

AGRICULTURE VERSUS MINING

Commissioner Jack Howard of Union County says he was glad the bill focuses on job creation, but that it could set up a dangerous precedent of competing land use goals between counties and the state. In an email to *EW*, Howard writes that he is concerned “it may be that we’ve moved from taking away the overreach of statewide planning to an inability for local governments to actually have a full range of discretion to deny a local application.”

Bill Harvey, the chairman of the Baker County Board of Commissioners, says he supports the bill and welcomes more mining in eastern Oregon. “Historically, mining is how the economy started out in Baker,” Harvey says.

According to DOGAMI, mining claims were made in Baker as early as 1862.

“Each county should have their own say,” Harvey says. “We know our land and we know what we can and cannot do.”

Harvey says he doesn’t think mining will conflict with agriculture because the best min-

Dave Hunnicutt, who lobbied for the bill on behalf of the Oregon Mining Association, says that mining is “by far the most heavily regulated natural resource use and pays the highest wages.”

“We can do it the Oregon way and do it with our environmental regulations,” Hunnicutt says, “or we can keep importing and pretending like things aren’t being mined because we don’t like it.”

Though Oregon does have an extensive review process for mining permits, inspection and enforcement of permits remains a major concern. According to Ali Hansen, the communications director for DOGAMI, the agency has five staff statewide responsible for inspection of approximately 900 mines. None of these five individuals are full-time inspectors.

Eugene Sen. Floyd Prozanski, one of four state senators to vote against the bill, raised concerns about the legislation’s impact on greater sage grouse habitat. While bill co-sponsor Republican Sen. Fred Girod emphasized in the reading of the bill that current sage grouse protections will be honored, Prozanski says he’s

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— BILL HARVEY, BAKER COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

ing sites are on rocky hillsides and not in the valleys where most farming takes place. Eastern Oregon county commissioners contacted for this story were in favor of the bill and promoted investments in mining in eastern Oregon, though some had reservations about the impact the new rules could have on ranchers and farmers.

Agricultural interests including the Oregon Farm Bureau, Harney County Farm Bureau and Grant County Farm Bureau have expressed worries that the new laws could create conflicts between mines and agriculture, which is the backbone of the economy in eastern Oregon.

The public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau, Mary Anne Nash, says OFB is generally supportive of mining but would prefer to see better-defined rules to avoid impacts to farmland. OFB would rather see conflicts mitigated in the first place than see mining companies pay neighbors, as provisions in the bill allow.

“We need to make sure we’re protecting farmers and ranchers in the process,” Nash says. “Bring on the jobs, but make sure they’re not displacing the existing jobs.”

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The proposed Grassy Mountain mine in Malheur County has an anticipated deposit of more than a million ounces of gold and four million ounces of silver, which the Nevada-based Paramount Gold mining company values at over \$100 million after taxes. According to the company’s environmental baseline study, the underground mine and on-site processing facilities would disturb roughly 400 acres.

concerned the bill isn’t responsive to future changes in sage grouse management.

Prozanski says he has reservations that the bill allows a different land use program for the seven counties that could lock in current rules and block future protections for sage grouse.

Mines and the roads required to service them could have lasting impacts on habitat for plants and animals in eastern Oregon. Water demands of the mines could also lead to diminished lake and groundwater levels, which could affect migratory birds that utilize the lakes as well as farmers and ranchers that depend on groundwater for irrigation.

The Oregon Natural Desert Association (ONDA) opposes the bill and argues: “The risk to years of conservation effort is not warranted when a major mining project such as that envisioned in SB 644 already has feasible pathways for reasonable and thoughtful permitting through existing law.”

ONDA argues the new process could become more complicated and less effective in minimizing the harm of mining. “Without appropriate safeguards the result is all-too-often the long-term degradation of the environment and impacts to human health, safety and well-being.”

For 21-year-old miner Chance Dewitt, new mines “would be good for eastern Oregon as far as there’s a lot of people and a lot of money in the industry.”

However, he does foresee some complications with bringing big mining to eastern Oregon. “I could see how it could not go over all that smooth at the bars,” Dewitt says.

SLANT

- **Val Hoyle**, our popular Lane County Democrat who was majority leader of the Oregon House, told *EW* this week that she is going to run for Oregon Labor Commissioner in May 2018. Current Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian told Hoyle he doesn’t plan on running again once this term ends. A non-partisan election, this one will be over if a candidate garners more than 50 percent of the vote; if not, there’s a runoff. It’s good to have Val back in the arena, and labor commissioner is a fine fit for her. Next question: Who else will be running?

- Last week an angry man **kicked in our employee door** after hours. One of the riders with Cascadian Courier Collective didn’t just stand idly by when he witnessed it. He chased after the suspect (we don’t necessarily recommend doing that, by the way), got a photo of the man, called the Eugene police and notified us. Thanks to him and the police and all the people who shared our post with the photo, the suspect was caught. Thank you everyone and thanks especially to those who are not just bystanders, but act when they see something.

- In Eugene, we’ve been **talking about the housing shortage**. In Springfield, we’re intrigued to see that the City Council has moved to waive system development fees for two years for those looking to build accessory or secondary dwelling units — what some call granny flats or mother-in-laws — to create affordable housing. See more info on our blog at eugeneweekly.com.



- **Sen. Ron Wyden** dropped by the *Eugene Weekly* office over the weekend, before heading over to Springfield for one of many, many town halls he’s held this rowdy political season. When we asked him about Trump’s future he stressed the word “if” when he told us “if” Trump gets through all this, he’ll definitely run for a second term. Russiagate piles higher and deeper, and meanwhile the Trump administration works to reverse all that’s been accomplished on climate change, health care and more.

- Good to see the petition to create an **independent performance auditor** for Eugene got approval from the city recorder’s office in time for petitioners to work the crowds outside the Oregon Country Fair last week. This initiative is important to the democratic process in Eugene. It would not change our form of government, but it would add a vital level of transparency and accountability, and likely save taxpayers many times the cost. Opponents are trying to confuse the issue with talk of compromises and alternatives, but it’s clear the best results come from *elected, not appointed* auditors. It will take a big group effort to gather the signatures to get this measure on the ballot next May, and the petitioners only have 100 days. For more information or to contact the chief petitioners, go to cityaccountability.org or call 541-520-9572.

- The City Club of Eugene’s July 7 **program on opioids** left us wondering what we can do to help reverse this epidemic that kills 91 Americans every day. One small suggestion: Take every painkiller left in your medicine cabinet from a tooth extraction or earlier medical episode to one of the nine drop boxes in Lane County. That will prevent someone else from getting into them. The local opioid problem was discussed by three impressive women at the City Club meeting: Dr. Elizabeth Maxwell from PreventionLane; Maureen Jenne from Emergence; and Judge Ilisa Rooke-Ley from Lane County’s drug court.

- Are you a **wine lover? A cannabis connoisseur?** Our beloved longtime wine writer Lance Sparks is retiring and we are looking for someone to fill his inestimable shoes. *Eugene Weekly* is also looking for a freelance weed columnist to write for us. Think you’ve got the skills (and the stomach for the letters to the editor)? Email editor@eugeneweekly.com for details.