

Oregon receives grant for endangered species study

By TOM JAMES
Associated Press

Federal and state funds totaling \$1 million have been set aside to study a new endangered species protection plan in Oregon forests, a decade after a similar effort stalled amid controversy.

The money is earmarked to pay for the first step in laying out new rules for protecting endangered species in 630,000 acres of state-owned forest land west of the Cascades, including large tracts on the state's northern coast.

The plan would consider species including the spotted owl and marbled murrelet, and set guidelines for timber harvesting and recreational use. Officials hope the study phase will take about a year, followed by a year to craft the

rules themselves, and a final year of review, said Cindy Kolomechuk, leader of the project at the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Formally called Habitat Conservation Plans, the plans facilitate logging on lands where threatened species are found, essentially authorizing negative impacts in exchange for enhancing other protections.

Previous efforts have sparked controversy in the state. A plan laying out protections in the Elliot State Forest, in southwestern Oregon, became mired after disagreement over marbled murrelet rules. And an attempt to create a broader plan ended in 2008 without guidelines being adopted, amid controversy over balancing protections against

logging revenues.

The conflicts reflect deeper tensions in the state, where businesses with ties to an historic logging industry have found themselves pitted against environmental groups.

Preservation efforts potentially have a new dimension amid a national focus on climate change, said Bob Van Dyk, of the Wild Salmon Center, a Portland conservation group.

"These are soggy, long-lived forests," Van Dyk said. "They sequester enormous amounts of carbon."

The forestry department announced the funding for the study Monday.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contributed \$750,000 with the remainder coming from the state.

Astoria mulls phone service fee

The Daily Astorian

The Astoria City Council is considering an ordinance that may trigger an increase in what people pay for phone services through Charter Communications.

The council held a first reading of an ordinance to levy a 7 percent telecommunications service tax on Charter Monday night. The fee would be passed on to Charter's customers and could have a negative impact, said a representative for the company.

Robin Smith, senior manager of government affairs with Charter, estimated that with the addition of the new fee the average customer would be paying \$11 every month in city-imposed taxes. The company already pays a 5 percent franchise fee to provide cable TV services along city rights of way.

Smith also argued that the city's ordinance is vague and could be seen to apply

to internet services, not just phone services. The company believes such an ordinance would be unlawful, and they plan to submit their legal position to the city for review if the ordinance moves forward, she said.

City Councilor Cindy Price said she felt "squeamish about imposing a 7 percent tax on a majority of Astorians," and asked City Attorney Blair Henningsgaard why they city needed such a fee.

Henningsgaard said a telecommunications tax is not unique to Astoria and is utilized by other cities in Oregon. The idea behind it is to equalize the playing field between telecommunication providers, he said. Astoria Finance Director Susan Brooks had asked him why Astoria does not impose this tax when so many other cities do.

The City Council also conducted the first reading of a new 10-year franchise

ordinance, an agreement with Charter for cable TV services. The company has not signed off on the new agreement yet, and is still seeking protections and provisions they say would help it stay competitive if other, similar companies set up shop in the area. Henningsgaard noted the city doesn't provide these types of provisions in other franchise agreements.

The city maintains six franchise agreements — with Pacific Power, Qwest, Coast Com, Lightspeed Networks, Northwest Natural and Charter — for telephone, internet, cable TV, gas and electricity services. The agreements allow the companies to use city rights of way to provide services.

The city has been negotiating a new franchise agreement with Charter since the last agreement expired in 2011. Charter operates for now under an extension of the older agreement.

Primary: Republican candidates divided on social issues

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Q: Do you support a constitutional change clarifying that passing fees and eliminating tax deductions and exemptions requires a three-fifths majority vote in the Legislature? Why or why not?

Buehler: Yes, the Oregon Constitution is clear: fees and taxes are revenue despite what Kate Brown and Salem Democrats want you to think. I've opposed \$14 billion in new taxes and fees the governor has supported. I'll balance the budget without increasing taxes and repeal the \$1 billion tax on small businesses.

Carpenter: Yes. We have this requirement for "tax increases." Anything that takes more money from the people should fall into this same category.

Wooldridge: The Constitution is clear that raising taxes required a supermajority vote, and Democrats have circumvented this by claiming bills don't raise taxes, when, in fact, they do. We have a tax and spending problem in Salem that must be stopped.

Q: Should all abortions be legal? Why or why not? If only certain abortions should be legal, which kinds should be allowed?

Buehler: The issue of abortion is between a woman and a doctor — not government and politicians — and it should be safe, legal and rare. That's why I wrote and successfully passed first-in-the-nation legislation providing women in Oregon access to over-the-counter contraception without a prescription. This has significantly reduced unintended pregnancies.

Carpenter: No. Abortion ends a human life, and all humans deserve equal protection of law. Abortion should only be allowed for the health of the mother or in cases of rape or incest — and even then, adoption should be the first option.

Wooldridge: I am pro-life. Period. Gov. Kate Brown's extreme position that late-term and gender-based abortions must be provided by taxpayers is wrong. We need to have a conversation about putting limits on these types of abortions,

and I'm confident that the majority of Oregonians agree.

Q: What is your opinion on man-made climate change? Is it real? On what evidence is your opinion based?

Buehler: I believe climate change is real, and human activity is part of the problem. As governor, I'll drive us toward a balanced approach that transitions us to renewable sources without excessive, heavy-handed regulation that rewards cronyism, costs small businesses jobs and drives up the cost of living for hardworking Oregonians.

Carpenter: The climate is always changing. Is it caused by man? There is insufficient data, and regardless, we must balance the very real economic impact against hypothetical environmental impact.

Wooldridge: Climate change is happening, but the Democrats have exploited natural climate change to punish businesses and raise taxes on workers and everyday Oregonians. We can protect our environment through well-thought-out public policy and by addressing our forest management and wildfire mitigation practices.

Q: How would you propose reducing gun violence in the state?

Buehler: Better suicide-prevention measures and mental health support could dramatically reduce gun violence, which is why I introduced legislation to supply vital information to every gun buyer at time of purchase. I also voted to close the "boyfriend loophole" to expand protection for survivors of domestic violence from convicted abusers.

Carpenter: The problem isn't "gun" violence. The problem is simply violence, and the solution is to change society from the current culture of violence, stemming from the lost respect for human life. This will take a generation, but it must begin now.

Wooldridge: We need to better protect our schools and families and increase security measures that do not violate the Second Amendment, and we must address our state's lack of mental health care services.

Q: Given the Supreme Court's limitations on reform

of the Public Employees Retirement System, what specific proposal would you advance to avoid increasing the state's unfunded liability?

Buehler: As governor, I won't sign a single new spending bill until the Legislature passes meaningful, substantive PERS reform. To start, I'd cap the benefits at \$150,000 per year, require public employees to contribute to their retirement and transition employees into a more traditional 401(k)-type plan while protecting current retiree benefits.

Carpenter: First thing is to convert all new hires to a 401(k) defined-contribution retirement plan to halt increasing the debt and obligation. With this done, shoring up the existing liability can be achieved. A booming economy from lowered taxes and decreased taxation will bring new revenue to keep Oregon solvent.

Wooldridge: I would move our state's taxpayer-subsidized benefits to a private-sector style 401(k) style benefit. The state would match the contributions made to employee retirement plans, and workers would rest assured their retirements were safe; right now, they're in jeopardy because of a lack of political will.

Q: What is the most important issue facing the state, and how would you begin to address it?

Buehler: It's clear that Ore-

gon has suffered from a terrible lack of leadership for too long. Our high school graduation rates put our children's futures at risk, the skyrocketing cost of housing threatens our communities, and our health care and pension systems are financially unstable. I'll lead where Kate Brown has failed.

Carpenter: Everything —

from PERS to forests to homelessness to schools — stems from 32 years of radical progressive far-left leadership failing Oregon. We address it all by rejecting leftist ideology and implementing a conservative agenda as a chief executive officer. Oregon needs a leader, not another failed bureaucrat in charge.

Wooldridge: We must address the culture that has normalized mediocrity. True leadership does not turn a blind eye to reality. I will lead by setting crystal-clear expectations that will inspire others to achieve extraordinary results. There are many great people in Salem who need a leader in whom they can trust.

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