

HANDY DEFENDS HIS POSITIONS

Lane County Commissioner Rob Handy says this week that “all options are on the table,” including funding of part or all of an additional 85 beds at the county jail.



Handy, in a prepared statement, defended his vote against including the jail beds in the budget for now, saying “I am not willing to decimate the county services we currently offer our most vulnerable people — from veterans to those with developmental disabilities, to those with mental health needs to those with drug and alcohol addictions. I won’t take away funds that will cripple the programs to the homeless and the hungry or undermine the necessary services for youth that will prevent the crimes of tomorrow.”

The commissioner says it’s clear that “we all want a strong public safety system,” but “the question on the table is to determine what we can reasonably afford.”

Handy cites Lane County’s 14 percent unemployment rates and the possible loss of millions in state funding as “equally strong reasons to hold on to our reserves in order to ensure shoring up our existing systems as the economy worsens and Lane County revenues continue to decline.”

“In recent weeks,” he says, “Lane County was notified of possible cuts from the state that ranged from \$1 million (the best case scenario) to \$9 million — per year.”

He says his intentions now are to pass the Lane County budget as required by state law by June 30, and then initiate a supplemental budget process after final passage of the state budget, seeing what services might be put back in the budget.

— Ted Taylor

WOLVES IN THE COURTS

Local conservation group Cascadia Wildlands is part of a federal lawsuit newly filed by a number of conservation groups fighting the federal government’s removal of gray wolves from the Endangered Species List in the northern Rocky Mountains. The groups allege that Interior Secretary Ken Salazar erroneously designated the northern Rocky Mountain gray wolf as a “distinct population segment” and took it off the Endangered Species List “despite significant threats to wolves’ survival and a lack of regulatory mechanisms to ensure that the wolf population does not plummet well below sustainable levels.”

The animals, which were systematically eradicated from Oregon by the late 1940s because they were seen as a threat to humans

and their cattle, were making a comeback in the Northwest under the protection of the Endangered Species Act until April, when federal protection of the wolves was lifted for the second time. The wolves are still protected within the state of Oregon.

In 2007, the federal government took federal protection away from the wolves, leaving wolf management under state-by-state jurisdiction. The environmental law group Earthjustice pursued and won a lawsuit to reinstate federal protections for wolves in 2008.

Local conservation group Cascadia Wildlands (formerly Cascadia Wildlands Project) was one of the groups involved in that lawsuit. This year, it is working with Earthjustice to yet again try to protect the wolves. Josh Laughlin, the conservation director for Cascadia Wildlands, says the Montana and Idaho state plans allow for wolves to be hunted down to a total of only 200-300 in those states, a significant drop from their current population of around 1,600.

Research in Yellowstone National Park shows that the resurgence of wolves helped restore balance in the ecosystem, bringing down overpopulation among animals such as elk and restoring the “ecology of fear.” That keeps possible prey animals moving, helping prevent overgrazing in specific areas and giving smaller animals such as beavers a chance to flourish.

The growth of Oregon’s wolf population, approximately 60 animals, is dependent on the migration of wolves from Idaho, Laughlin says. Oregon’s wolves remain protected by state laws, but without the proper protection of all the wolves of the Northwest, Laughlin says, “We fear that in Oregon the wolves won’t get a chance to repopulate.”

Right now wolves aren’t being given that opportunity, he says, and if they aren’t protected now, they’re just going to need to be protected later when their numbers dwindle again. — Krista Harper



GARY KRAMERUS/FWS

news Briefs

SPONSORS TO EXPAND BEDS

Groundbreaking was May 30 for three new buildings to provide transitional housing for ex-offenders released from state prison and returning to Lane County. The new \$5.5 million Sponsors Inc. facilities will be at 338 Hwy. 99 N. in Eugene.

The nonprofit Sponsors has been providing reentry services to ex-offenders in Lane County for the past 35 years. Those services include housing, case management, assistance with employment and schooling and practical support to about 300 men and women annually, which is about 35 percent of the ex-offenders released to Lane County.

The new 44-unit center is expected to double the organization’s capacity to accommodate about 72 men and women. Space will also be provided to store donations, food and other goods.

Funding comes from Oregon Housing and Community Services, the city of Eugene and Lane County programs, the Veteran’s Administration, the Collins Foundation, community contributions and a variety of other public and private sources, according to information provided by Sponsors.

See www.sponsorsinc.org for more information, and links to earlier EW stories on the organization, including a cover story Dec. 20, 2001.

BIKE DAY IS SATURDAY

Not everyone loves bicycles, even in Eugene, but the Science Factory children’s museum is hosting the fifth annual “Bike Day” to “Celebrate Eugene’s Bikulturalism” hoping to make biking in Eugene more accessible and safe for everyone.

The event near Autzen Stadium and Alton Baker Park is from 10 am to 4 pm, Saturday, June 13, and includes music, food, family-friendly events, demonstrations, booths and a beer garden (but remember, it’s still considered drinking and driving when it’s a bike!).

Riding a bike is fun exercise, but riders need to remember that safety and obeying the law is an important part of cycling. According to Oregon Revised Statute 814.400, “Every person riding a bicycle upon a public way is subject to the provisions applicable to and has the same rights and duties as the driver of any other vehicle.”

As for those bikers who whiz along on the sidewalk leaving pedestrians in their wake, part 2a of the same statute clarifies, “A bicycle is a vehicle for purposes of the

vehicle code.” Harlow Meno, station manager at the West University Public Safety Station next to the UO campus, an area packed with cyclists, says bikes must “obey all the same traffic laws as a car.”

“There’s a hierarchy of right of way in the world of transportation,” says UO student Nick Snyder. “It goes: cars, bicyclists, then pedestrians. Bicyclists at the university have forgotten that.”

Non-bikers complain about distracted cyclists talking on cell phones and wearing headphones, not paying attention to pedestrians or, more dangerously, to cars. “You have to pre-think what the cars are going to do,” says Meno. “When it’s car vs. bicycle, a car is going to win.”

Other attractions at Bike Day to help Eugeneans become better bikers include a safety rodeo, helmet decoration, bike safety checks, bike polo, tire changing competition, fashion show, jumping, tricycle races, unicycle demonstration, bike blended smoothies and a performance by the “Bottom Brackettes” bike dance group.

The local GEARS (Greater Eugene Area Riders) bike group helped organize the event and has posted a full schedule on its www.eugenegears.org/bikeday website. — Sam Marx



METOLIUS BILL STILL ON TRACK

Legislation to protect the Metolius River basin from large resort developments is making its way through committees and could end up on the Senate floor this week or next. Democrats in Salem have been moving along HB 3298 while Republicans have been trying to block it. The bill got a public hearing in the Senate Rules Committee June 3.

Some 17 local, state and national organizations have allied to urge lawmakers to protect the Metolius. The alliance’s concerns include water quality and flow, fish, bird and other habitat, river stability and health, plants and winter range for elk and deer. Fighting the legislation are developers and Jefferson County officials who see the building of two large resorts as an economic boost to the area. As many as 8,000 new homes and other buildings could be constructed at the resorts.

The two proposed resorts are The Metolian, on one square mile just north of Highway 20 and Suttle Lake, and The Ponderosa, on 10,000 acres straddling the Metolius basin on Green Ridge about eight miles north of Sisters.