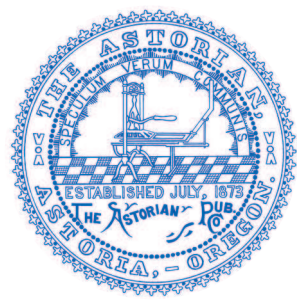


THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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OUR VIEW

County, others should opt out of timber lawsuit

Clatsop County commissioners face a tough, potentially divisive meeting Wednesday when they are scheduled to decide whether to stay in or exit a \$1.4 billion class-action timber-management lawsuit against the state.

A state judge gave the lawsuit, initiated by Linn County, class-action status in September, automatically adding 14 counties, including Clatsop, and 130 other taxing entities to the case. Each has until Jan. 25 to decide whether to opt out.

Paid for by timber industry groups and private companies, the lawsuit contends the counties turned over ownership of more than 640,000 acres of forestland to the state decades ago with an expectation the state would maximize timber revenues.

The contentions

The suit contends that in the late 1990s the state changed forest-management practices by placing greater emphasis on environmental, conservation and recreational values.

As a result, the lawsuit asserts, the state breached its contract with the counties because there has been insufficient logging that has collectively cost the counties \$1.4 billion in past and future damages.

At the heart of the case is wording within the state's timber-management rules to provide the "greatest permanent value" in its practices, and how those rules — in place for decades — should be interpreted. The state's attorneys say timber interests funding the lawsuit want the rules changed to emphasize timber harvest over other values.

The county's decision will have lasting impacts. Monetary damages could be a boon to regional budgets.

Opting out

But for a variety of reasons, we believe the best course for the county and other entities is to opt out.

Clatsop County currently has 147,000 acres of state forestland. That is about 23 percent of the acreage in the lawsuit. Harvesting in our county generates about \$15 million a year, disbursed regionally. State statistics for Clatsop County show annual harvesting between 1990 and 1998 averaged 32.8 million board feet. After the state's rules changed in the late 1990s, it increased to an average of 74.9 million board feet between 1999 and 2014. At the same time, timber payments nearly doubled — from an average of \$8 million to an average of \$15.2 million. Those same trends hold true for the state as a whole.

It's important to note that the period in which harvesting and payments increased included the Great Recession when the housing boom went bust. So clearly the state's forest-management practices haven't hurt the region, although the plaintiffs assert the returns should have been much greater.

Commissioners should consider that while a potential \$262 million regional payday could be at stake by opting out, much of the suit is pegged on future damages, and there's no certainty an award will be anywhere near that level. And 15 percent of any award will go to the private attorneys handling the case for Linn County, not to the taxpayers.

The lawsuit is also likely to be tied up in court for an extended period, especially with potential appeals. It conceivably could disrupt the current revenue stream from the state.

Who pays?

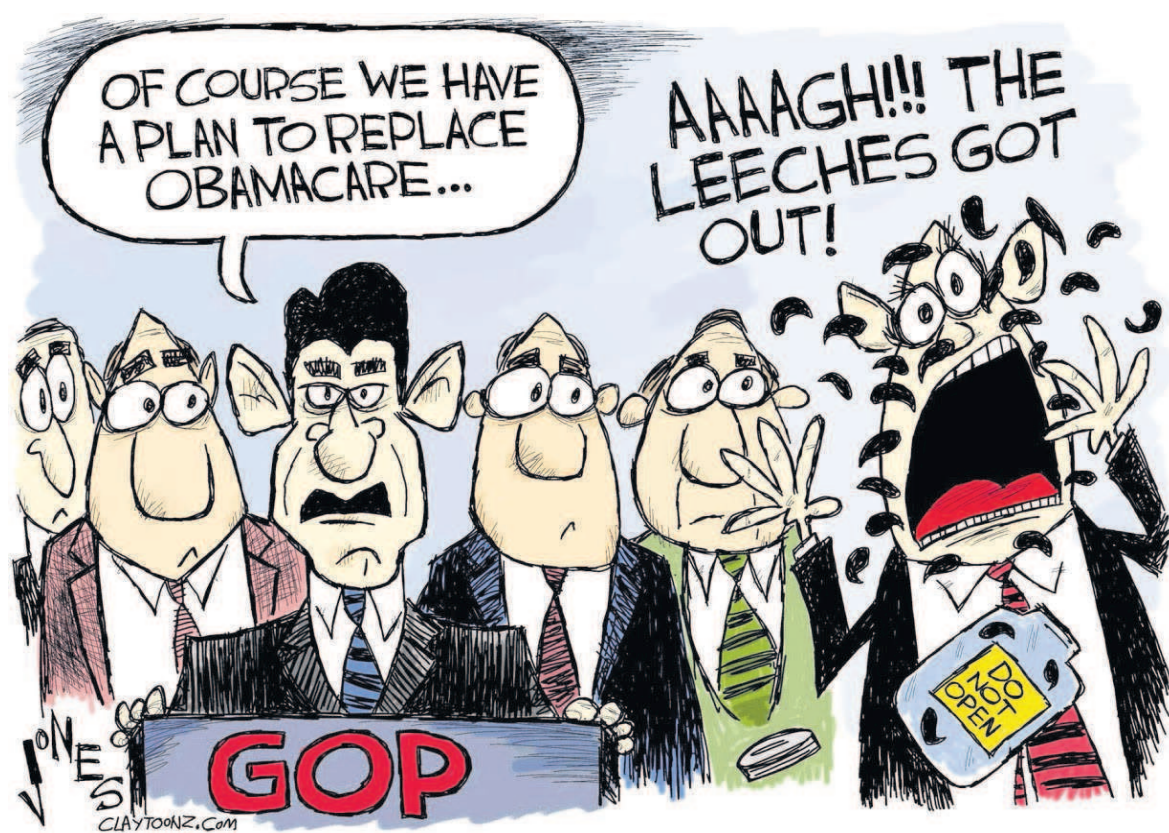
Importantly, if the counties win, it would likely give taxpayers the burden of footing at least a portion of the state's bill for financial damages, which will diminish any windfall the taxing entities expect to receive.

And while many say it's important to have a seat at the table, Linn County, with little comparatively at stake, is the primary plaintiff, not Clatsop. But our county is one of the biggest dogs in the fight. Opting out doesn't preclude our county from filing a lawsuit on its own at some future point.

In 2015, the county adopted an initiative called Vision 2030 Together, a plan designed to guide public policy decision-making into 2030. The plan contains these points: "Our natural environment is a key contributor to our quality of life. ... Our forestlands are sustainably managed, with portions permanently protected for their inherent natural value."

State forests are a public asset, and while a breach of contract and financial damages are the base of the case, it's public policy that would change through any outcome that could increase harvesting and allow private interests to run the show. That could result in less accountability and less attention to environmental and recreational values.

The place to change that policy — or to make it more clear — is in the Legislature, not the courts and not at the expense of the taxpayers. The county and other taxing entities should steer clear of the case.



Wellville climbs toward lofty goals

Way to Wellville after two years

By SUSAN CODY
 For The Daily Astorian

Envision a place where all kids have high-quality education, where their social and emotional needs are met, where they have access to healthy food and medical care. What if there were a way to improve the 70 percent graduation rate in Clatsop County? What if obesity, drug use, alcoholism and crime could be reduced?

Those are lofty goals that are built on ideas identified by participants at community forums when Clatsop County was chosen as one of The Way to Wellville communities.

A community forum will offer updates on Way to Wellville initiatives Wednesday, Jan. 11. Speakers include Way to Wellville founder Esther Dyson and Clatsop County Strategic Council members Dan Gaffney, Debbie Morrow, Stacey Brown, Paulette McCoy and Jeanette Schacher.

The event is free and open to the public, 6:30 to 8 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Express, 204 W. Marine Drive in Astoria.

Clatsop County is one of only five Way to Wellville communities nationwide chosen to improve health by investing in wellness and disease prevention rather than spending endless dollars on chronic health care. Two years into the five-year program, infrastructure and a business plan are nearly completed and many initiatives have been launched.

"The Way to Wellville continues to gain momentum through stronger collaboration across the county's government, non-profit and business sectors," says Marya Stark, a national Wellville team member who is the navigator for the local Strategic Council. "We're nearing completion of a plan to create a trauma informed community."

The latest result of collaboration is a \$350,000 grant to Clatsop County from the U.S. Department of Education to identify the needs and assess the feasibility of universal preschool. Way to Wellville Strategic Council members worked many hours with the county and other partners to craft the grant application.

"In 2017, we will begin building our business plan for universal preschool," Stark says, as part of an international movement to publicly fund quality preschool for all families.

What is Wellville?

Instead of investing in health care, investor Esther Dyson offered a challenge to communities to work together to create a healthier environment. The Way to Wellville prompts communities to combine their resources, cooperate and invest in healthy living. The Wellville 5, all communities of fewer than 100,000 people, make a five-year commitment to create strategies to improve health locally, and ultimately attract investment.

"The whole point of The Way to Wellville is to help communities apply well-known techniques in sustained initiatives that are accountable, measurable and ultimately fundable," Dyson says.

The Way to Wellville in Clatsop County is sponsored by the Columbia Pacific Coordinated Care Orga-



Susan Cody/For The Daily Astorian
 Students at Warrenton Grade School practice yoga as part of the Clatsop Kids Go program sponsored by The Way to Wellville. The instructor is Sarah Brown, right.

The Way to Wellville
 five places. five metrics. five years.

ONLINE

For more information visit WayToWellville.net or the Facebook page Way to Wellville Clatsop County. The James Heckman study is The Lifecycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program. A related article can be found at <http://bit.ly/W2Wheckman2>

nization and has technical support from CareOregon, two local health care nonprofits.

Clatsop County's Way to Wellville Strategic Council, composed of county employees, health care professionals, educators business and recreational leaders, uses a multi-pronged approach to address issues arising in four focus areas: Community Wellness, Emotional Health, Health Care Access and Financial Opportunity.

Early childhood ed

The council decided it could make the biggest impact in early childhood education. That turns out to have been a good call.

A study released in December shows early childhood education returns 13 percent per child in cost benefits through better earning power, less crime, improved social behavior and reduced need for special education and health expenditures. The study was based on children who entered preschool at age 3 or 4, and were followed until about age 35.

One of the authors, Nobel Prize winner and economics professor James J. Heckman says, "Investing in the continuum of learning from birth to age 5 not only impacts each child, but it also strengthens our country's workforce today and prepares future generations to be competitive in the global economy tomorrow."

Projects

Working with community partners and about \$90,000 in grants, the local Way to Wellville has created programs that focus on childhood health and development, and healthy activities for adults.

Rx 4 Play: Designed to increase physical activity for residents at risk for obesity and other health problems, physicians and other providers prescribe play for their patients. Incentives include park and recreation passes and free parking at state and national parks. Local providers have written 3,000 prescriptions.

2,000 Mile Challenge: Team-

ing with the National Park Service, more than 400 people logged 73,000 miles during the one-year challenge.

Early Childhood Clinic: Children were assessed for hearing, physical, visual, development, speech and nutritional benchmarks, while parents were interviewed and offered support materials.

Passport for Wellness or Clatsop Kids Go: This program for Clatsop County third-, fourth- and fifth-graders is designed to reduce and prevent obesity. The goal is to create a culture of positive attitudes, knowledge and behaviors around nutrition, physical activity and emotional well-being.

Paper Tigers: "Paper Tigers" is a film of hope, possibilities and courage. It features the Walla Walla, Wash., community and Lincoln High School, an alternative school that specializes in educating traumatized youth. It gives an intimate look at their challenges and shows how changing the approach to problems has a dramatic effect on success. A showing at the Liberty Theater attracted 300 people.

Pocket Full of Feelings: This educational kit is designed to teach children from pre-kindergartners to teenagers how to deal with their feelings and change their behavior. Tools include interactive cards, coloring books, workbooks, teachers' tools and more to help raise emotional intelligence for academic success.

Tall Cop Says Stop: Two community education forums addressed drug and alcohol abuse and how to recognize paraphernalia.

FamilyWise: The Way to Wellville and United Way of Clatsop County partnered to bring free FamilyWise prescription savings cards to the community. The community has saved more than \$6,000 in medical prescription costs.

Susan Cody is the communications lead for the Clatsop County Way to Wellville. She is also a former deputy managing editor for The Daily Astorian.