

# Students represented for first time on White Salmon school board

By Jacob Bertram  
Columbia Gorge News

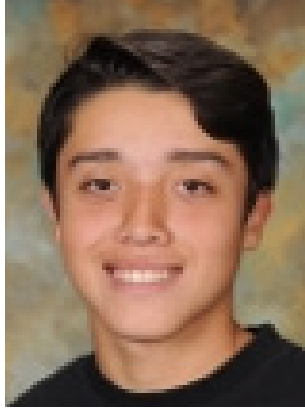
Two students from Columbia High School in White Salmon were recently selected to serve a one-year term as representatives to the White Salmon Valley School Board, seated with five elected board members.

Oscar Robles and Leonardo "Leo" Wilson, both 17-year-old seniors at Columbia High School, attended their first board meeting this November as student representatives, paving the way for more student inclusion in decision-making at the district level.

The decision to appoint the two students as non-voting representatives marks the culmination of discussions among veteran board members to bring student voices

and perspectives into conversations held at the district's monthly meetings. The board voted last spring to bring on two members of the student body as representatives to attend meetings, listen, and discuss with district officials board actions and other school district ongoings.

"The White Salmon School Board recognizes the importance of student voice," said School Board Vice Chair Alan Reitz. "We've got two young men who are excited and involved. The role of these students is to provide a bridge between the student body and the board on important decisions. They will help the board to understand what students see as strengths and weaknesses in the school experience and use that information to inform decisions."



Leo Wilson



Oscar Robles

Following board approval of two spots for students to serve a year as board representatives, District Superintendent Sean McGeeney led the recruiting process and interviewed the two Columbia High seniors, awarded them the spot in time for the Nov. 18 meeting.

or anything that the school board is doing," Robles said. "I think having that representation will open the conversation more about what actually goes on at board meetings and hopefully bring more student involvement at the meetings."

His first month as a student representative has been marked by actively engaging his peers and searching for feedback on what issues the district needs to address. He does not have a specific agenda to accomplish right now, and he noted that his fellow board members do a "phenomenal job of addressing the needs of this school district," citing district presentations to the community on topics related to COVID-19 and the district's budget.

"I like being involved in this community and knew that being a student representative for the board would help increase that involvement with this community," Robles said. "I am most looking forward to being that

voice of the students and bringing any issues that the student body may have to the board."

Wilson said he applied for the role advantage of the opportunity "to be a leader and voice for my classmates."

"I also applied because it sounded interesting to learn what the school board discussed and what kinds of actions they take for our schools," Wilson said. "I look forward to learning as much as I can on being a better leader and bringing the student body's voice to the board."

To Wilson, serving as a representative means being a messenger between the student body and the school board.

"We are able to communicate what is happening at our schools through a students perspective and share any ideas that we the student body may have. We can also communicate anything the board finds important to the student body," Wilson said.

## Berendzen new project leader for Central Washington National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has selected Steve Berendzen as the new Project Leader for the Central Washington National Wildlife Refuge Complex in the Columbia Pacific Northwest Region. He will begin his role in February 2022.

"We are so excited to have Steve as the new Project Leader for these important public lands," said Robyn Thorson, regional director. "He brings with him unparalleled leadership experience and natural resource knowledge, and his ability to work with partners and the community makes him the right fit for this position. I look forward to the work he will do in Washington."

A 37-year veteran of the Service, Berendzen has led conservation efforts in a diverse array of habitats from the Hawaiian Islands to northern Alaska. He will be leaving his most recent post as the project leader for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to come to central Washington and tackle conservation challenges such as wildfire management and invasive species control in support of ongoing habitat restoration efforts.

As the project leader for the Central Washington National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Berendzen will lead a team of biologists and refuge specialists in the management of Columbia, Toppenish, Comboy Lake National Wildlife Refuges, and the Hanford Reach National Monument.

"My wife and I are looking forward moving back to the Columbia Pacific Northwest



Steve Berendzen, project leader for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, will begin as project leader for Central Washington National Wildlife Refuge Complex in February.

Kyla Berendzen photo

Region after all these years," said Berendzen. "Each landscape presents unique conservation challenges and opportunities, and I am excited to tackle these challenges, build new partnerships in the community, and reinforce our commitments to Tribal governments."

The National Wildlife

Refuge System is a network of protected lands that are established for the conservation of wildlife and habitats. These lands also offer the public access to wildlife-dependent recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, environmental education, and interpretation.

## Jury duty scams reported in Ore., again

**Bogus phone calls, emails, or texts on jury service may lead to fraud**

The Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) is reporting that Oregonians are once again being targeted by fraudulent phone calls, emails, or texts threatening them with fines, prosecution, or jail time for failing to comply with jury service. According to the OJD, the most recent reports are from the Willamette Valley, but it is likely that other areas may be

targeted as well.

In these calls, emails, or texts, recipients are pressured to provide confidential data such as bank account information, credit card numbers, date of birth, or social security numbers, potentially leading to identity theft and fraud. These fraudulent calls or messages — which threaten recipients with fines and jail time if they do not comply — are not connected with the state or federal courts.

State and federal courts do not require anyone to provide sensitive information

in a telephone call, email, or text. Oregon state courts may provide jury notices and reminders by text, but these will not request personal information, make threats, or demand money.

Persons receiving such a jury-related telephone call, email, or text demanding information or money should not provide the requested information or payment, reply directly to the text or email, click on any links, or open any attachments, regardless of who it appears the communication is from.

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