

Oregon committee dives into water problems

Seven-member House Water Committee reformed after long hiatus

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A newly revived committee in the Oregon House is taking a deep dive into water issues, potentially creating opportunities and worries for the state’s irrigators.

The seven-member House Water Committee, recently reformed after a long hiatus, will focus on a variety of issues relating to water quality and quantity, said Rep. Ken Helm, D-Beaverton, its chairman.

In the past, Helm has sponsored bills that proved highly controversial in the agricultural community, such as proposals in 2017 that would impose a new fee of \$100 per water right and require installation of monitoring devices on irrigation diversions.

Helm said the new committee will take a different tack to improving data collection and revenues than man-

dating monitoring and fees, at least initially.

“I think we’re still a ways away from talking about that at this point,” he said.

The higher priority is to determine what “data gaps” about water are the most glaring in Oregon, then figuring out how to fill them, Helm said.

As for revenue streams for water resources, Helm said he doesn’t expect a fee proposal to emerge in the 2020 short legislative session.

Over the long term, fees may be just one part of a mixture of revenue streams, he said.

The committee’s narrow focus on water will allow it to “understand the complexity of these issues” as well as the implications of water legislation, said Mary Anne Cooper, vice president of public policy for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

“All the things we’ve seen hitting various committees will be moving through this committee,” she said.

The committee’s revival signals that lawmakers in the House appreciate how



Helm



The Malheur Siphon is a 4.5-mile-long steel pipe that carries irrigation water from Malheur Reservoir to the northern part of the Owyhee Irrigation District system.

critical water problems are for Oregon, as well as the need to invest in infrastructure, Cooper said.

On the other hand, the possibility of new fees or taxes to fund projects remains a concern. “It’s always a question of who pays,” she said.

During the commit-

tee’s first hearing on Sept. 17, lawmakers got a briefing about the state’s water law and its integrated water resources strategy from officials at the Oregon Water Resources Department. They also heard about the functioning of the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, which provides

grants for conservation-oriented water projects.

Representatives of irrigation districts and organizations described the ongoing work of modernizing aging irrigation canals and structures with pipes, fish ladders, hydropower turbines and other technology.

“Our stuff is old. It was

built 75 to 100 years ago or more. We need to make repairs to it,” said April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, which represents irrigation districts. “We can’t do it alone.”

About 80% of the water consumed in Oregon is used for irrigation, with irrigation systems handling about 480 billion gallons of water per year for 6,500 farms, said Jed Jorgensen, energy director for the Farmers Conservation Alliance, an irrigation nonprofit.

Old infrastructure poses a liability and is difficult to outfit with technology, such as fish screens, while open canals seep water into the ground that could be put to better use, he said.

As an added problem, irrigators are anticipating that less water will be stored in the form of mountain snowpacks, said Les Perkins, manager of the Farmers Irrigation District near Hood River. That means upgrading systems to instead rely on rainfall by expanding or building reservoirs, for example.

“A changing climate means we have less snow, more rain. We have to store some of that winter water,” Perkins said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area

TODAY

Sun and clouds, a shower

FRIDAY

Partly sunny; pleasant

SATURDAY

Partly sunny; beautiful

SUNDAY

Considerable cloudiness

MONDAY

Clouds and sun; pleasant

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
69°	51°	69°	48°	76° 52°
HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST				
75°	55°	75°	52°	79° 58°

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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	67°	52°
Normals	77°	49°
Records	96° (1898)	28° (1911)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.01"
Month to date	0.93"
Normal month to date	0.28"
Year to date	10.67"
Last year to date	6.52"
Normal year to date	8.66"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	74°	49°
Normals	78°	47°
Records	93° (1952)	29° (1965)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.05"
Month to date	0.11"
Normal month to date	0.23"
Year to date	4.72"
Last year to date	5.15"
Normal year to date	6.35"

WINDS (in mph)

	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 4-8	SW 6-12
Pendleton	W 6-12	WSW 7-14

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	6:38 a.m.
Sunset tonight	6:59 p.m.
Moonrise today	9:55 p.m.
Moonset today	12:01 p.m.

Last New First Full

Sep 21

Sep 28

Oct 5

Oct 13

NATIONAL EXTREMES
Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 104° in Andalusia, Ala. Low 12° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

-10s -0s 0s 10s 20s 30s 40s 50s 60s 70s 80s 90s 100s 110s

showers t-storms rain flurries snow ice cold front warm front stationary front high low

School board members admit to executive session violations

Issue centered around dispute over eligibility of former Enterprise student

By STEVE TOOL
EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — According to a stipulated final order from the Oregon Government Ethics Commission, five members of the Enterprise School District board admitted to an executive meeting violation regarding the long-running dispute over the sports eligibility of a former EHS student.

The commission conducted the investigation based on an ethics complaint by Ilene Wells, wife

of then-Enterprise basketball coach and athletic director Larry Wells. Board members are Kate Fent as chair and Position 4 representative; Mandy Decker in Position 1, Adrian Harguess in Position 2, Mike Weideman in Position 2 and Heather Melville, who is vice-chair and holds Position 5.

The five virtually identical letters charge that the board violated executive session law during a Dec. 3, 2018, meeting in which they voted to send a letter that addressed complaints made by Justus Even’s parents about two school employees — Wells and high school principal Blake Carlsen, who had determined Even was ineligible to participate in school sports because of a mid-year transfer issue.

An executive session is a meeting in which a public board discusses information or records exempt from public inspection by law.

ORS 192.660(6) prohibits the board from taking any final action or making any final decision during an executive session. The OGE found that the entire board violated the law in their actions.

Violation of ORS 192.660(6) is punishable by up to a \$1000 fine, but the OGE chose to give each board member a “letter of education.” As a result, each member agreed to the terms and conditions of the OGE order without its completing the investigative phase. All the board member signed off on the stipulated final order on July 11.

BRIEFLY

Oregon’s public university workers vote to strike

PORTLAND — Workers at seven public universities in Oregon have voted to authorize a strike if a new contract deal isn’t reached, their union said Wednesday.

The workers’ union, SEIU 503, said 95% of its members voted to strike on Sept. 30 if a deal can’t be reached during a negotiating session on Sept. 23 at Portland State University. The vote results were first reported by *The Register-Guard*.

The union represents 4,500 public university employees who work in maintenance, food preparation, tech support, grounds, custodial services and financial aid assistance at Oregon’s seven publicly funded institutions.

Those are the University of Oregon, Oregon State University, Portland State University, the Oregon Institute of Technology, Southern Oregon University,

Western Oregon University and Eastern Oregon University.

West Nile virus cases reported in Eastern Oregon

SALEM — There’s been a small outbreak of West Nile virus infections in Eastern Oregon this year.

West Nile is a virus carried by mosquitoes. Oregon Public Broadcasting reported that this year there were five cases in humans, in Harney, Deschutes and Malheur counties. There were also four cases in horses and about 80 mosquitos found carrying the disease.

Most people infected with West Nile don’t feel sick. But one in five develop a fever and one in every 150 suffer a serious, sometimes fatal, illness.

People can reduce their risk of catching the virus by using insect repellent and wearing long-sleeved shirts and pants.

— Associated Press

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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