news Briefs

TALKING ABOUT TREES & TAXES

Some of the things that matter to Lane County, in no particular order, are bad taxes, good beer, good food, good conversation and trees. In a state that's covered in forestland, you can't talk politics or even sports (Portland Timbers anyone?) without talking about the trees.

Lane County Commissioner Rob Handy, public interest forester Roy Keene, and *ArchitectureWeek* editor-in-chief Kevin Matthews have been having a conversation about the forest, or rather a series of them, and if you've missed the first three, there are two more to go. The next fireside chat-style conversation will be 6 pm Monday, May 7, at Cozmic, 199 W. 8th, is called: "Small Towns, Timber and Economic Trauma," and will focus on rural communities.

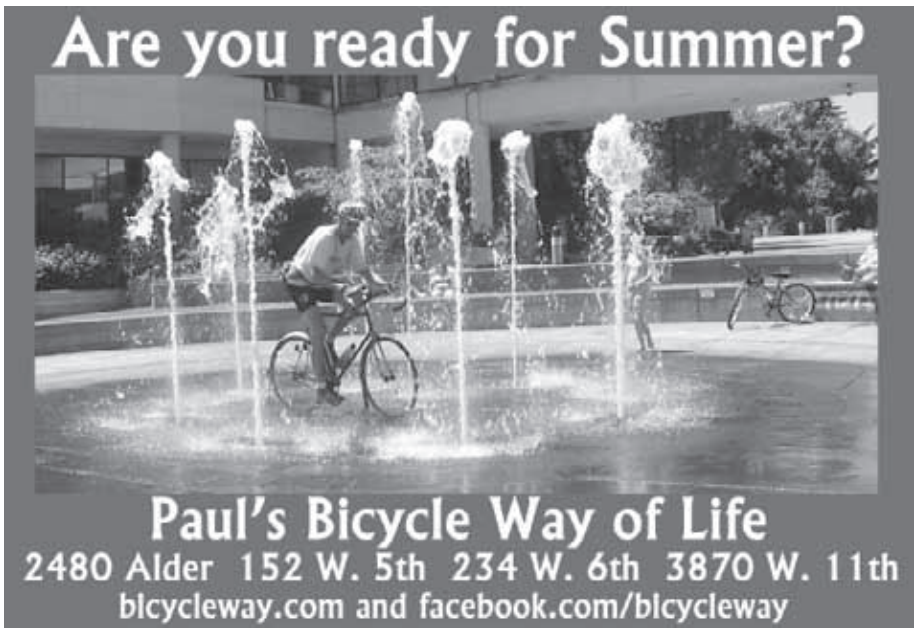
The conversations, which all take place at Cozmic, started with background on Lane County's forests — 58 percent of the county is public land, the speakers say. More than half a million of Lane's acres are privately owned timber lands — that's more than twice the amount of controversial O&C lands (see cover story 4/12) that are at the center of a battle about using public lands logging to generate income for the county.

County funding is a big topic for Handy, who is up for re-election in his north Eugene seat this year, and "forest economics" was the topic of the March 5 chat. Handy says that "industrial forestlands are the source of 80 percent of the logging and most of the log exporting in Lane." He argues along with Keene that Lane County is losing more than $20 million a year in revenues through forest tax exemptions.

Of the little tax money that is generated by private timberlands logging through the state timber harvest tax, Steve Pedery of Oregon Wild says some of it goes to the sponsorship of the Portland Timbers soccer team rather than to cash-strapped counties. Lane County is looking at cutting funding for everything from law enforcement to animal control.

The April 2 talk at Cozmic covered "public goods and ecology" and included a look at water quality — some of those private forests being logged, as well as public forests, are the source of Eugene's drinking water. Handy says inventory records document the overcutting of industrial timberlands and "science documents the degrading effects of massive clearcutting and chemical poisoning on publicly owned water, wildlife, fisheries, and human property and health." Yet he says the same corporations "who degrade our forests resources and life quality" get tens of millions annually in tax subsidies.

The final session on June 4 will look at forest futures and "Are win-win-win solutions possible?"

For more on Conversations on the Forest, including recordings and handouts from past sessions, go to: wkly.ws/196 or email rob@robhandy.com

— Camilla Mortensen