

Congress OKs bill to allow killing sea lions to help salmon

PORTLAND (AP) — Congress has agreed to make it easier to kill sea lions threatening fragile runs of salmon in the Northwest.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that a bill approved by the House Tuesday changes the Marine Mammal Protection Act to lift some of the restrictions on killing sea lions to protect salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River and its tributaries. The measure had previously passed the Senate.

Wildlife managers say sea lion populations have grown so large that they no longer need all the protections that were put in place for them in 1972.

The measure would usher in a more streamlined process for Washington, Idaho, Oregon and sev-



Associated Press/Don Ryan

In this April 24, 2008, file photo, a sea lion eats a salmon in the Columbia River near Bonneville Dam in North Bonneville, Wash. OPB reports that a bill approved by the House on Tuesday changes the Marine Mammal Protection Act to lift some of the restrictions on killing sea lions to protect salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River and its tributaries. The measure had previously passed the Senate.

eral Pacific Northwest tribes to capture and euthanize sea lions. Sea lions deemed to be a problem are captured and euthanized.

Supporters, including the governors of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, fishing groups and tribes, have said the bill will give wildlife managers greater flexibility in controlling California sea lions that dramatically increased from about 30,000 in the 1960s to about 300,000 following enactment of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Jaime Pinkham, executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said in a statement that he was "grateful Congress worked in a bipartisan manner to give us the local flexibility to protect

the tribal treaty resources we share with others in the Columbia and Willamette rivers."

Critics called the move by Congress ill-conceived and say it will not solve the problem of declining salmon, which also face other problems such as habitat loss and dams.

While there are several thousand California sea lions in the Columbia River estuary, only about 200 to 300 swim more than 100 miles upriver from the Pacific Ocean and would be eligible for removal, state wildlife officials say.

An orca task force convened by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, also backed the legislation to boost the fish for the struggling population of southern resident killer whales.

Bentz asks WA lawmakers to 'convince us if you're for real'

By LAUREN DRAKE Oregon Public Broadcasting

In the first meeting between Oregon and Washington lawmakers to discuss a revived replacement plan for the Interstate 5 bridge on Tuesday, Oregon legislators made it clear they aren't over Washington's 2013 move to blow

up the approximate \$3 billion Columbia River Crossing project.

Oregon Sen. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, reminded his Washington counterparts on the panel that he put a lot of political capital in shepherding the first project through the Oregon Legislature.

"I can assure you I'm

not enthusiastic about going through that process again," Bentz said, adding he was at the meeting to listen and see if Washington lawmakers "can convince us if you're for real" this time.

Talk of replacing the 100-year-old Interstate 5 bridge has long been one of the most divisive topics in

Clark County. After a group of Washington lawmakers torpedoed the Columbia River Crossing project, it's taken years to convince their Oregon counterparts that they are committed this time.

Twelve lawmakers — some from Oregon, like Bentz, and others from Washington, like Sen. Ann Rivers, R-La Center, who was instrumental in killing the CRC — sat at a long table in a nondescript building in North Portland near the Columbia River.

Oregon Sen. Lee Beyer, a Democrat who chairs the Senate Committee on Business and Transportation, reluctantly agreed it's time to start addressing the bridge once again.

"Do I want to spend more time on this? No," Beyer said, noting they've

spent about two decades on the project. "Do I feel like we should? Probably."

The CRC, as it became known, would have replaced the bridge, rebuilt freeway interchanges and extended light rail from Portland to Vancouver, until Washington backed out of the project. Oregon tried to pass a version on their own, but the effort failed in 2014. About \$200 million was spent in a planning process that started in 2001.

One of the sticking points between the two states was mass transit.

Oregon said the project needed light rail, while the Clark County community pushed back against the idea. Lawmakers didn't speak of public transit during their meeting Tuesday, but several commenters at the gather-

ing brought it up.

Steve Wallace, from Vancouver, told lawmakers to remember his community wants "lanes, not trains."

Several lawmakers brought up the idea of pursuing more than one bridge.

Oregon Rep. Richard Vial, R-Scholls, pushed the idea of a new highway west of Interstate 5 through Washington County.

"It's a missed opportunity if we don't include a conversation of the need of a westside solution," he said before the meeting.

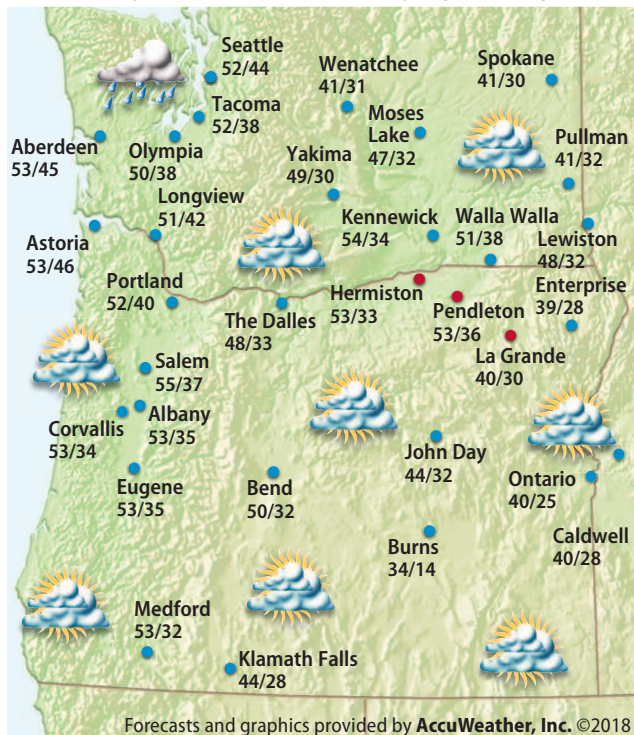
Joe Cortright, a Portland economist, told the panel one of the reasons why the first effort failed was because some of the hard decisions — how much it will cost, who will pay for it — were put off until the end.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Mostly cloudy	Mostly cloudy	Intervals of clouds and sunshine	An afternoon and evening shower	Mostly cloudy with a little rain
PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
53° 36°	50° 35°	46° 36°	49° 42°	52° 37°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
53° 33°	50° 35°	49° 36°	47° 39°	53° 37°

OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

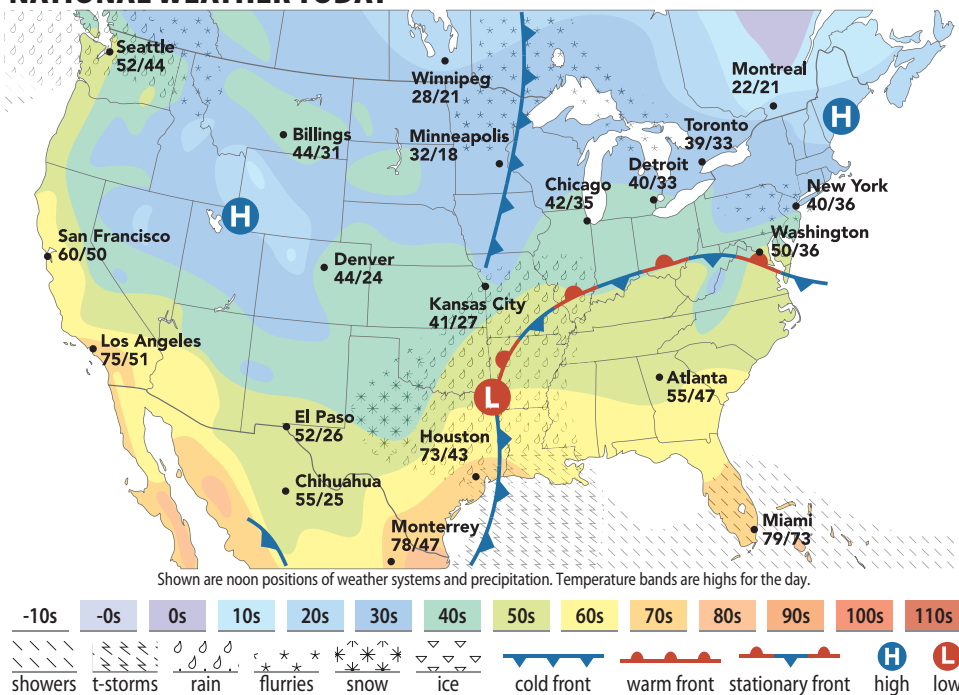
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.														
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW												
Yesterday	46°	40°												
Normals	39°	26°												
Records	75° (1921)	-23° (1919)												
PRECIPITATION														
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.19"													
Month to date	0.34"													
Normal month to date	0.55"													
Year to date	9.21"													
Last year to date	15.33"													
Normal year to date	12.02"													
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.														
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW												
Yesterday	50°	42°												
Normals	40°	27°												
Records	62° (1933)	-5° (1972)												
PRECIPITATION														
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.17"													
Month to date	0.19"													
Normal month to date	0.62"													
Year to date	7.15"													
Last year to date	8.77"													
Normal year to date	9.09"													
WINDS (in mph)														
Today	Fri.													
Boardman	SW 4-8 WSW 6-12													
Pendleton	S 7-14 SSW 8-16													
SUN AND MOON														
Sunrise today	7:27 a.m.													
Sunset tonight	4:11 p.m.													
Moonrise today	11:47 a.m.													
Moonset today	10:21 p.m.													
<table border="0"> <tr> <td>First</td> <td>Full</td> <td>Last</td> <td>New</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dec 15</td> <td>Dec 22</td> <td>Dec 29</td> <td>Jan 5</td> </tr> </table>			First	Full	Last	New					Dec 15	Dec 22	Dec 29	Jan 5
First	Full	Last	New											
Dec 15	Dec 22	Dec 29	Jan 5											

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 81° in Edinburg, Texas Low -11° in Presque Isle, Maine

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Legislature to weigh statewide plastic bag tax, straw ban

SALEM (AP) — The Oregon Legislature will consider a statewide tax on plastic bags and a ban on plastic straws.

The Statesman Journal reports a Senate committee voted to introduce both legislative concepts, or preliminary bills, during an informational hearing Wednesday.

Both bills would help reduce plastic waste that ends up in landfills and the environment.

"From our perspective, nothing we use for 10 minutes should pollute the environment for hundreds of years," said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director of Environment Oregon.

One would impose a 5 cent per bag tax on single-use plastic bags used by retail stores selling food or alcohol, and require the establishments to provide paper check-out bags.

The tax wouldn't apply to meat and vegetable bags, or other non-checkout bags. And customers who use vouchers and state bene-

fit cards would be exempt.

Money collected would go to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, for a new Plastic Clean-Up and Recycling Fund.

Fourteen Oregon cities have banned single-use plastic bags.

The Legislature previously considered banning plastic bags, in 2010, 2011 and 2012. All three bills died in committee.

This is the first time a tax, rather than a ban, has been proposed. Because the bill would raise revenue, it would require a three-fifths majority approval.

Another measure would prohibit restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws to customers unless they request a straw.

The proposal specifically exempts straws made from sugar cane, pasta and some other natural ingredients.

Violators could be fined up to \$25 per day, with a cap of \$300 per year.

Deadline looms for health care signups

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL Oregon Public Broadcasting

The window for Oregonians to enroll in new health insurance closes Saturday night.

So far more than 73,000 people have signed up. Last year 156,105 Oregonians enrolled through HealthCare.gov.

Some experts predict lower enrollment this year as the federal government cut the advertising budget. But Oregon maintained its budget and has been running plenty of ads.

Elizabeth Cronin with the Oregon Mar-

ketplace says there'll be an uptick in enrollment as the Saturday deadline approaches.

"Sometimes people are surprised that they qualify for financial assistance. Or they don't give it a shot because they assume they make too much to qualify," she said.

A family of four, that doesn't get coverage through a job, can make up to about \$100,000 a year and still qualify.

A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that about 20 percent of Oregonians are eligible for free bronze level health insurance, after factoring in a tax credit.

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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Regional Publisher and Revenue Director:

• Christopher Rush

541-278-2669 • crush@eomediagroup.com

Advertising Services:

• Angela Treadwell

541-966-0827 • atreadwell@eastoregonian.com

• Grace Bubar

541-276-2214 • gbubar@eastoregonian.com

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541-278-2683 • kmacias@eastoregonian.com

• Jeanne Jewett

541-564-4531 • jjewett@eastoregonian.com

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Business Office Manager:

541-966-0822

COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Production manager: Mike Jensen

541-215-0824 • mjensen@eastoregonian.com