

BILLS BILLS BILLS

WHAT'S GREEN ON OREGON'S LEGISLATIVE AGENDA?

By Camilla Mortensen

In a wonky way, Oregon's 2011 legislative session will be exciting when it resumes on Feb. 1. Oregon has a \$3.5 billion deficit, unemployment is still more than 10 percent, more than 1,600 bills have been introduced, the Oregon House is 30 Republicans and 30 Democrats, an even split, and everybody's got an agenda, some greener than others.

Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli has a dog agenda. He's introduced Senate Concurrent Resolution 3, which would designate the border collie the state dog. Eleven other states do have state dogs. Our neighbor to the north, Washington, designated an official state endemic mammal — the marmot — in 2009, and here in the Beaver State not only is our state animal, obviously, the beaver, we also have a state rock, the thunder egg, and a state tree, the Douglas fir.

But when not deciding really important things like whether border collies are more symbolic of Oregon than, say, Labradors (which at least have webbed feet) Oregon's Legislature will be voting on issues that affect not only our economy, jobs and whose dog is the coolest but the environment as well.

EW checked in with eco-oriented groups, locally and around the state, to find out what their priorities are for this year's session, the first since Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 71, requiring the Legislature to meet annually instead of every two years. Priorities run the gamut from ridding the ocean of plastic bags to making sure cougars aren't hunted with hounds.

TOP GREEN BILLING

Each year, more than 50 environmental groups in Oregon coordinate their top priorities for bills in the Legislature. Jon Isaacs, executive director of the Oregon League of Conservation Voters, says this "forces the entire community to really prioritize and say, 'these are the things that all of us agree are really important.'" OLCV, through its Education Fund, sponsors and facilitates this group of dues-paying organizations, called the Oregon Conservation Network. The goals reflect a diverse coalition of members from the Surfrider Foundation to various Riverkeeper groups to smaller groups like Oregon Toxics Alliance (OTA) based in Eugene. OLCV then lobbies based on these priorities, Isaacs says, though the individual groups may still work on their own causes, even if they didn't make it to the top of the list.

Just because an issue doesn't get top

billing doesn't mean it won't go through. Two issues that Lisa Arkin and OTA have worked on — the ban on field burning and integrated pesticide management in schools, a technique of pest-and-weed control that leads to lower toxic chemical usage — were not on OLCV's list in the past, though they were passed into law. Isaacs says after field burning passed in 2009, the network put a process allowing important new priorities to be added to the list that might come up over the course of the session.

Arkin says that this year OTA is hoping HB 2188, the "safe public places" bill, will expand integrated pest management beyond schools to public places such as state forests, public parks, public buildings and grounds, as well as land and rivers adjacent to public highways.

This year the top priorities for OLCV are banning plastic bags, updating Oregon's bottle bill, banning Bisphenol-A from kids'

food and drink containers, improving energy efficiency and establishing a system of marine reserves as well as state forest reserves.

A quick check with Lane County area legislators didn't yield much in the way of results when it comes to eco bills, at least not yet. Sen. Chris Edwards was out of the country, and several legislators didn't respond to an email inquiry before press time. But local politicians have come through in the past on bills such as banning field burning and pesticide management, and OLCV has given them high ratings on Project Vote Smart for their environmental positions. Reps. Paul Holvey, Nancy Nathanson and Phil Barnhart earned 90s out of 100 points. Sen. Floyd Prozanski got a 79 and Sen. Edwards earned an 86. (Sen. Ferrioli, the border collie guy, got a 10).

Reps. Nancy Nathanson and Phil Barnhart have introduced bills related to public transportation, a green goal.

Nathanson's office says her top priority is improving Oregon's rail system for both passenger and freight lines. Barnhart says he introduced Senate Joint Resolution 17, at the request of Tom Bowerman, which proposes an amendment to the Oregon Constitution that would allow money from taxes on fuel, and on owning, operating or using motor vehicles to be used for public transportation services. The amendment would be referred to voters for approval or rejection at next regular general election.

In the 2009 session, Attorney General John Kroger made strides for the environment when the Legislature passed a bill allowing him to create an environmental crimes unit from existing funds in order to crack down on polluters. This year, Tony Green, the AG's communications director says there is "nothing new" legislatively from the office on environment issues.

BAGS AND BOTTLES

The ban on plastic bags has been erroneously pitched as "bad for business," says Brock Howell, former policy advocate for Environment Oregon. An organizer for the Great Pacific Cleanup, he says plastic bags are an ocean problem and are the number one item found in beach cleanups. But despite that pitch by groups like Save the Plastic Bag Coalition, Howell says, so far more than 500 small businesses have endorsed the campaign; so have the Northwest Grocers Association, Fred Meyer and paper-bag maker International Paper. Commissioners Pete Sorenson and Rob Handy and Mayor Kitty Piercy have endorsed it also, along with businesses such as Kiva.

Howell says the bill would not stop shoppers from bringing their own plastic bags if they wanted to and would call on stores to use and charge 5 cents for recycled content paper bags. SB 536 also would stop local governments from imposing charges on checkout bags or other bags provided to customers.

Howell also points out that a recent headline-making announcement from OSU scientist Angel White critiquing exaggerations of the Pacific Garbage Patch doesn't detract from the message of how bad plastic is for the oceans and marine life. White says the debris may act as a

vector for introducing invasive species into sensitive habitats and that it is extremely costly to remove. An unknown amount of plastic sinks to the ocean floor as well.

Oregon's Bottle Bill had dramatic results when it first passed in 1971, with beverage bottle litter dropping by 83 percent in just a few years. In 2007 the bill was updated to include water bottles, including flavored water such as vitaminwater, though sports drinks and teas were not included either in the '70s or in the 2007 update. Environment Oregon would like to see the bill include newer drinks and increase the bottle and can deposit to 10 cents.

The group would also like to see retailers use the unclaimed deposits on bottles, which they've been holding on to and not disclosing, to make the bottle program more efficient. Environment Oregon estimates that about \$30 million to \$40 million in deposits stay with the retailers each year due to unredeemed bottles.

Another would-be bottle bill on the OLCV agenda is aimed at baby bottles, sippy cups and other food and beverage containers used by infants. OLCV says that Bisphenol-A (BPA) disrupts children's brain development and is linked to chronic health problems, such as diabetes and breast cancer.

The BPA-Free Baby Bill, which has yet to be introduced in the Legislature, would also ban using the chemical in sports water containers and require cans containing BPA to say so on the containers.

Isaacs says Sen. Jackie Dingfelder of Portland will be sponsoring the BPA bill. Dingfelder is also the sponsor of a bill that would require genetically modified fish and shellfish to be labeled as such, and an energy bill, SB 164, which would create a state energy commission made up of five citizens appointed by the governor to establish statewide policy and priorities.

RESERVES

Also on the list of top priorities for enviros in the upcoming session is the goal of creating both new marine reserves and establishing state forest reserves.

The 2009 legislative session passed a marine reserves bill that created two pilot sites along with four sites for future study. Proponents say these reserves support marine habitat, yielding more fish and seafood for the economies that depend on them. OSU studies have shown that reserves allow fish to grow larger and result also in more fish in areas surrounding the reserve. Isaacs says there are recommendations from stakeholders, scientists and fishing representatives to create more reserves in this session.

Ivan Maluski of the Oregon Sierra Club says the group hopes to spearhead the "first-ever protected forest reserves on state lands." Rep. Deborah Boone has introduced HB 2736, a bill that Maluski says he hopes by the end of the session "will have created a new mechanism to protect special places on state lands like the Tillamook, Clatsop and Elliott state forests for clean water, recreation, fish and wildlife, and carbon sequestration."

Cascadia Wildlands has been angling for several years to preserve Coast Range old-growth trees in the Elliott State