell released a statement concerning the incident, calling it "disappointing." "I believe we all share a deep regret for the hurt caused by those involved in the incident," said Stockwell. "The Parkrose school community, students, and families deserve better and should expect a welcoming environment free of racist comments when they attend events. Disrespectful language and behavior does not represent the teaching of the St. Helens School District. I am personally mortified and embarrassed by the bigoted actions of those involved. It is upsetting that the

ignorance of a few reflects on our entire community. If we stand silent in the presence of racism we are culpable."

Stockwell went on to say the incident was, "... absolutely inexcusable and unacceptable," and apologized for the District, noting, "... words cannot fix what happened, only actions." "What matters is that we as a school community take responsibility and refuse to tolerate discrimination of any kind."

Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) Executive Director Peter Weber confirmed the incident did take place. "To my knowledge no one is saying that this did not happen," said Weber during a recent phone interview. "Things did happen and they shouldn't have happened, and they need to be dealt with, because it's unacceptable."

Weber said the expectation is

*continued on page 13*