

ENVIRONMENTAL SHINDIG AT THE UO

The annual PIELC conference addresses green topics

Every year, as spring returns to Oregon, so do hordes of environmentalists and lawyers. This is the 36th year of the Public Interest Environmental Law Conference (PIELC), and as always the community is invited to come hear the plethora of green talks at the University of Oregon March 1-4.

According to Thomas Boone, one of this year's PIELC organizers, the conference features 120 panels and five keynote speakers. Boone says PIELC's variety of panels on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is particularly pertinent in an era in which the Trump administration is attempting to dismantle environmental reforms.

Also up against the Trump administration is *Juliana v. U.S.*, the much-publicized lawsuit by 21 youth plaintiffs against the U.S. government on the issue of climate change. The Juliana in question is South Eugene High grad Kelsey Juliana.

Julia Olson, executive director of Our Children's Trust, the nonprofit behind the lawsuit, gives a keynote speech 5:30 pm Friday, March 2.

Local attendees will be reminded of the fires that blanketed Lane County this past summer at panels such as Saturday's "Using Fires as an Excuse to Clearcut: Fire Ecology and Federal Forest Policy" and "Wildland Fire in Oregon: Which Way Forward?" also on Saturday.

Parker Brigance, a fellow member of the PIELC organizing team, points to the 6 pm Thursday, March 1, keynote speech by Richard W. Spinrad as relevant in light of Trump's moves to open U.S. waters up for offshore drilling. Spinrad is a professor of oceanography at Oregon State University and retired chief scientist of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Other panel topics include films such as *WALL-E* and *The Hunger Games* in an environmental context, beavers, fracking, coal, dams, wolves and more. PIELC also plays host to an extensive array of groups and causes who will be tabling at the UO School of Law over the course of the weekend. The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement is a perennial favorite.

Boone says the conference made an effort to elevate the voices of those who ordinarily go unheard, acknowledging that the environmental movement is "really white and male." And, he says, the keynote speakers are those who serve the public, "not the big elites, but people who see what the grassroots are putting out there." ■

PIELC is Thursday afternoon, March 1, through Sunday, March 4, at the University of Oregon School of Law. For more information and a panel brochure go to pielc.org. FREE.

IT'S ABOUT TIME
BY DAVID WAGNER

Almost thirty years ago a new, annual species of geranium showed up at the Mount Pisgah Arboretum wildflower show. It is known as shining geranium or *Geranium lucidum*. It spread rapidly through the woodlands of Mount Pisgah. Within 10 years it became the dominant understory herb. It is now almost everywhere in western Oregon.

Considerable effort is devoted to combatting species that disrupt native ecosystems. English ivy was originally widely planted, but now it is illegal to plant because it has proven to be fiercely invasive. With the shining geranium, however, there was never a chance to keep it at bay. It spread so rapidly that we now have to accept it as being here to stay.

Many weedy species came with the arrival of Europeans in North America. To the original natives of the continent, Europeans brought with them an invasive culture and invasive plant species. We prefer to call the human invaders settlers, pioneers or migrants, so why not the plants? Their arrival was not by choice but they migrated thanks to opportunities given by some agent like wind or animals. Successful spread is what makes them "invasive."

We cannot always determine if a new arrival is a natural, opportunistic migrant or a human-mediated invasive. But when something like shining geranium arrives, it doesn't matter whether you call it a recent migrant or an invasive. Its presence must be simply accepted. It seems to me that those who are now called "illegal immigrants" deserve similar acceptance.

David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. He can be contacted through his website, fernzenmosses.com.



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