

COUNTY CALLS A TEMPORARY HALT TO CONTROVERSIAL CHANGES TO PETITION PROCESS

The Lane County Board of Commissioners voted 5-0 on Aug. 30 to call a six-month halt on its efforts to change its initiative petition process, Commissioner Pete Sorenson tells *EW*.

The initiative petition process allows the public to collect signatures and get measures on the ballots, such as efforts to ban aerial sprays of pesticides or genetically modified crops — two issues that local group Community Rights Lane County has been working on.

Back in June, the Lane County Commission began to mull over giving itself authority to block any countywide ballot measures that it decided was not “of county concern” before they go to voters or the courts. The proposal was at the behest of local conservative political fundraiser Dennis Morgan. Commissioners Jay Bozievich and Faye Stewart previously spoke of the effort to block public initiatives as a way to save costs for the county.

Since then, the proposed ordinance has garnered threats of at least two lawsuits — one for and one against — as well as a loud community outcry against the idea.

In a media release, Sorenson, who was against the effort to block initiative petitions, writes that in response to his repeated requests to stop work on the ordinance, the board agreed to cease current work on the process.

Sorenson says, “Although this is temporary, it looks like the board decided that this change right now isn’t going to be a good idea. To me, this has always been about — in basketball terms — changing the height of the basket in the middle of a basketball game,” as the proposal to look into blocking initiative petitions came after three proposed petitions were underway.

Ann Kneeland, attorney with Community Rights Lane County, which has been vigorously fighting the board’s efforts to block the initiative petitions, says, “There is more at issue here than the popularity, costs or even constitutionality of individual initiatives. Rather, our rights to direct democracy and free speech are at stake, including our right to circulate petitions, engage in political discourse and vote on proposed laws.” Kneeland adds, “No government official should have the power to obstruct these core democratic activities.”

The media release notes that the unanimous vote is “a rare win for Sorenson, a progressive, who is frequently at odds with the conservative board majority.”

Sorenson continues, “I’ll be on the alert for any further proposals to interfere with the rights of Lane County residents to change their laws by initiative petition.”

Kneeland says she too believes that the community also will “remain vigilant to protect the people’s initiative and referendum powers from any further assault from corporate interests.” ■



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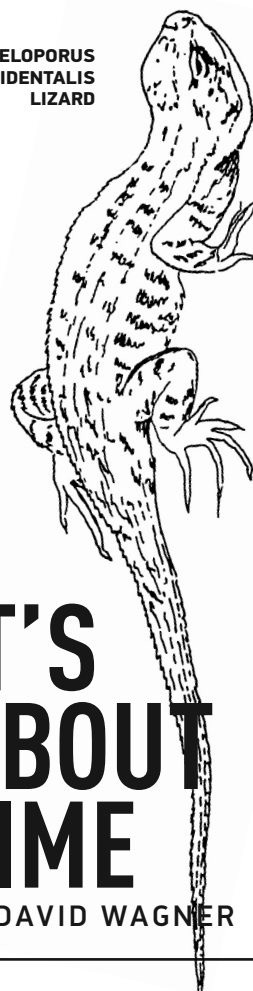
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**IT'S
ABOUT
TIME**
BY DAVID WAGNER

September is the month that hikers in western Oregon look forward to more than any month. Rainless days are almost guaranteed, mosquito levels drop off quickly and tourists thin out after Labor Day. This year there are a few qualifications to what is typically our best month for backpacking. Mosquito levels may be slow to disappear in the high country because there haven't been enough freezing nights.

The unusually warm and dry weather has led to extremely high fire danger. This might be the year to try hiking like John Muir: no fires or stoves at all, just nuts and dried fruits. And, to be contemporary, corn chips, energy bars and cookies. It means traveling very light, as no pots, pans or kettles are needed.

Warm weather brings on flushes of toxic bacteria in lakes and slow moving rivers; erroneously called algae or bluegreen algae, they are actually photosynthetic bacteria called cyanobacteria. The really bad population explosions look like someone has poured turquoise-tinted white latex paint in the water. This stuff is not good to drink, wash or even swim in. Watch for state notifications.

Reptiles are at their time of most rapid growth. With body temperature controlled by the environment, high activity in warm weather allows fattening up for the cool winter months to follow. Two species of native snakes are different from most reptiles in that their eggs are incubated and hatched inside the mother's bodies so that live young are born: rubber boas and garter snakes.

David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. Contact him directly at fernenmosses@me.com.