

Forest. The Eugene-based group has been proposing the state look into the benefits the trees provide, rather than what the group's campaign director, Josh Laughlin, calls "clearcuts for kids," because the forest is part of Common School Fund lands. The Elliott State Forest borders on the popular proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness area and is home to threatened and endangered species such as marbled murrelets and northern spotted owls.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Although newly elected Gov. Kitzhaber's office had made clear that its first priorities are jobs and the economy, green groups and the governor do agree on one priority that affects jobs, the economy and the environment: energy efficiency.

Four bills have been introduced, OLCV says, that cut energy costs in Oregon's public schools, require utilities to prioritize conservation over generation, create an efficiency rating system for buildings and make it easier to create high-performance buildings.

"We're going to be working hard to support the governor's plan for energy efficient schools and his plan to catalyze the energy efficient upgrades on public and private buildings," Isaacs says.

The goal is funding the upgrading of public schools so that they are completely energy independent and retrofitted to be energy efficient, Isaacs says, adding that this saves taxpayer money. Studies show that students do better when the air is cleaner, classrooms are better lit and the temperature is consistent. Despite budget issues currently troubling schools, the plan is that the energy savings would pay in the end for the costs of the changes.

One part of Kitzhaber's plan that may raise hackles in Eugene — where the Seneca biomass-burning cogeneration plant construction has led to concerns about local air quality — is to convert coal-burning heating systems in schools to biomass boilers. Kitzhaber's office has been advocating for federal rules favoring the burning of woody biomass for energy production. Opponents have concerns not only over public health issues regarding burning biomass, but also over whether the demand for woody biomass could result in using whole trees for fuel rather than logging slash and other organic debris.

PREDATORY BILLS

For every pro-environment bill introduced, there's at least one causing conservationists some pain and angst. Maluski of the Sierra Club says, "Declaring biomass to be carbon neutral or exempting it from greenhouse gas reporting rules," could be potentially one such bad bill.

"I think one top priority on the environment this year will be to hold the line and prevent rollbacks to existing environmental rules," he says. Maluski points out that with a 30-30 split in the House, "and that body operating under the 'rule of 31' that allows any group of 31 legislators to bring bills to the floor for a vote, we will inevitably see some bad environmental bills pass the House."

Predators, including wolves and cougars, could be in the crosshairs of this

legislative session, according to several groups contacted by *EW*. Laughlin of Cascadia Wildlands says, "We are hearing that special interests will be introducing bills to make it easier to kill federally and state-listed wolves in Oregon, which are just beginning to recover after a systematic eradication program over 60 years ago." He adds, "Wolves are the icon of freedom, and we are all into freedom, right?"

Sean Stevens of Oregon Wild says that the Oregon Cattleman's Association has vowed to bring as many as four bills before the Legislature that would change the way wolves are managed in Oregon. "As far as I know they haven't been released yet," Stevens says, but he adds that OCA wants to change the language in Oregon's plan "to remove professional wildlife managers from the equation and allow private citizens to shoot wolves almost free of restrictions." According to Stevens there are currently only 22 wolves in Oregon.

Sally Mackler, carnivore representative for Eugene-based Predator Defense, says two bills have been introduced to repeal Measure 18, the citizen's initiative that banned hound and bait hunting of bear and cougar. HB 2337 would create a pilot program allowing counties to implement the hound hunting of cougars if they request it. SB 474 would apply to hunting zones where cougar quotas haven't been met, and it would give hunters the right to use dogs to chase cougars during the last three months of the season.

Mackler says that the most up-to-date science shows increasing cougar hunting and killing leads to increased conflict with people. The bills ignore science in favor of politics, she says.

With clean water and water rights so recently an issue in Eugene — the City Council voted unanimously on Jan. 24 to approve a resolution allowing EWEB to sell up to 3 million gallons of water a day to Veneta — it's not surprising that that conservationists are watching some bills that revolve around water issues. Kimberley Priestley of WaterWatch of Oregon says it will be of critical importance to protect existing river protections and adequately fund the Water Resources Department. The WRD manages Oregon's existing 85,000 water rights and continues to grant more. Priestley says the agency is already understaffed.

Among the bills WaterWatch is monitoring is SB 190, which seeks to reserve 30 million-acre feet of Columbia River water for "consumptive use" for things like irrigation and power development. Kitzhaber's office has indicated support for the bill, but Priestley says it could undermine or eliminate protections for Columbia and Snake River fish. She also says the bill skirts existing water allocation statutes and resource protection rules.

With well over 1,000 bills already introduced — and more to come on topics from border collies to establishing an official state "wild west show" to a proposal to designate hatchery fish as "native" if they were born in Oregon to an Oregon species — conservationists, politicians and pundits are laying out agendas and seeing what rises to the top. *EW*

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