



A map of the proposed state boundary change to create ‘Greater Idaho.’

Group seeks to merge part of state with Idaho

Movement to retain rural values

By **EMILY CURETON**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Some rural Oregonians are so frustrated by Democratic politics they want to leave the state.

But not by moving elsewhere.

Instead, a group is seeking to change the map itself so that most of Oregon and a chunk of Northern California would break off and join Idaho, a Republican-majority state. The group, Move Oregon’s Border For a Greater Idaho, succeeded in getting petitions approved for circulation in two rural Oregon counties this month.

The effort is only the latest separatist cause in Pacific Northwest history to spark popular interest, despite being practically infeasible for a long list of legal, political and economic reasons.

“It’s a movement to try to maintain our rural values,” said spokesman Mike McCarter, a 73-year-old retired plant nursery worker and firearms instructor from La Pine (population 1,900) in central Oregon.

More than half of all Oregonians live in the Portland metro area. McCarter said policy set by a predominantly urban, Democratic supermajority in the state Legislature is fomenting frustration in the conservative, rural areas of the state.

“We’re afraid of what’s coming down legislatively. It’ll destroy rural Oregon ... I grew up in the ’50s and ’60s, and it was a great time. It was a blue-collar state, a state of hardworking people,” he said.

The messaging hits cultural flash points. Idaho has more permissive gun laws and more restrictions on abortion. The state doesn’t allow sanctuary cities, nor does it issue driver’s licenses to “illegal aliens,” to quote from the group’s literature.

National media coverage exploded on social media last week after officials in Douglas and Josephine counties approved language for petitions that, if enough people sign, would create ballot measures to move Oregon’s borders.

But even a widespread yes vote by all the rural counties in an election wouldn’t change state boundaries. That would require agreement from three state legisla-



La Pine resident Mike McCarter, who is part of the group Move Oregon’s Border for a Greater Idaho, said rural counties are ‘outraged by liberal policies from the Oregon Legislature that threaten their livelihoods, industries and values.’

tures and Congress. The ballot measures merely direct individual county commissions to become advocates for the cause.

“One of the ways maybe to see this moment is as a form of political protest and political theater,” said Joe Lowndes, an associate professor at the University of Oregon specializing in populist movements.

‘WE’RE AFRAID OF WHAT’S COMING DOWN LEGISLATIVELY. IT’LL DESTROY RURAL OREGON.’

Mike McCarter | part of the Move Oregon’s Border for a Greater Idaho group

Rallying people around state lines and secessionist causes has a rich history in the Pacific Northwest. In 1941, ranchers, miners and loggers on the California-Oregon border staged a rebellion and proclaimed themselves citizens of a new state, the State of Jefferson. Those symbols continue to adorn flags, T-shirts and protests, turning up at a #TimberUnity rally against cap-and-trade legislation this month in Salem.

There is also the Cascadia Independence movement, which seeks to erase state lines and form an environmentally conscious bio-region. Meanwhile, numerous right-leaning groups and militias have energized followers across the West by challenging federal authority and trumpeting coun-

ty-based rule over natural resources.

These movements veer all over the political map, Lowndes said, but there are threads to bind them, like an emphasis on local control and a belief in self-determination. He traces those ideas to Manifest Destiny, a 19th century doctrine that justified white supremacy and the colonization of Indigenous lands.

“Oregon itself is a historically white polity. The territorial constitution forbade both slaves or free blacks in the state,” Lowndes said.

Changing state boundaries is a process laid out in the U.S. Constitution, “particularly Article 4, Section 3,” said Shaakirrah Sanders, professor of constitutional law at the University of Idaho.

But even with a road map, there are likely deal breakers. California and Oregon would lose population, and therefore representatives in Congress. “And that’s usually not something that states like to have happen,” Sanders said.

There’s another big, green problem: the growing and selling of marijuana.

Legal cannabis has become a pillar of the rural economy in Oregon and California, while Idaho still has some of the harshest laws in the country criminalizing it.

Sanders, a black woman who lives in Boise, said she’s gotten used to contradictions in American society. For example, she’s devoted her career to a document that, when it was written, codified both freedom and slavery.

“It’s not that strange to me that the same constitution that protects an LGBTQ person’s right to marry, is the same constitution that someone wants to use to create a super-conservative megastate,” Sanders said.

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A man on stilts wears State of Jefferson regalia at a #TimberUnity rally in front of the Oregon Capitol in Salem in February.