

OPINION

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

'Wild and Scenic' needs clarity

It was a bit surprising to discover that some of the rivers proposed for Wild and Scenic designation were dried up or were creeks, streams or gulches — not really rivers at all.

Missteps like that go to the heart of criticisms of sweeping legislation that paints a broad brush, but fails to look at the finer details.

A Senate bill that would designate nearly 4,700 miles as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in Oregon is being criticized for including hundreds of small creeks, streams and gulches that were found to be completely dry, according to the Capital Press and its reporter George Plaven.

The American Forest Resources Council, a trade group representing the timber industry, did an analysis of the proposal, arguing that certain non-river segments under consideration “do not meet the intent or definition of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.”

Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, introduced the River Democracy Act on Feb. 3. A year prior to that, there was a well-attended open house in Bend, where many submitted comments on which rivers should be protected from development along their banks. The legislation came out of more than 15,000 nominations submitted by the public.

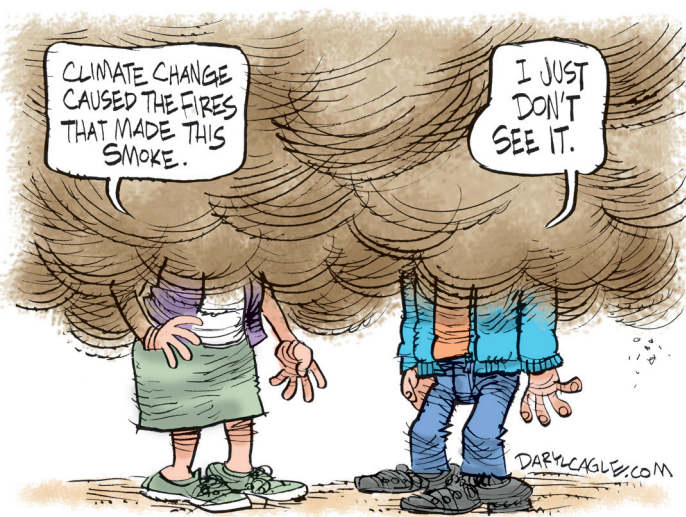
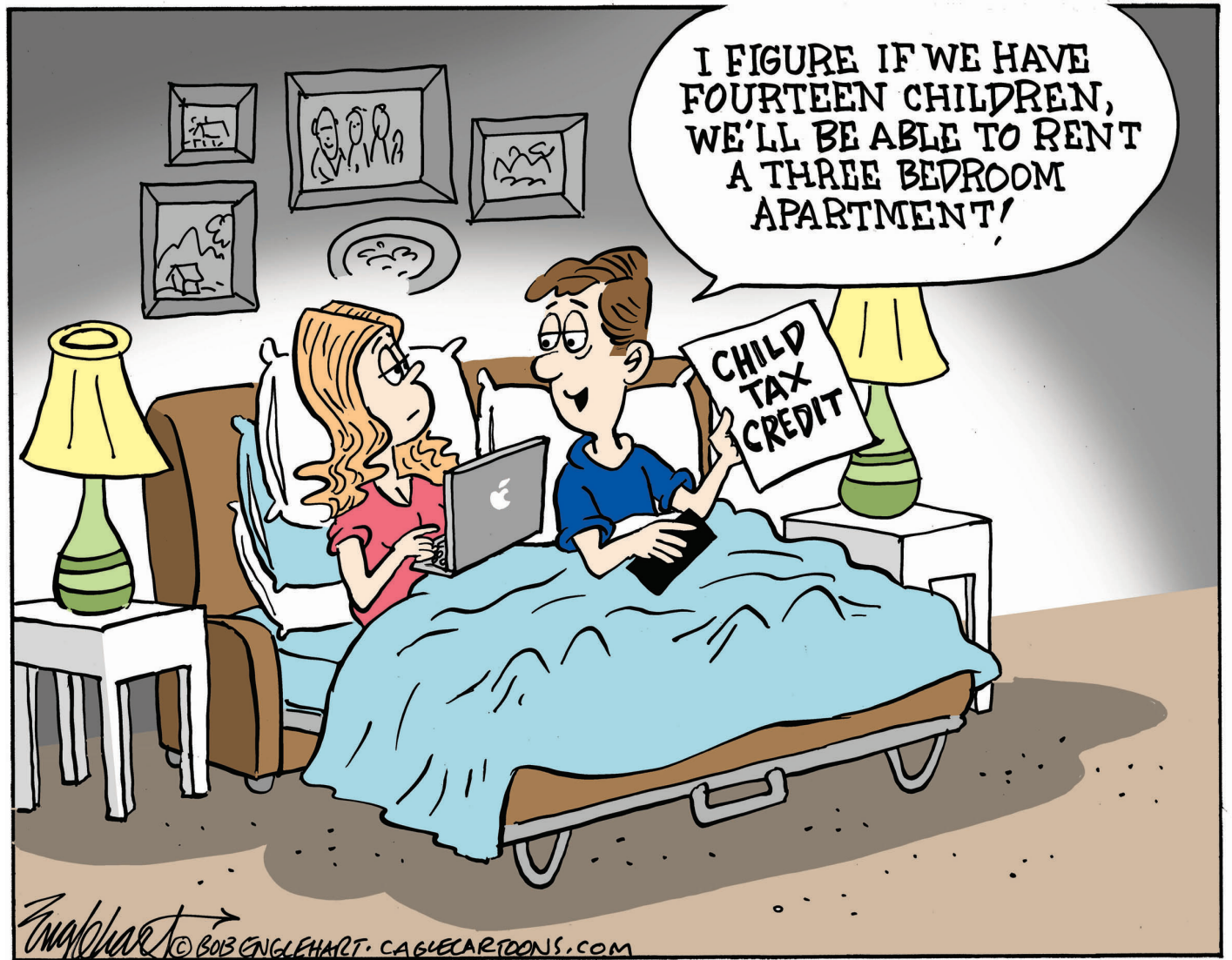
But according to the forest group, just 15% of the waterways are actually labeled as “rivers.” Out of 886 segments, 752 are identified as “streams,” rather than rivers. Another 33 are identified as “gulches,” one “draw” and 17 were “unnamed tributaries.”

The bill would roughly triple the number of wild and scenic rivers across Oregon to protect fish and wildlife, water quality and outdoor recreation values. It also increases wild and scenic river corridors from a quarter-mile to a half-mile on both sides, which adds up to approximately 3 million acres of protected land — an area approximately the size of Connecticut.

Cutting timber along streambanks is a well-known cause of sediment in rivers and a degradation of fish and wildlife habitat. But, the forest council’s president, Travis Joseph, makes a good point that restricting the ability to harvest trees when the state is in a grip of catastrophic wildfires and where thinning of trees can reduce the wildfire risk is detrimental to the bill’s intent.

Sen. Wyden says those claims are addressed in the bill, calling for coordination between state and federal agencies to allow for forest thinning.

But there needs to be some balance here. We can see the Willamette, Deschutes and Santiam rivers gaining some protection against development as they are truly wild and scenic rivers. Even the headwaters of these rivers deserve attention. But intermittent streams are not really rivers and should not be considered as such. We encourage some clarity on the issues, especially how state and federal agencies would be held accountable for working together. And perhaps removing some of the non-flowing streams from the list of this important designation would go a long way to boosting its credibility as a new piece of legislation.



Other Views

Good news in the recycling world

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE



Peter Ferré

Some good news for the world we live in and the state and county we call home.

Recently, Senate Bill 582A: Plastic Pollution and Recycling Modernization Act passed the Oregon Senate! The Recycling Modernization Act will overhaul Oregon’s outdated recycling system by building on local community programs and leveraging the resources of producers to create an innovative system that works for everyone in the state.

The following are some key elements of the bill:

- Responsibility is shared and scaled by bringing packaging producers into Oregon’s recycling system to cover the cost of improvements. Cost to producers will be scaled based on what materials they use and how much they sell in Oregon. This will put responsibility on producers to create packaging that is actually recyclable.
- Increase access to recycling by providing or increasing recycling services to people who did not previously have them, such as rural areas. This will provide additional resources for counties like ours to expand and improve our recycling services.

- Prevents plastic pollution by ensuring collected material is actually recycled and addresses plastic trash that pollutes oceans, rivers and communities.

- One list for the entire state of what can be recycled will eliminate confusion and will create efficiencies in recycling operations across the state.

- Incentivize innovation as producer fees will be higher for nonrecyclable products and those creating more environmental pollution. This helps continue to put pressure on the packaging producers to provide recyclable products.

- Accountability to actual outcomes will be achieved by Department of Environmental Quality permitting and auditing recycling processors and a governor-appointed advisory council who will review statewide producer programs, the statewide collection list and educational resources.

This is wonderful news for the health of our air, water, land and lives and will help set the stage for similar statewide initiatives around the country, (many other states already have, or are in the process of enacting similar legislation).

You can gather more information on this new initiative at: www.ordeq.org/sb582.com, and the actual implementation details will be posted there when available.

On a slightly different reduce, reuse, recycle topic, one of the county’s long-time residents contacted me and asked if I would share some slightly different, but critically important, action points

that pertain to the heat, dryness and fire we are experiencing.

We all feel and see the real impact of the wildfires that are embracing where we live. One of the reasons for those fires is how hot and dry it is, and one of the things that is impact by the heat and dryness is our water supply, (just look at the level of the lake, our rivers and streams).

With that in mind, here are a few things that were shared with me that we each can do to help lessen the amount of water we use:

- Wash dishes in a tub, then use that water on plants, gardens, etc.
- Flush the toilet less often.
- Fix leaky faucets, (inside and outside your house). A single leaky faucet wastes more than 100 gallons of water per year.
- Be conscious/smart about how we water our gardens.
- Invest in low-flow shower and faucet heads, (these are relatively inexpensive and easy to install).
- When it does rain, capture that rainwater for another use, (we installed a 250-gallon tank under our barn’s downspout to collect rainwater to fill our horses’ water tank).

Thank you for all your help in the small things we each can do, to make a collective big difference. If you have other ideas, topics, concerns please feel free to email the Friends of Wallowa County Recycling at www.wallowacountyrecycling@gmail.com.

Peter Ferré is a member of the Wallowa County Recycling Task Force.

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infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

SEND LETTERS TO: editor@wallowa.com, or via mail to Wallowa County Chieftain, 209 NW 1st St. Enterprise, OR 97828