

# Lee: 'I didn't go out and start any of the struggles'

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that the county is in good shape, we're working on providing services."

Lee, a progressive and environmentalist, pointed to major environmental decisions as some of his most memorable moments. Top of mind for him are choices to reject a liquefied natural gas pipeline and terminal in Warrenton and to withdraw from a class-action timber lawsuit against the state.

"The LNG controversy really brought the community together," Lee said. "I think protecting the diverse value of our forests was a really important position we made."

County Manager Cameron Moore has been with the county since 2016 and is retiring in January. Moore said he tends not to focus on the past and did not offer many reflections on his tenure.

"That's sort of not the way I approach my thought process," Moore said. "It's just more my philosophy. You just have to go in and earn it."

But he did speak a little bit about his time working with Lee. Moore and Lee would meet ahead of county commission meetings to review agendas.

"I think it was fairly easy to work with Scott because I respected his position as chair and he respected my position as county manager, and that allowed us to have a positive working relationship," Moore said.



Commissioner Sarah Nebeker, left, recognizes Scott Lee for his service as chairman of the Clatsop County commission at a meeting in December.

## 'Don't go looking for a fight'

Lee's relationships with other county commissioners were not always positive. He did not shy away from fights, but the chairman insists he never picked them.

"My philosophy is, 'Don't go looking for a fight. Wait until it comes to you,'" Lee said. "I didn't go out and start any of the struggles I dealt with in my time on the board."

One of the most notable strains was between Lee and Commissioner Lianne

Thompson. Since she was elected in 2014, Lee has criticized her on multiple fronts, and the arguments have often boiled over at commission meetings.

"The only comment I have is that his record speaks for itself," Thompson said.

Lee put the sticking points with Thompson and others into a historical perspective. While recent interactions have been stressful, problems on the commission in the 2000s — including several recalls — were far more damaging, Lee said.

"I think the issues I've had to confront don't come close to what happened in the 2000s. It was a disaster," Lee said. "There are still echoes of that era, but I don't think what I've dealt with rose to that level."

Both Lee and Moore emphasized that commissioners should adhere to the county charter to avoid future friction. The charter delegates the responsibility for carrying out board policies and hiring and firing employees to the county manager.

Heated discussions have

taken place about what that means, including whether commissioners have the right to sit in on interviews during the hiring process for department directors. Moore and Lee have said the charter, which voters approved, removes commissioners from any role in day-to-day county operations.

"I think one of the most important things commissioners can do is follow the rule and the letter of the home rule charter," Lee said. "Every time a commissioner has gone astray, it's because peo-

ple haven't followed that."

## 'Obvious choice'

Commissioner Sarah Nebeker — the board's vice chairwoman, who has served since 2013 — incoming Commissioner Mark Kujala — a former Warrenton mayor — and Thompson have all expressed interest in replacing Lee as chair.

Lee, who has served as chairman for the past five years, has endorsed Nebeker.

"She'd be the obvious choice based on experience and skills leading the board," Lee said. "I think she has a great personality to lead the board."

The new chair will lead the commission's search for a new county manager. Monica Steele, the county's budget and finance director, as well as the interim county manager, has said she would likely apply.

Moore had had discussions with Steele about the job for more than two years.

"I think if she decided she wanted to apply, given my opportunity to work closely with her in my time here, she is certainly someone I support based on what I know about her and her ability," Moore said.

Lee, who owns Bikes and Beyond in Astoria, said he will remain involved in local politics. He will volunteer with a local environmental group, but is waiting to show his hand until the new commission is in place.

"You never know where I'll pop up," Lee said. "You never know which next fight is going to come that I'm not going to invite."

# Wildfires: Cost of fighting wildfires estimated to be about \$500M this year

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Forest practices likely won't be part of council's review, but could become a consideration.

Brown also wants the state to hire a consultant to analyze budgeting for fires. Oregon's byzantine array of reimbursements, borrowing and insurance burdens the state's general fund.

## Expensive to fight

From 2008 to 2012, annual fire costs in the state hovered at \$20 million or less, according to state data.

Costs spiked to \$122 million in 2013, as fires in the Rogue Valley persisted. While expenses haven't reached that point again, they continue to stay above pre-2012 levels.

The Department of Forestry had to bump up its borrowing from the state treasury to pay this year's bills while waiting for the federal money.

"Payments to contractors and vendors must be made by on a timely basis,"

state analysts wrote in a recent report on the fire season. "Many people and businesses assisting with fighting large fires are self-employed or own small businesses and cannot wait to be paid until the department receives reimbursements."

And fire-induced cash flow issues aren't limited to the Department of Forestry. The Oregon State Police feels the impact too.

The state fire marshal's office, part of the state police, incurred about \$32 million in unbudgeted expenses in 2017 and 2018 due to wildfires, according to legislative documents.

When fires threaten people and homes, the governor can call on the fire marshal to dispatch local firefighters to action and cover their costs. This year, about 1,000 firefighters protected 7,600 homes that were threatened by fires.

The federal government will cover about two-thirds of those costs, but not before next summer, when the state's two-year budget ends.

The cost of fighting all wildfires, including federally-managed fires, is estimated to be about \$500 million this year.

The Legislature has appropriated about \$3 million to help with projects on federal lands in Oregon. These include thinning and other measures that could reduce the risk of fires.

Travel Oregon, which promotes tourism, said in August that the state lost an estimated \$51 million in tourism due to fires last year.

## Fire danger

Fires are worsening in the West — a combination of decades of postwar forest management policy and conditions exacerbated by climate change — and came into the spotlight last month as California dealt with the deadly Camp Fire, which resulted in at least 85 deaths.

"Forest management practices are at the center of all of our thoughts right now," said state Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, during a recent legislative hearing to

vet the Department of Forestry's request for funds to pay for the fire season.

Meanwhile, the land use group 1000 Friends of Oregon released a report this month calling for the state to map wildfire risk across the state and avoid development in high-risk areas.

In 2015, about 107,000 homes were at high risk of being damaged by wildfires, according to a report that year from the Union of Concerned Scientists. More development in wildfire-prone areas means the risk of fire damage grows.

"Federal, state, local budgets have been woefully inadequate to cover firefighting costs, not to mention the costs of lost lives, homes and businesses," Russ Hoeflich, the executive director of 1000 Friends of Oregon, said in a prepared statement. "We hope to see that change in 2019."

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# Wauna: 'By banking them, we legitimize these businesses'

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the time of a memorandum by then-Deputy Attorney General James M. Cole directing federal resources away from legal state cannabis programs. Nine states and the District of Columbia have legalized recreational marijuana for people 21 and older. Medical marijuana is legal in 30 states.

Wauna is required to have an exit strategy in which it would liquidate assets in the Cannabis Business Solutions program if mandated to do so, Smiley said.

Marijuana banking slipped nationwide in the first couple of months after then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded the Cole memo in January, according to a report

by Forbes, but has kept growing since clarification that the guidelines are still in place. More than 400 financial institutions nationwide take marijuana accounts.

"We felt with the Cole memo and the FinCEN guidelines ... we're not breaking the law," Blumberg said.

Wauna hired two staffers to monitor the transactions of marijuana businesses, inspect properties and review permits. That helps the state ensure transactions from seed to sale are legal, Blumberg said.

"They have all this cash they don't know what to do with, so they operate under the radar," Blumberg said. "By banking them, we legitimize these businesses," Blumberg said.

Jesus is the Reason  
for the Season