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OUR VIEW

Questions over the River Democracy Act linger

It means a lot when a river gets the federal designation of “wild and scenic.” Stirring views will be protected. Water quality gets armor around it. People can savor that the waterway will be preserved. Wildlife gets a better chance to thrive.

The River Democracy Act would add 4,700 more miles of wild and scenic waterways to Oregon. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, have led the legislation.

The act has inescapable appeal. But there are also questions about what it will mean for property owners in the area designated and around it.

The concise answer: The federal agencies that administer wild and scenic rivers have stated in the past that the government may take action to protect river values. But there is also clear language in the River Democracy Act that should allay many fears.

Now we’ll go through a detailed answer. Feel free to skip to the bottom if you don’t want to wade through details.

How does the federal government regulate wild and scenic waterways? We found some good answers in two places on the rivers.gov website — a document prepared by federal managers of wild and scenic rivers and a search tool.

The document says the wild and scenic act “neither gives nor implies government control of private lands within the river corridor” and that “management restrictions would apply only to federal lands. ... The federal government has no power to regulate or zone private lands under the Act; however, administering agencies may highlight the need for amendment to local zoning...”

So what happens when the federal government believes the uses of private land are incompatible with a wild and scenic river?

“Should some proposed or actual use clearly threaten the values the river was designated to protect, the river managing agency would work with a landowner to explore ways to avert the threat through local zoning, state provisions, land exchanges, or purchases on a willing-seller/willing-buyer basis. Condemnation would be a last resort, would only be feasible if funding were available, and is prohibited on some wild and scenic rivers by their enabling legislation,” the search tool says.

Since condemnation was mentioned, here is a relevant section of the River Democracy Act ... “may not acquire any private land or interest in private land within the detailed boundaries of a covered segment without the consent of the owner.”

The River Democracy Act also explicitly states that nothing in the act affects private property rights, which may help some landowners relax. Wyden’s office helped clarify what that means.

“The language is intended to ensure that the designation of any new segments doesn’t affect private property rights whether the landowner lives within the boundaries of the segment or outside of it,” Hank Stern, Wyden’s spokesperson, told us.

Wyden and Merkley have written the River Democracy Act to add more protection to Oregon waterways and to protect private property rights.

But yes, of course, the federal government would take action if it believes river values are threatened.



After all that, I saved a dollar



TAMMY MALGESINI
INSIDE MY SHOES

My life straddles a divide between an analog and digital world. For the first dozen or so years as a professional in the workforce, I didn’t use computers. In fact, I initially learned to type on a manual typewriter.

So I get that people become frustrated with grocery shopping and digital coupons. In Coos Bay where my folks live, my mom is able to get the discount by explaining she doesn’t have a smartphone.

My husband, who doesn’t have the Safeway app on his phone, tried that a few times. However, either he doesn’t look old enough or local stores are more insistent that people use the apps to get the savings. A couple of recent letters to the editor and my personal experience suggest the latter.

First of all, I don’t really enjoy grocery shopping. It probably dates back to when John and I were first married. Back then, with gas cheaper and our budget tight, I’d go through the grocery ads in the newspaper. After

plotting my trip, I’d hit three different stores to make our purchases.

While I don’t like the time and energy it takes these days to embark on lengthy shopping excursions, I still want to save money when I can. Thankfully, my husband does the bulk of our grocery shopping. I take care of pickup orders at Walmart. And if we only need a few items or if John sees something he wants on a digital coupon, then I’ll go to the store.

Such was the case earlier this month when I had to buy some Dr. Pepper to settle a baseball bet with Daniel Wattenburger — yeah, yeah, I know I owe you more, I’m still suffering from Post-Traumatic Shopping Disorder from my last trip to the store.

Anyway, I whipped out my phone and tried to scan the bread John wanted to activate the digital coupon. As I stood there mumbling to myself, I grew frustrated.

Although an employee was standing a few feet away, she did not make an attempt to see if she could help — granted, I hadn’t asked. However, when I did, her response was something to the effect of I don’t know what to tell you.

Seriously!/? As a senior in high school and during summers/Christmas breaks while in college, I worked at

the J.C. Penney Co. store in Coos Bay. Such a lack of customer service would undoubtedly have resulted in my immediate termination.

I took a photo of the digital coupon and when I went to the register, I explained the problem to the checker. Although I attempted to scan it in front of her, she evidently thought I wasn’t utilizing the correct wrist action.

The checker asked if she could try. Sure, what could possibly go wrong?

I will tell you. After she couldn’t get it to work, she hit the back screen on my cellphone one too many times and logged me out of the app. She immediately handed my phone back, gesturing for me to log back in.

At that point, I would have had a better chance of reciting the Gettysburg Address than remembering my password. Exasperated, I finally asked, “Can’t you punch a few buttons and give me the discount?”

Thankfully, she did. However, in retrospect, I have to wonder if the dollar I ended up saving was worth all the hassle.

Tammy Malgesini, the East Oregonian community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two canine kids, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.

YOUR VIEWS

Don’t discard Brian Hemphill

After reading the article regarding the email sent by Rebecca Ninburg concerning Brian Hemphill’s status as a servant of the public (“Coming under fire” in the Saturday, Aug. 20, edition of the East Oregonian), I’m at a loss for what she had hoped to accomplish. It may be common practice in Los Angeles to casually discard flawed human beings, and kicking people while they’re down may be acceptable forms of advancement in California, but this is Umatilla County. It would behoove Ms.

Ninburg to familiarize herself with the people who live here before making such wild aspersions of character.

I’ve known Mr. Hemphill since we were both toddlers. I don’t know what’s happened in his recent adult years to lead him to the low point he had hit, but I can firmly attest that it in no way is it a reflection of his personal character. I recall him pouring through volumes of first responder manuals at an age when most would turn green at the imagery depicted. You don’t simply discard commitment like that.

And so I hope Ms. Ninburg will take the time to leave

her old life behind and start life anew in our community. Because we ruralites have no interest in becoming as soulless as Los Angeles.

Mark Elfering
Hermiston

Follow-up to the Pendleton Food Pantry Team Food Giveaway

Thank you to the East Oregonian for your coverage. Your reach into the community translates well into less time explaining our intent — people are more comfortable responding to invitations to

attend and to organize.

Our volunteer team includes like-minded community builders in addition to Pendleton Baha’i Community members — Altrusa, Presbyterian, the professional community builders from Community Action Program of East Central Oregon and a substantial group of like-minded advisors/activists whose idealism takes them out of their homes to advise, lug boxes and deliver food.

We’ll be back.
Bill Young
Pendleton Food Pantry Team
Pendleton

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