

Release of Commissioner Candidate's Personnel Records Raises Questions

Casey Garrett, a Columbia County employee running for County Commissioner, has a troubled work history.

By Scott Laird

The release of personnel records for Columbia County Commissioner candidate Casey Garrett have raised some questions about his fitness to serve as an elected official.

Garrett is currently employed by Columbia County as the Facilities Service Manager, and is running for Position 3 on the Columbia County Board of Commissioners against incumbent Alex Tardif. Garrett has prominently referenced his employment with the County as part of his qualifications in his Commissioner campaign.

In his current position Garrett is responsible for managing facility projects and maintenance across the county; maintaining working relationships with department heads and staff who use county facilities; supervising staff that maintain county parks, buildings, and facilities; managing the bud-

get for Facilities Services; coordinating the County Safety Committee; managing vendors and contracts for county facilities.

Garrett had previously worked as a construction engineer in California before joining Pacific Stainless Products in St. Helens as a project manager from 2005 to 2010. He also ran his own general contracting business, starting in 2006.

Garret's personnel records were released after a public records request was made and the released records were heavily redacted, which was formally appealed. Columbia County District Attorney Jeff Axelier recused himself from making a decision based on the fact his family has donated to Garrett's opponent in the Commissioner campaign. The decision was then handed to the Multnomah County District Attorney, Adam Gibbs, who agreed the public had a right to know about Garrett's work history at the County and released the unredacted files.

Garrett joined the staff at Columbia County in early 2015 and immediately ran into trouble. His first Annual Performance Review was conducted by

continued on page 13

New Ballot Drop Box



Columbia County has installed a new drive-up, election ballot drop box at the Vernonia Library. Watch for our Candidate Questionnaire and Responses from Vernonia City Council and Mayor, Columbia County Commissioners, and State Representatives in the October 15 issue of Vernonia's Voice.

The Timber Industry of Today Part 4: The State of Our State Forests

By Scott Laird

Over the last several issues we've been taking a look at different aspects of the timber industry, how it's regulated and taxed, different management styles, and its impact on forest ecology. In this issue we examine our state forests – how they're managed and regulated, along with some important current administrative issues.

Oregon's state owned forests are in trouble, and the list of reasons is as long as it is broad. From the ongoing debate between conservation and industry interests, to questionable management, to severe financial issues, the problems have been ongoing for years and only

appear to be worsening. And finding solutions is proving to be difficult.

At the top of the list is the Oregon Board of Forestry, a group of seven individuals tasked with overseeing forest policy on both state and privately held forestland. The Board appoints the State Forester, who supervises the Department of Forestry (ODF) and the management of our state forests. The Board adopts new rules for regulating forest uses for the benefit of all its citizens. In recent years the Board has found itself at the center of the ongoing debate about recreational, ecological, and industrial uses – which is exactly where they should be. It's a debate which has become increasingly more contentious, dysfunctional, and political. The wildfires at the end of this summer season have only heightened the conflict around the state.

Adding to the issue is the current management at ODF. State Forester Peter Daugherty has come under increasing scrutiny and has received serious criticism for his management of what is one of the most important agencies in state government.

Also at the heart of the problem is the continuing "timber wars," the long running battle between environmental interests that want stricter regulations on harvests and better protections for natural resources, and the timber industry who want to harvest wood and generate revenue from the forests. In February this year Oregon Governor Kate Brown announced a compromise agreement between representatives from the two sides – a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which halted all forestry-related initiative petitions and related litigation by both sides

following the passage SB 1602. This legislation passed in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote in June and strengthened the state's aerial pesticide spray regulations. It also set the stage for fundamental reform of the Oregon Forest Practices Act through a new, federally approved Habitat Conservation Plan, which is currently being negotiated.

While this compromise was heralded as a new beginning of cooperation between the two sides ("It's always good when people sit down and try to negotiate away their differences in the interest in solving problems, so this was exceedingly encouraging," said State Representative Brad Witt at the time of the agreement), the ongoing battle now seems to have shifted back to the upper administrative level.

How we want our state forests to be managed continues to be the unanswered question. And I emphasize OUR forests because, unlike privately held timberlands, our state forests belong to all of the citizens of Oregon. Finding some kind of balance between multiple uses remains the elusive solution Oregonians continue to search for. How to manage forests to prevent catastrophic wildfires is making the issue even messier.

"The Board of Forestry table is the place to slug out timber policy – to harvest or not harvest, to build trails or not build trails," said State Senator Betsy Johnson during an interview with *Vernonia's Voice* on September 23. "The Department of Forestry needs to know what their core mission is, what their metrics are, and what are the expectations. And right now, in what I consider a moment of crisis, I would submit that the management of the agency ought to

take primacy over any other debate."

The State of Oregon's State Forests

Oregon has approximately 800,000 acres of state forestland. Most of the land is parceled into six State Forests, all located in the western half of the state. Five of the six state forests are managed by ODF: the Clatsop, Tillamook, Santiam, Gilchrist, and Sun Pass state forests; the sixth, Elliott State Forest, is managed by the Department of State Lands. In addition ODF also owns and manages less than 2,000 acres here in Columbia County along with other small parcels of forestland, located primarily in the Coast Range near Corvallis, Eugene, and south to the California border.

Oregon law (OAR 629-035-0020) requires the Department of Forestry manage the forests under their control by developing a Forest Management Plan based on Board of Forestry established policy. According to these rules, the forest plans must include strategies that: contribute to biological diversity, maintain and restore healthy habitats for aquatic species, maintain healthy forests through pest and disease control, maintain or enhance long-term soil productivity, protect threatened or endangered species, produce sustainable levels of timber for harvest, enhance timber yield and value, and use the best available science in management programs.

Here in Columbia County over 93% of timber harvested annually comes from privately held land (80% from land owners who hold more than 5,000 acres). We have 1,932 acres of state forest on eight tracts of land; the largest is 1,262 acres and the smallest is less than an

continued on page 5

inside

4 mayor gives back to community

8 tree planting 101

10 the errant crumb

