

Ballot measure would restrict interstate tolls

Money could only be used for road construction

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Oregon Capital Bureau

Portland-area drivers facing freeway tolls may get some protection from seeing that money diverted to anything but expanding highways.

Language has been approved for a ballot measure that would restrict the state's use of that toll money. Transportation Department officials are planning to assess tolls in about five years.

The proposed measure would require voters to approve any use of toll money that doesn't relate directly to adding capacity

for vehicles.

The Oregon Supreme Court last week signed off on the language for the measure, and now supporters can gather signatures for a vote in November 2020.

Initiative Petition 10 — known as "Tolls Need Voter Approval" — would amend the Oregon Constitution to restrict state officials to spending tolling revenue only on adding new vehicle lanes to congested freeways.

"I'm pleased with the ballot title. I think it references what we want to accomplish," said state Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, a chief petitioner.

Most people in the metro area "hate the idea (of tolling), and our elected leaders are steamrolling them," Parrish said.

The measure wouldn't ban tolls, however.

Les Poole, another chief petitioner, said tolls are a good way to finance new freeway lanes or widen a bridge. But he is concerned that state officials would use money collected through tolls to get motorists to drive less. For instance, state officials have discussed using the money to build transit stations or park-and-ride lots.

Without the ballot measure, state officials could spend tolls on roadway construction, repairs, improvement and operations.

Restricting spending to adding new freeway lanes could produce unintended consequences, said Joe Cortright, a Portland economist and former administrator of the Legislature's Trade and Economic Development Committee.

"Tolls have been proven to be the one way to make

traffic move smoothly and give people a quality system, and this would really impinge on that," Cortright said of the proposed measure. "It would make it difficult to do variable pricing, which gives lower prices when there is less demand and is used to smooth out traffic."

In applying to the Federal Highway Administration to start the tolls, state transportation officials proposed toll prices that would increase when traffic volumes are high and decrease when there are fewer vehicles on the freeway.

The proposed measure "would block spending the revenue on (tollway) maintenance costs, which are substantial, so the state would be forced to build capacity that you might not need," Cortright said.

The Oregon Transportation Commission plans to place tolls on sections of Interstate 5 and Interstate 205 in Portland as soon as 2024 but wants to eventually impose tolls on all Portland-area freeways.

Tammy Baney, Transportation Commission chair, said the commission has yet to set the price of tolls or how much revenue would be spent adding vehicle capacity versus paying for maintenance and operation or adding amenities such as park-and-ride lots.

Baney said it's not clear how the proposed ballot measure would impact the tolling plan.

"From my reading of the initiative, it was relatively short and didn't have a lot of detail," Baney said. "There is a lot you can read into as far as the intent. The intent is

left to the person interpreting the language so I would have more questions about what that actually means."

A survey a year ago by DHM Research for the Transportation Department found that only 43 percent of Oregonians are willing to pay a toll. Support came with a caveat: Respondents supported the tolls if they knew they would "provide faster and more consistent travel time."

The measure needs 149,360 valid signatures to go on the ballot.

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Conservation groups question fishing's role in orca protection

By **GENE JOHNSON**
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The federal government is violating the Endangered Species Act by failing to consider how salmon fishing off the West Coast is affecting endangered killer whales, two conservation groups said Tuesday as they threatened a lawsuit.

The Arizona-based Center for Biological Diversity and the Washington state-based Wild Fish Conservancy notified President Donald Trump's administration they intend to file a lawsuit within 60 days unless officials reevaluate whether

the fishing further jeopardizes orcas that frequent the inland waters of the Pacific Northwest.

"We can't allow business as usual in the salmon fisheries while Southern Resident killer whales are starving to death," Julie Teel Simmonds, an attorney with the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a news release.

The orcas' plight has received much attention this year as scientists warn that they're on the brink of extinction. There are just 74 left, the lowest number since more than 50 were captured for aquarium display in the 1970s, and no calf born in the last three years has survived. One mother whale captured attention around the world this summer when she carried her dead calf on her head for 17 days in an apparent attempt to revive it.

Last week, Washington Gov. Jay Inslee announced what he called a "herculean" \$1.1 billion plan to help the population recover. The Democrat said the money would go toward protecting and restoring habitat for salmon, especially chinook, the orcas' favored prey; boosting production from salmon hatcheries; storm-water cleanup; and quieting vessel traffic, which can interfere with the whales' hunting and communication.

But conservationists say more must be done. While a federal judge has ordered the government to consider boosting salmon runs by breaching four dams on the Lower Snake River, that prospect remains highly controversial and Republicans



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

Endangered orcas swim in Puget Sound and in view of the Olympic Mountains just west of Seattle as seen from a federal research vessel that has been tracking the whales.

in Congress have vowed to oppose it.

Unlike other populations of orcas, which feed on marine mammals including seals, the southern residents eat salmon — primarily chinook. The conservation groups said Tuesday that one way to help them immediately would be to catch fewer salmon off the coast, where the whales spend their winters.

For now, the groups are not targeting fishing in Washington state's inland waters, including Puget Sound, where fishing quotas are managed under a different process.

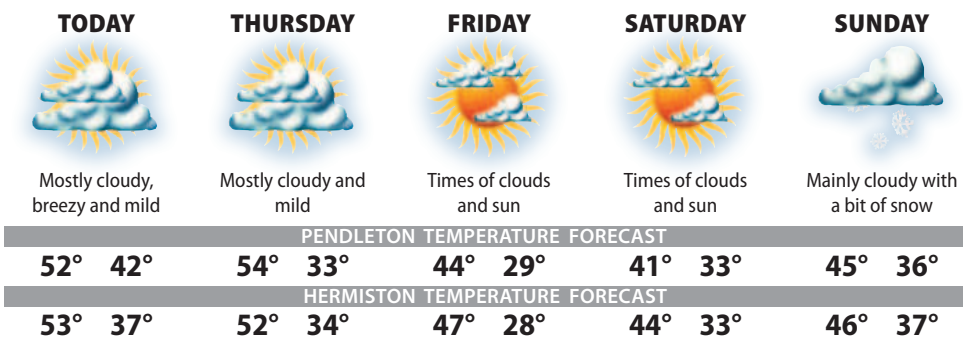
According to a letter the groups sent to the U.S. Commerce Department and the

National Marine Fisheries Service, the federal government has been relying on an outdated 2009 review to authorize salmon fisheries up and down the West Coast. At the time of the 2009 review, there were 85 orcas in the southern resident population.

Michael Milstein, a spokesman for the fisheries service, said it did not have any immediate comment.

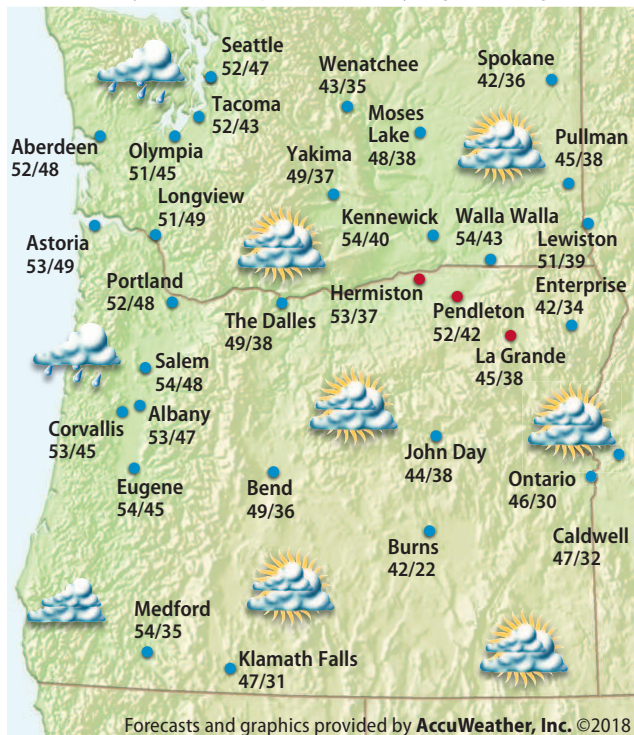
The letter noted that more than 200,000 chinook were caught by recreational and commercial boats off the coasts of Washington, Oregon and California last year, which researchers estimate as equaling as much as one-quarter of all chinook available.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



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	55°	46°
Normals	39°	26°
Records	68° (1917)	-5° (1924)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.22"
Month to date 0.61"
Normal month to date 0.86"
Year to date 9.48"
Last year to date 15.43"
Normal year to date 12.33"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	59°	46°
Normals	39°	27°
Records	63° (1936)	-5° (1984)

PRECIPITATION
24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.12"
Month to date 0.36"
Normal month to date 0.89"
Year to date 7.32"
Last year to date 8.87"
Normal year to date 9.36"

WINDS (in mph)

Today	Thu.
Boardman	SSW 4-8
Pendleton	SSW 10-20
	SW 7-14
	SW 8-16

SUN AND MOON

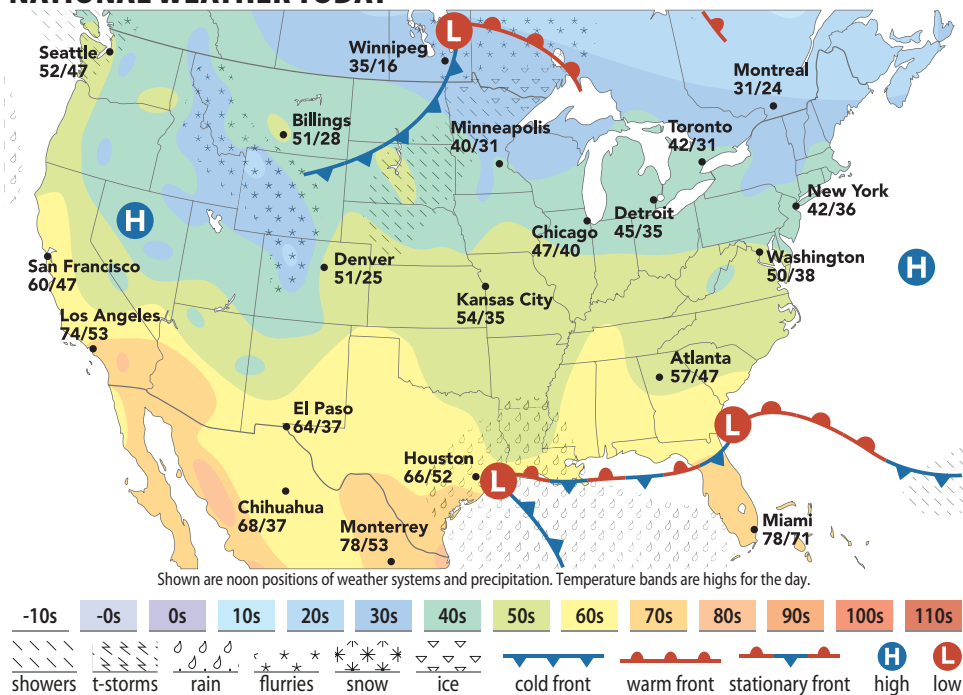
Sunrise today	7:32 a.m.
Sunset tonight	4:13 p.m.
Moonrise today	2:24 p.m.
Moonset today	3:44 a.m.

Full Last New First
Dec 22 Dec 29 Jan 5 Jan 13

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 77° in Miami, Fla. Low -6° in Daniel, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



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