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ONE DOLLAR

Clatsop County opts out of timber suit

Commissioners heard 'overwhelming message' from public

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A \$1.4 billion lawsuit pitting Oregon timber counties against the state will no longer include Clatsop County. The Clatsop County Board of

Commissioners voted 3-2 Wednesday night to opt out of the class-action suit that included 15 counties throughout Oregon. The suit claims the state Department of Forestry has not maximized revenue from timber harvests on land the counties turned over

to the state to manage.

Hundreds of people, both in person and in writing, have offered opinions to the county since it was included in the suit filed by Linn County last year. Out of the 19 people who spoke during the comment session Wednesday

night, 11 voiced their support for opting out.

"The overwhelming message from public testimony has been in favor of balanced forest management and against the Linn County lawsuit," Scott Lee, the board's chairman, said.

Commissioners Sarah Nebeker and Kathleen Sullivan joined Lee in voting to opt out of the lawsuit. One

of the most common issues both commissioners and opponents of the suit raised was that, should the state lose in court, county residents could be affected by higher state taxes.

The fear of higher taxes stems from how the state could pay the counties back for the lost timber revenue.

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WINTER'S ICY WONDERLAND



Photos by Susan Rhoads/For The Daily Astorian

Ryan Carpenter explores the frozen plant life with his grandmother, Susan Rhoads, at Youngs River Falls Saturday.

A trek to Youngs River Falls finds frozen delights

The Daily Astorian

Astorian Susan Rhoads and grandson Ryan Carpenter decided to go to Youngs River Falls Saturday after seeing pictures of the frozen plants. This is what they found. ¶ After Wednesday's snow, today will be cold and sunny. Rain is predicted to start up again Monday. ¶ Brent Gilland, the fueler at the Astoria Regional Airport, estimated the airport received between a quarter and a half-inch of snow on Wednesday.



Ice surrounds the plant life at Youngs River Falls Saturday.



Plants at Youngs River Falls were mostly encased in ice.

Two pitches take aim at PERS liabilities

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE
Capital Bureau

SALEM — As lawmakers head into the 2017 legislative session, at least two proposed bills plan to address oft-tread territory: the state's pension system.

In 2013, the Legislature approved a slew of changes to the system, referred to as PERS, only to have many of them rejected by the Oregon Supreme Court in 2015.

This time around, those legislators who have called for reforms to PERS — including members of an informal work group — say the Legislature needs to address the system's \$22 billion unfunded liability while meeting legal requirements.

Two proposals that have emerged thus far have co-opted some ideas floated at that work group, which is led by Sens. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, and Tim Knopp, R-Bend.

SB 559 would increase the number of years used in calculating final average salary of public employees to prevent end-of-career spikes; and SB 560 would redirect employee contributions from an individual account program to the pension fund and cap the final salary used in the benefits calculation at \$100,000 starting Jan. 1, 2018.

Both bills' chief sponsors are Knopp and Sen. Jeff Kruse, R-Roseburg, who said that the two bills might not be the only proposals to expect from Senate Republicans this session.

"We're still kind of dancing around a few things," Kruse said Wednesday.

Tier 1

Currently, PERS beneficiaries who were hired prior to Jan. 1, 1996 — known as Tier 1 employees — are promised an assumed 7.5 percent rate of return on investment, credited to their regular accounts every year.

Kruse said changing that 7.5 percent rate, which the market has failed to match, could be legally permissible but that it and other ideas were still being vetted.

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Betsy Johnson



Tim Knopp

Former fire chief gets \$55,000 in settlement

Balzer was fired for 'poor leadership'

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — Former Cannon Beach Fire Chief Mike Balzer will receive a one-time payout of \$55,000 from the Cannon Beach Rural Fire Protection District and the district's board of directors.

Details of the settlement, prepared by attorneys for Balzer, the fire district and the board of directors, were

released Wednesday.

According to the agreement, Balzer will not receive attorneys' fees or any additional compensation from the fire district. Balzer agrees he will not apply or accept employment from the fire department again, and agrees not to pursue future litigation against the fire district or board of directors.

The settlement was dated Dec. 13. Balzer's civil rights lawsuit against the fire district was dismissed by U.S. Magistrate Judge Paul Papak in Portland on Jan. 4.

"My only comment would be to express that the settlement is not an admission of fault to

either side, but more a business decision based on the costs of litigation moving forward, not just for the district but for Mr. Balzer, as well," said Ron Downs, an attorney with the Special Districts Association of Oregon who represented the fire district and members of the board of directors.

Earlier this week, Balzer's attorney Judy Snyder said the former chief was "pleased with the resolution."

"He's pleased he's engaged in this process and that it resulted in a satisfactory outcome for him," Snyder said.



EO Media Group/File Photo

Mike Balzer, center, served as fire chief from 2012 to October 2015. His lawsuit was dismissed earlier this month.

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