

PARVIN IN ART AND COURT

In Eugene, the Maude Kerns Art Center is hosting a one-week exhibit of poetry and photographs, “Silent Witness: Parvin Butte,” calling attention to the destruction of scenic Parvin Butte by developers. Out in Dexter, the mining of the butte continues, and in county and agency offices the question of just what to do about the butte lingers.

The Dexter/Lost Valley community that surrounds the butte says loud blasts of dynamite and heavy equipment on roads are the latest problems connected with Lost Creek Rock Products’ quarry mining. They are also concerned about effects on a salmon-bearing stream and other environmental issues as well as the loss of a butte that has provided a scenic backdrop to the community of Dexter and the nearby reservoir.

The natural and recreational resources in the 30-mile area around Dexter Lake generate about \$50 million a year, according to the Army Corps of Engineers. Almost 100,000 people a year come to visit the area, a study by the agency says.

Commissioner Faye Stewart says that he thinks some of the neighbors’ concerns could be addressed under the nuisance ordinance. It wouldn’t halt the mining activities, he says but it could put limits on them and provide some relief. Stewart says he has asked county staff to look into the timeline and costs it would take to change the Lane County Code to make site review mandatory.

Prior to a vote by the Lane County commissioners in May, county staff had been arguing that site review was required at Parvin and that LCRP was mining illegally without site review. In a 3-2 vote pitting the conservative majority against progressives Rob Handy and Pete Sorenson, the board voted to not appeal the Parvin Butte decision by the county hearings officer, but that the county would appear in response to an appeal by a defendant in the case.

Attorney Dan Stotter, who represents the Parvin Butte neighbors, alleges that county attorney Stephen Dingle “misrepresented the whole issue of enforcement,” when he spoke about the possibility of having to pay attorneys’ fees if the county took the case further to the appeals court or to the Land Use Board of Appeals (LUBA).

“Is it possible? The real question is ‘Is it likely?’” Stotter says, comparing the argument to buying the casket before anyone is dead.

Stotter called the vote by commissioners Stewart, Sid Leiken and Jay Bozievich not to appeal “a political decision” and says the lack of action by the county at Parvin Butte is an example of discretion in enforcement.

“Discretion can be exercised in ways that are unfair,” Stotter says. “These guys are blowing up a mountain and being given immunity.” He adds, “Millionaires, resource extractors, donors to their campaigns are hands-off to these commissioners.”

Parvin Butte advocates have invited the community to come to Maude Kerns to learn more about the butte through art and poetry. In response to the invitation to the volunteer members of the Lane County Planning Commission to attend the art show, Lane County Planning Director Kent Howe sent out an email warning the LCPC that if they attended the show “please coordinate among yourselves to avoid having a quorum of the LCPC present and raising concerns about conflicting with Oregon’s Public Meetings Law.”

The LCPC is an appointed advisory board, not a decision-making body.

“Silent Witness: Parvin Butte” wraps up with a poetry reading and closing reception 7 pm Friday, May 18, at Maude Kerns Art Center, 910 East 15th Avenue.

— Camilla Mortensen

RIGHT-TO-KNOW ABOUT GMOs

GMO-Free Oregon wants you to know the dangers of genetically modified crops pose to the food supply and to local farms. The group is launching local and state efforts to stop GMOs from contaminating organic crops and making their way further into the foods Oregonians eat.

On May 30 Oregon Right to Know will present “What You Need to Know about GMOs in your Food and Farms” at the UO. Oregon Right to Know is a 2012 ballot initiative for labeling GMO foods.

The group will need to collect the signatures of 100,000 registered Oregon voters to get the initiative on the ballot.

The event will feature Scott Bates, director of Oregon Right to Know; Kim Goodwin, director of Oregonians for Farm and Food Rights; Clint Lindsey, a Benton County bean and grain farmer and Leda Hermecz, director of FIRST, which helps businesses go green and non-GMO, according to Sabrina Siegel of GMO-Free Oregon.

Siegel says that the ballot initiative isn’t the only plan. The group is also working on efforts in Jackson and Benton counties to pass ordinances that would block GMOs at the local level. It’s about the right to farm sustainably and about heritage seed, she says. She says she’d like to pass an anti-GMO ordinance in Lane County, where she lives, as well.

GMO-Free Oregon is getting help with the ordinances from Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF). CELDF provides support to communities and groups who want to “assert their right to local self-government and clean climate, and to sustainable, environmentally cohesive or compatible agriculture,” according to Kai Huschke of CELDF.

“GMO foods and factory farms are positioned as better, more advanced, more modern,” Huschke says. “Those are buzzwords they will use to convince communities that it’s a good thing.”

The regulatory system is “all about mitigating impacts not stopping it all together,” he says.

Siegel says that GM crops and their fuel-intensive farming practices are dangerous for human health and the environment, and linked to climate change. Benton County in particular she says is an interesting mix — both home to organic farms and farmers who have long been fighting GMOs, but also the home of OSU, a land grant institution that takes in a great deal of corporate funding.

The effort to protect organics and heritage seed through legislation is a fairly new one, Huschke says. He says that given the long history of influence that big money and corporations have on a legal and legislative system that assumes “a corporation’s will is somehow greater than the

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FLAGPOLE SITTING & COURTHOUSE OCCUPYING

Summer is near and in Oregon that means it’s treesit season. And apparently it’s flagpole-sitting season, too. Last week a Cascadia Forest Defenders (CFD) activist was arrested after hanging a protest banner from a flagpole at the state capitol in Salem. And with the warmer weather, Occupy Eugene is not only protesting but also occupying again. They’re at the old Federal Courthouse with a permit in hand.

Early in the morning hours of May 10, forest defender (and sometime Occupy protester) Perry Graham climbed a flagpole to hang a banner that said, “School vs. trees? We want both.”

CFD has had a campaign since 2009 protesting logging in Oregon’s state forests. In 2011 Gov. John Kitzhaber and the State Land Board approved a plan that nearly doubles the yearly amount of trees clearcut in the Elliott State Forest, which lies south of Eugene.

“There are no schools on a dead planet,” the forest defenders say. CFD argues that clearcutting the native trees of forests like the Elliott doesn’t provide much money to Oregon schools, and it threatens species such as marbled murrelets, spotted owls and the mountain beaver.

Mountain beaver host one of America’s largest fleas, *Hystrichopsylla schefferi*, which can be longer than one

centimeter. If the mountain beaver were to be wiped out, so would its unique fleas, in a form of coextinction, according to the newsletter *Flea News*.

Graham stayed on the pole for almost two hours before he came down and was arrested by Oregon State Police on charges of disorderly conduct, second-degree criminal trespass and second-degree criminal mischief.

Meanwhile in Eugene, Occupy Eugene celebrated May Day by occupying the courtyard at the old Federal Building at the corner of 7th and Pearl. According to OE, the group was approached by a Homeland Security officer while holding a general assembly on the steps of the courthouse on the evening of May 1. General assemblies are a key part of the Occupy movement’s democratic process in which decisions are made by group consensus.

OE says the officer inquired about the group’s intentions at the site. “When the Occupiers made it clear that they intended to hold a round-the-clock (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) protest, they were offered a 60-day permit, along with a promise to protect protesters’ First Amendment rights,” according to a press release from OE’s Communications Committee.

Occupy Eugene says “it invites the greater community of Eugene to join them in their protest.”

This summer Cascadia Earth First! will be holding its annual rendezvous in the Clatsop State Forest west of Portland, June 20-25. For more information, go to cascadia2012.com

— Camilla Mortensen



PHOTO BY CASCADIA FOREST DEFENDERS