

Struggling rural county spends safety net cash on pro-timber video

By ROB DAVIS

The Oregonian/OregonLive

The six-minute video opens to ominous music and burning trees. After the flames are out, a narrator says, forests suffer from devastating neglect, turning into a "vast sea of dead, charred trees" that aren't reforested because of a maze of confusing, contradictory environmental regulations.

The music brightens as the answer appears: Salvage logging. The video concludes by urging viewers to call their elected officials "and tell them these federal lands... are too valuable to simply walk away."

The clip credits a tiny nonprofit called Communities for Healthy Forests and went online in early September, a day before Oregon Republican Rep. Greg Walden introduced a bill to harvest trees burned this summer in the Columbia River Gorge. Timber companies support the plan.

It's become routine for cryptically named interest

groups to push changes in federal policy that industry wants. The surprising twist this time: Federal money paid for it.

Douglas County, a local government so broke it closed all its public libraries earlier this year, funded Communities for Healthy Forests to create the video. And it did so with federal safety net money meant to ease rural Oregon's dependence on timber revenue.

Commissioners have awarded Communities for Healthy Forests a total of \$490,000 in federal money over the last two years, \$250,000 of it to make videos. Only one has been released.

The Douglas County commission's spending raises questions about a federal program called Secure Rural Schools, which has suffered from a lack of oversight since it was co-authored in 2000 by Sen. Ron Wyden, an Oregon Democrat.

The program gives counties part of what they once earned from logging on federal land before

endangered species listings curtailed the harvest. Oregon has received \$3 billion, more than any other state.

Most of the federal money goes to roads and schools. But counties have wider leeway over a portion known as Title III, which was funded at \$14.3 million nationally in 2015.

Chris Boice, chairman of the Douglas County commission, said the pro-salvage logging video counted as "education related to forestry." That's a use that Congress authorized for money received before 2008. Boice said the county had pre-2008 dollars on hand to pay Communities for Healthy Forests in 2015 and 2016.

But even back when education was an allowed purpose, the law said money could only be spent on after-school programs.

The cash the county awarded Communities for Healthy Forests instead could have been used to boost the county's wildfire preparedness or pay firefighting costs, purposes allowed by Title III

since it was created.

Internal and external audits have repeatedly found Title III money misspent over the last decade and urged reform. But all the recommended changes haven't been adopted.

Wyden, who wants Congress to reauthorize the program, said counties should be using the economic lifeline wisely to meet rural Oregonians' essential needs. In a statement, he said what The Oregonian/OregonLive found in Douglas County would spur him to ensure counties are held accountable for their spending if the program is renewed.

"A single dollar of Title III payments should not be wasted rehashing decades-old debates and siphoning taxpayer money away from its prescribed purpose of protecting our communities from wildfires," Wyden said.

Douglas County, the heart of Oregon timber country, has been one of the biggest beneficiaries under Title III, receiving \$4.3 million between 2010 and 2015.

BRIEFLY

Cops: Gun owner stops knife-wielding skateboarder

LEBANON (AP) — Police in Lebanon, Oregon, say a man pulled a gun on a skateboarder who was threatening a driver with a knife.

Authorities told KPTV the incident happened Thursday night, when the 30-year-old skateboarder — Michael Van Gelder — got into a confrontation with a driver.

A witness with a concealed carry permit saw what was happening and drew his weapon. He ordered the skateboarder to drop the knife.

Police say the skateboarder tried to run, but was stopped by the driver and the gun owner. They say the skateboarder struck the driver, who sustained a minor injury.

Court records list Van Gelder as a resident of Stevenson, Washington. He was booked into the Linn County Jail on charges of assault, menacing, disorderly conduct and unlawful use of a weapon.

He had not retained a lawyer or been appointed one as of early Friday afternoon.

Portland man accused of selling stolen Disneyland passes

PORTLAND (AP) — Portland police arrested a man accused of using Craigslist to sell stolen passes to Disneyland.

Sgt. Chris Burley says a Portland woman purchased two three-day passes to the California attraction, only to discover at the front gate that the tickets had been stolen. The woman and her daughter had to buy new passes.

She reported the fraud Tuesday after arriving

home. Police detectives searched Craigslist and found more three-day passes for sale. They arranged to buy some and sent an undercover officer to meet the seller.

Burley said Friday that 39-year-old Michael McCrobie of Portland was arrested shortly after selling stolen tickets to the officer. He faces charges of theft and computer crime.

A preliminary court hearing is scheduled for Oct. 12. Court records don't list an attorney to speak on his behalf.

Ads blast lawmaker's stance on national popular vote bill

SALEM (AP) — A new ad campaign is targeting Senate President Peter Courtney for repeatedly blocking a bill that would permit Oregon to give all seven of its electoral college votes to the winner of the national popular vote during presidential elections.

National Popular Vote Inc., a California-based nonprofit, launched the ad campaign against Courtney on Thursday, the Statesman Journal reported.

The National Popular Vote bill had passed in the House in 2009, 2013, 2015 and 2017 but was killed in the Senate by Courtney, said John Koza, the nonprofit's chairman. The nonprofit is running a 16-second advertisement, a Facebook page and website which promises to spread ads against Courtney on Google and Facebook as part of the campaign.

The campaign's goal is to inform voters of Courtney's record with the bill, Koza said.

A statement by the Democratic senator suggests he has changed his stance on the bill since the most recent election cycle.

ICE targets sanctuary cities, arrests 33 in Northwest

By CONRAD WILSON

Oregon Public Broadcasting

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement announced Thursday it targeted hundreds of people in sanctuary cities, including Seattle and Portland, during a four-day operation called "Safe City."

ICE said it targeted communities that don't honor the agency's detainers and "where ICE deportation officers are denied access to jails and prisons to interview suspected immigration violators."

A detainer is a request ICE makes to local jails to hold people in custody that it suspects have entered the country illegally. They allow ICE to eventually assume custody of the person and potentially begin deportation proceedings.

In 2014, a federal judge

in Oregon ruled detainers were not a legally sufficient way to hold someone in prison. After the ruling, sheriffs in Oregon and other states stopped honoring the requests.

Since then, even sheriffs sympathetic to ICE's mission have asked the agency's officers to go before a judge and get a warrant — something they've not been willing or able to do.

ICE misreported the number of people arrested during this latest sweep in the Northwest at least two times, an ICE spokeswoman confirmed Friday.

The latest figures from ICE indicate 26 people were arrested in Washington state, including in Vancouver, Seattle, Federal Way, and Everett. The agency arrested seven people in Oregon cities that included Salem, Portland and Gresham.

ICE said during the "Safe City" operation it prioritized "criminal convictions, pending criminal charges, known gang members and affiliates, immigration fugitives and those who re-entered the U.S. after deportation."

The agency said people with active DACA status were "not targeted for arrest."

The Trump administration has criticized sheriffs who don't cooperate with federal detainer requests.

Earlier this month, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions spoke in Portland where he criticized law enforcement leaders and politicians for directing officers to refuse detainers.

"The result is that police are forced to release the criminal alien back into the community without regard to the seriousness of his crimes or the length of his

rap sheet," Sessions said. "They should, according to law and common sense, be processed and deported."

Following his speech, Sessions met with several law enforcement officers from the Portland area.

Multnomah County Sheriff Mike Reese said that Sessions "refused to acknowledge" the 2014 court ruling against ICE detainers during the closed door meeting.

"Sanctuary jurisdictions that do not honor detainers or allow us access to jails and prisons are shielding criminal aliens from immigration enforcement and creating a magnet for illegal immigration," ICE Acting Director Tom Homan said in a statement Thursday.

"As a result, ICE is forced to dedicate more resources to conduct at-large arrests in these communities," he said.

East Oregonian advertisement including subscription rates, classified ads, and contact information.

AccuWeather.com Forecast section with daily weather icons, temperature forecasts for Pendleton and Hermiston, and an almanac.

Regional Cities and World Cities weather sections, including temperature and wind data for various locations.

National Weather Today section featuring a map of the United States, national summary, and national cities weather data.