

# Oregonians to vote on gun control in November

By CATALINA GAITÁN  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregonians will get to vote on state-wide gun-control legislation this November, the Oregon Secretary of State's office confirmed Monday, July 18.

Initiative Petition 17, also known as the Reduction of Gun Violence Act, earned enough valid signatures to qualify for the election. The petition garnered 131,671 valid signatures, almost 20,000 more than it needed to land on the ballot.

The measure would require people to get a permit and pass a background check before buying a gun, and it would prevent the sale of gun magazines that hold more than 10 rounds.

Rabbi Michael Cahana of Congregation Beth Israel, one of the initiative's chief petitioners, said Tuesday he is feeling "very confident" that voters will pass the



Dean Guernsey/Bulletin, File

**A large group rallies June 11, 2022, during March for Our Lives, a gun-violence protest in Bend. An initiative that would require permits and background checks before allowing a gun purchase has qualified for the November ballot.**

measure in November.

"I am not going to be complacent — none of us are," Cahana said. "We're working very hard to educate Oregon voters because we know there will be a lot of misinformation. But I know

people want to see change."

A caravan of gun-control advocates drove July 8 from Portland to Salem to hand deliver the initiative's final batch of signatures to the state Capitol. Rev. W.J. Mark Knutson of Augustana

Lutheran Church, also one of the initiative's chief petitioners, sat aboard a school bus crowded with volunteers.

"Today has to be a day of joy," Knutson said that day. "Because this will give Oregonians a chance to step

out in the nation with the most progressive piece of legislation this year for public safety."

The effort to push for stricter gun laws in Oregon has also led to pushback from pro-gun organizations.

In a July 1 statement, the Oregon Firearms Federation said the new permitting process required by the measure, which would include completion of a firearms safety training and a background check, would be "far more onerous."

The organization on Tuesday asked its supporters to send their input on the measure to the Oregon Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, who will approve the text explaining the initiative on the ballot.

Lift Every Voice Oregon, the lobbying group behind Initiative Petition 17, launched shortly after the 2018 mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Doug-

las High School in Parkland, Florida.

Support for Initiative Petition 17 started small but grew exponentially this year, skyrocketing from less than 3,000 signatures in March to almost 100,000 three months later. About 1,600 volunteers helped gather signatures across the state. A wave of gun violence, including mass shootings at an elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, and a grocery store in Buffalo, New York, "spurred people to action," Cahana said.

"There was a strong sense that we've had for decades now that nothing is going to happen, that things aren't going to change, and people are fed up. They really want to see substantive change," he said. "This is how democracy works — we actually care and can change our country. We can change the direction, we can turn away from hopelessness, and that just lifts my spirit."

## RIVER DEMOCRACY ACT



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

**The land around the Imnaha River in Northeastern Oregon would be affected if the waterway is designated as Wild and Scenic under the proposed River Democracy Act.**

## Oregon groups sign letter supporting SB192

By MICHAEL KOHN  
The Bulletin

WASHINGTON — A plan to protect thousands of miles of rivers and streams in Oregon received renewed attention last week when dozens of organizations banded together to encourage politicians to speed up the passage of the bill.

Seventy-five organizations across the state sent a joint letter to Oregon Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley urging them to pass the River Democracy Act. The letter is signed mainly by conservation groups and outdoor sporting and fishing organizations.

If passed, the bill would add nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The federal designation, created in 1968, protects rivers and develops them for tourism, just as national parks and national forests protect designated areas of land. Rivers can be listed as having wild, scenic or recreational value.

Wyden and Merkley introduced the River Democracy Act, Senate Bill 192, in February 2021. More than 15,000 streams and rivers were nominated by Oregonians for inclusion in the act after Wyden called on state residents to suggest their favorite waterways in 2019. In Bend, one nomination came from a group of sixth graders at Pacific Crest Middle School.

But the bill has its detractors too. In January, U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, spoke out against the act on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives, declaring that it will create a wildfire risk in Oregon's watersheds. Bentz argued that the act puts forests at risk because it allows prescribed burns without conducting thinning operations.

The American Forest Resources Council, which represents logging interests, is among the groups that defend Bentz's position.

"We continue to oppose the River Democracy Act because it will increase the risk of severe wildfires, threaten our communities, impede public access, and impact multiple uses of public lands," said Nick Smith, the council's public affairs director. "Catastrophic wildfires including subsequent erosion and sedimen-

tation pose the greatest threat to watersheds and rivers, and water quantity and quality."

Smith said more management of federal lands will help reduce wildfire.

"Rather than imposing more arbitrary designations and restrictions on federal lands, Oregon's federal representatives should focus on giving public lands managers more resources and tools to proactively reduce wildfire risks, maintain access and protect our forests, rivers, and communities," said Smith.

Wyden's office has pushed back against the argument that forests will be at a greater risk for fire, stating that the bill requires agencies to implement a fire risk-reduction plan across a half-mile corridor on either side of a river or stream.

The letter sent last week was supported by riverkeeper groups, guiding associations, watershed councils and paddling clubs, among others.

"Although our groups represent a wide variety of interests, purposes, and people across the state, we all have at least one thing in common — a love of Oregon's rivers," stated a portion of the letter. "They provide us with clean drinking water, our favorite swimming holes, and places to take our families fishing and boating."

The designations would add protection for fish, wildlife, clean drinking water and recreation in watersheds including the Deschutes, Metolius, McKenzie and others.

The next step for the act is a vote by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, which is chaired by West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a Democrat.

Wyden told The Bulletin that public lands bills tend to get a close look at the end of the year, and he is preparing to have it voted on in the Senate by that time. His office is in communication with Manchin specifically to seek the necessary votes to get the bill passed.

"In terms of public lands, we're going to fairly soon have some mark-ups, where the legislation is formally considered and pulling out all the stops for it," said Wyden. "We are getting all the small businesses from rural Oregon behind it and we are pleased about the coalition coming together."

## Oregon spent \$2.4 million on a digital COVID-19 vaccine card few are using

By FEDOR ZARKHIN  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregonians have used the state's \$2.4 million digital COVID-19 vaccine card program only about 50,000 times, far less than people in Washington used their state's app and at more than twice the cost.

Oregon released its vaccine card web application in late April, with fanfare, providing Oregonians with a method to obtain digital proof that they've been vaccinated against COVID-19 in the form of a scannable QR code.

In theory, that meant people didn't have to fear losing their paper vaccine card or fret about forgetting it at home, while businesses would have an easy and efficient way to confirm

patrons' vaccination status.

But whether Oregonians have decided they don't need the digital card or simply haven't heard it is available, it's clear relatively few are opting to use it.

As of June 30, about 45,000 Oregonians had downloaded QR codes showing proof of vaccination a total of 50,730 times, with 6,000 repeat users. That amounts to one download for every approximately 83 Oregonians, and one download for every 63 Oregonians who have received at least one shot of the COVID-19 vaccine.

That rate is nearly 11 times smaller than what Washington achieved about three months after it made digital vaccine cards available in October.

The difference in timing

may have made all the difference.

By the time Oregon made the vaccine card web application available April 25, COVID-19 restrictions were already being lifted and the state and country were moving psychologically past the pandemic. That, said one national expert on immunization information tech systems, may explain why so few people went on to download a QR code.

"There was a little more of a COVID focus in the fall and a little bit less in early 2022," said Mary Beth Kurilo, a senior director at the American Immunization Registry Association.

The Oregon Health Authority, which is responsible for the state's application, agreed. Washington launched its vaccine card

application during a surge in cases while Oregon did not, spokesperson Rudy Owens said in an email. The states also had different vaccine requirements when the tools launched.

Oregon officials say how many people actually use a state-issued digital vaccine card is not what matters most.

"The download rate isn't something we are measuring as indicative of project success," Owens said in an email.

Instead, Owens said, the agency focused on making the application accessible to as broad a swath of the population as possible, "intentionally" launching it slower than neighboring states as Oregon consulted with the community on how to make the roll out equitable and accessible.

76<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

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TUE	1:30pm	Bucking Horse Stampede — Main Street
WED	9:30am	Little Buckaroo Special Needs Rodeo
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	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	Family Fun at the Thunder Room — DJ
THUR	9:00am	Tough Enough to Wear Pink Walk
	9:00am	Steer Tripping, Three Rounds
	2:00pm	Slack — Arena
	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	Tough Enough to Wear Pink — Wear Pink
	9:00pm	Fun at the Thunder Room after Rodeo — Stay Tuned!
FRI	10:00am	Chief Joseph Junior Parade — Main Street
	2:00pm	Slack — Arena
	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center
	9:30pm	Live Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — Whiskey Creek
SAT	10:00am	Grand Parade — Main Street
	2:30pm	Slack — Arena
	6:00pm	Rodeo Gates Open — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	7:00pm	PRCA RODEO — Harley Tucker Memorial Arena
	9:00pm	All Teen Dance — Joseph Community Center
	9:30pm	Live Music and Dancing at Thunder Room — Whiskey Creek
		After Rodeo — Cowboy Breakfast — Rodeo Grounds — til 3:00am
SUN	6:00am	Cowboy Breakfast — Rodeo Grounds — til 10:00am
	9:00am	Cowboy Church Service

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