



CELESTIAL EVENT OR COSMOLOGICAL DISASTER?

Oregon is in the path of the Aug. 21 total solar eclipse with Eugene just on the fringe of the area that will experience totality. If you live in Corvallis you can take off your solar shades once the eclipse is total, but in Eugene, though it will get darker, you will need to wear those special specs while staring at the sun.

The eclipse starts at 9:04 am in Eugene-Springfield, reaches its peak at 10:17 am and wraps up at 11:37 am, according to NASA. Most of Lane County sees about 99 percent of the sun blotted out. You need to travel north of Monroe on Highway 99 or to about Brownsville on I-5 to experience totality.

Travel. That's the problem. Oregon's Office of Emergency Management estimates 1 million eclipse visitors in its planning scenario. Oregon only has about 4 million residents. So the state's called in the National Guard, and the Oregon Department of Transportation and other state and local agencies are sending out warnings that sound like an impending natural disaster instead of celestial event: Stay put! Don't travel! Have a full gas tank! Carry water! This is either going to be an amazing event, an amazing disaster or another Y2K with much ado about nothing. Let's hope the National Weather Service doesn't start predicting another bout of 100-degree temps for that week.

On the positive side, President Donald Trump was born during a total lunar eclipse and many astrologers are predicting this total solar eclipse spells disaster for his presidency (as if it weren't a disaster already).

— Camilla Mortensen

AUDITOR DEBATE AT OUR REVOLUTION

First public debate on city auditor initiative leans toward petition

The first public debate on the proposal to establish an Office of Independent City Auditor did not go well for the opposition.

On July 29, the “trans-partisan” political group Our Revolution Lane County heard arguments from chief petitioner Bonny Bettman McCornack and opponent Chris Wig, and at the end of the debate voted 36-5 to endorse the measure. Our Revolution is a local chapter of a national group that arose from the 2016 Bernie Sanders presidential campaign.

Wig is chairman of the Democratic Party of Lane County, but represented himself as a “concerned citizen.” The DPLC has not yet taken a position on the proposal, which is now gathering signatures to go on the ballot next May.

Wig ran for Eugene City Council last year and says he supports independent auditing and may even end up campaigning for this measure. But he said he wants to hear first from a study group on the topic led by Mayor Lucy Vinis. “My concern at this juncture is that any endorsement for or against any specific proposal is premature,” he said. “I think this particular proposal has a lot of really good aspects in it, but it also raises some questions.”

He is concerned that no citizen review panel is required, the funding mechanism is “outside the normal budgeting process” and does not allow for flexibility, and the auditor’s subpoena power is “highly irregular.”

Auditors can use subpoenas to legally compel the release of information that is being withheld or delayed by agencies or officials.

He also voiced concern that the drafting of the measure was not done in public. “If key stakeholders and communities of interest had been involved, some of these concerns I have raised would have been addressed in the proposal and the proposal

would be better for it,” Wig said.

McCornack said her group considered adding a citizen review panel, but decided that peer review, stringent federal Government Auditing Standards and open public access to the auditor’s work would provide adequate feedback. She said nothing in the measure prohibits a citizen review panel, and some auditors may prefer to have them. The measure could also be amended later by another public vote.

McCornack, David Monk and former city councilor George Brown are chief petitioners in the effort to get an independent auditor; they have formed a group called City Accountability.

Regarding the fixed budget, McCornack said the auditor’s independence requires a predictable and adequate minimum budget not subject to the whims of changing administrations or councils, and the council can allocate extra funds for special projects.

The subpoena power may never be used, McCornack said. Retired Oregon state auditor Gary Blackmer told her, “Just knowing the auditor has it is enough to motivate cooperation.”

McCornack and others have pointed out that drafting this measure has been a public process in many ways. The City Council unanimously approved the idea of a performance auditor in 2002, but a series of city managers, mayors and conservative council members have kept it off the action agenda.

Blackmer has advocated for an independent auditor numerous times in public talks in Eugene, and the topic has been discussed in many candidate debates and in op-eds and letters to the editor of local newspapers. Blackmer helped draft the technical aspects of this measure based on his many years as a city, county and state auditor. ■



PHOTO: TED TAYLOR

IT'S ABOUT TIME

BY DAVID WAGNER



LEWIS MOCKORANGE
PHILADELPHUS LEWISII

August is a month of tension between the urge to backpack into the high Cascades and the density of mosquitoes near the best campsites around lakes or wet meadows. In most years, the fierceness of mosquito attacks tends to diminish toward the end of August. Mosquitoes proliferate rapidly in snowmelt ponds. The sooner the snow disappears, the sooner mosquito-breeding season diminishes. Our dramatic recovery from recent years of drought and low snow pack was predicted to stimulate a massive resurgence of mosquitoes this summer. Reports from friends confirm this prediction is valid in the western Cascades. It may well take fall's return of freezing nights to make for truly mosquito-free hiking.

Following an especially wet and cold spring, July was hotter than normal with practically no

rainfall. Blackberries, raspberries, thimbleberries and others in the same family are maturing sooner. The invasive and prolific Armenian blackberry is already bearing fruit in many locations, suggesting the peak will come before my birthday. Commercial berries are also peaking early. Food preservers need to take note! We like to put up a year's supply of marionberries, blackberries and blueberries by freezing many pint bags.

Pressure on conservationists continues to be intense. The irrational policy changes generated by our lunatic president demand nature lovers pay attention to attacks on wildland preserves of all kinds. It is difficult to know where to apply maximum pressure. Opportunities for future generations to enjoy at least small fragments of natural environment depend on contemporary activists.