

WATER GRAB GOES BEFORE THE COUNTY

Should a privately owned corporation be given the right to 22 million gallons of water a day out of the McKenzie River? Willamette Water Company, a quasi-municipal water source, has been fighting to get an additional 34 cubic feet per second water right out of the McKenzie River, on top of a 4 cfs right it already has, but has not been fully using.

The Lane County commissioners voted 3 to 2 with Rob Handy and Pete Sorenson dissenting on a resolution on Oct. 26 to “support the Willamette Water Company’s efforts to provide water to the Pleasant Hill, Creswell and Cottage Grove areas from the McKenzie River for domestic, commercial and industrial water users in south Lane County.”

In an investigative series in 2010, *EW* uncovered that Willamette Water was owned and run by land and timber barons Greg and Jeff Demers and Melvin McDougal. The post office box listed by Willamette Water with the Public Utilities Commission was the same one used by the Oregon Land Company, which lists lands for sale owned by the Demers and Norman and Melvin McDougal.

The McDougals and Demers own thousands of acres of land around Lane County. Their Willamette Water Company says in its permit application that it needs the water right in order to provide water for growth in rural cities in Lane County. Oregon Land Company lists several proposed subdivisions in Veneta for sale on its website, in addition to lands up the McKenzie.

John Devoe of WaterWatch, a group which seeks to protect and restore flows in Oregon rivers, says, “Obviously we oppose this resolution, which is nothing more than a last minute attempt to bolster a record that is clearly deficient before the upcoming contested case hearing.”

In his written comments to the board, Doug Heiken of Oregon Wild opposes the resolution and asks, “Why give them 80 times the water they are currently using? How do we know this speculative future need trumps the obvious needs of the river ecosystem?”

Heiken writes that according to a 2009 document filed with the Corporations Division of the Oregon Secretary of State, the only person on the board of directors of Willamette Water Co. is Greg Demers.

He says, “It seems highly improper to give one person the power to allocate 34 cfs of public water according to his whim or profit motive.”

Devoe says WaterWatch is been preparing for the administrative trial on the Willamette Water issue that begins Nov. 14.

Commissioner Faye Stewart, whose East Lane district encompasses the areas Willamette Water has said it would serve, including Cottage Grove, Creswell and Goshen, did not respond to a request for comment before press time.

— Camilla Mortensen

OCCUPY EUGENE PERSISTS PEACEFULLY

Occupy Eugene’s move from the Park Blocks to Alton Baker Park on Oct. 21 left the Park Blocks clean and tidy — even the leaves were raked — and a message to the city that while the occupiers are here to stay, they are around to create positive change.

Occupy Eugene was inspired by Occupy Wall Street’s stand against corporate greed, its call for economic justice and critique of corporations being given the rights of human beings, among other issues.

CRIME DROPS WITH DROP IN JAIL BEDS

Local law enforcement has long argued that fewer county jail beds would increase crime, but that hasn’t been the case.

In the past dozen years, the number of county jail beds has dropped by 37 percent while the violent crime rate in Eugene has dropped by 50 percent and the property crime rate has dropped by 46 percent, according to FBI data.

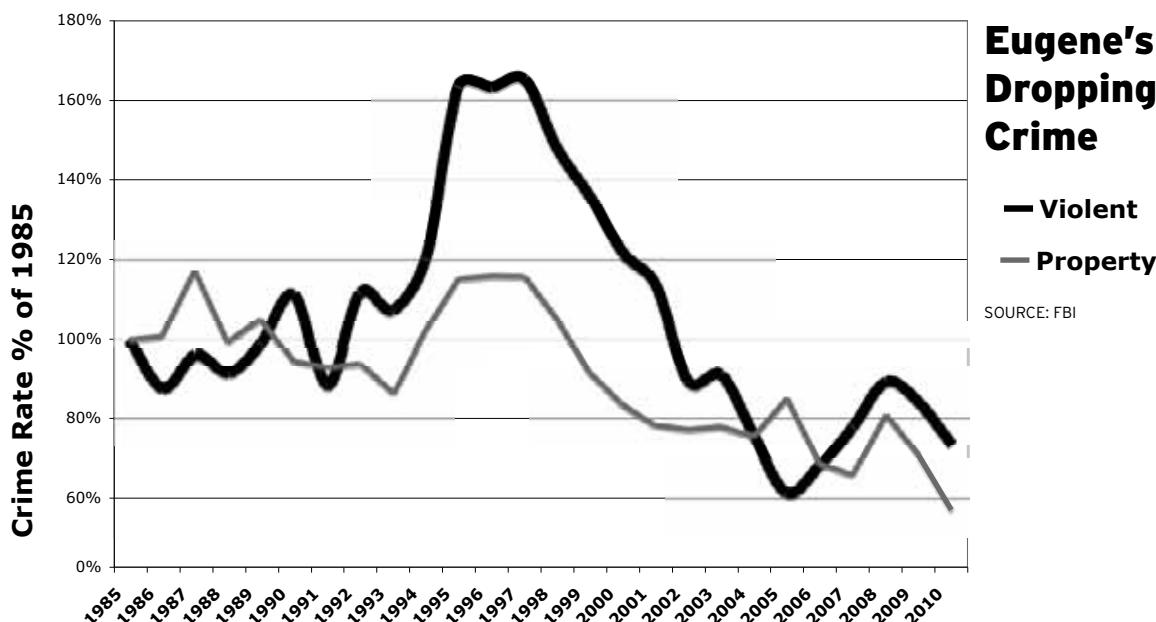
Violent crime rates in Eugene dropped 13 percent last year and property crimes dropped 20 percent, continuing a trend since 1998 that has left Eugene as one of the safest cities in the nation, FBI data shows. Compared to FBI violent crime rates in other cities of more than 100,000 people, Eugene ranks in the top 25

percent of the safest cities in America.

Last month, Eugene Police Chief Pete Kerns claimed that more jail beds reduce crime. But he admitted, “it’s theory, of course, because it’s very difficult to draw causal relationship between changes in crime and other societal effects. But in law enforcement, our theory would be that those are the greatest causal factors.”

Kerns said that the recent closure of 84 jail beds by the county sheriff could increase crime. “That’s a pretty significant increment of accountability that isn’t available for 84 repeat offenders on any given day and that’s day after day after day,” he said. “That combination of factors is going to make it pretty challenging for all of us in local law enforcement in Lane County to manage our crime rates.”

Chief Kerns used the press conference to argue for an increase in his police budget. But in the last decade, Eugene police spending has increased 72 percent, despite the falling crime rates. — Alan Pittman



Happening people BY PAUL NEEVEL



JARED PRUCH

Eugene native Jared Pruch got a start in environmental education as a student at South Eugene High School when he began volunteering with the Cascade Raptor Center. “We made presentations,” he says. “We brought birds into the schools.” After a trip to Europe that included a month at a wildlife rehab center in Greece, Pruch spent four years at Colorado College to earn a degree in comparative

religion. Afterwards, he worked at an outdoor school in California, at the Canyonlands Field Institute in Utah, then for two years on a biodynamic farm and at a charter school in Hood River. “My job was to manage the school garden,” says Pruch, who returned to Eugene in 2007 to manage the School Garden Project. “I found the job on craigslist.” SGP, a nonprofit, helps Lane County schools create and sustain vegetable gardens. “We supply 30 schools with starts, and we offer training for teachers,” says Pruch, who partnered with the Northwest Youth Corps, FOOD for Lane County and other agencies. “Each year, we work with 15 schools to do an educational program.” In September Pruch left the SGP for a new position as coordinator of the Berggren Demonstration Farm, an experimental and educational facility on 92 acres of riparian forest and farmland acquired last year by the McKenzie River Trust.