

Wyden defends River Democracy Act in virtual town hall

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**

Capital Press

HERMISTON — Legislation that would add nearly 4,700 miles of wild and scenic rivers across Oregon would have no impact on private land or existing property rights, according to the bill's chief architect, Sen. Ron Wyden.

Wyden, an Oregon Democrat, introduced the River Democracy Act in February based on more than 15,000 public nominations from all corners of the state.

On Tuesday, Aug. 31, Wyden defended the bill during an hour-long virtual town hall. The legislation has faced opposition from rural counties over whether it would add new restrictions on grazing, timber harvest and recreational access.

Speaking from Hermiston in Northeastern Oregon, Wyden pledged the bill would not go forward without "loophole-free, airtight" protections for private property.

Rather, he said it applies only to federal lands and was written specifically not to interfere with existing property, grazing and water rights.

"Protecting existing rights was part of our effort to strike a balance," Wyden said.

If passed, the River Democracy Act would roughly triple the number of wild and scenic rivers in Oregon. The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was established in 1968 to preserve rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values.



Wyden

The bill also widens protective buffers from a quarter mile to a half mile on both sides of designated streams, adding up to 3 million acres of protected land.

Earlier this year, the American Forest Resource Council, a regional timber trade association, conducted its own analysis of waterways nominated for inclusion in the bill. The group found that just 15% were actually labeled as "rivers," with most being identified as streams, gulches, draws or unnamed tributaries.

The AFRC and other opponents have argued this is a misuse of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System — though Wyden countered that intermittent streams are not only valid for protection under the law, but necessary for watersheds.

"I've come to think that there's almost a transportation analogy here that's appropriate," Wyden said. "You don't manage traffic just by building highways.

You need connecting streets, alleyways and sidewalks. The same, in fact, applies to most river systems."

Approximately 2 million Oregonians, or nearly half the state's total population, depend on intermittent streams for clean drinking water, Wyden added.

The bill also requires the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to assess wildfire risks in each wild and scenic river corridor. The agencies would then have up to six years to develop mitigation plans, working with local, state and tribal governments.

The bill would create a \$30 million per year fund to restore and rehabilitate riparian areas that do burn in a wildfire, Wyden said.

"What I see the River Democracy Act doing is creating a multiple-use toolbox so we have this array of tools and we can build on existing law," Wyden said.

Supporters of the bill did speak during the virtual town hall, including representatives of the Nez Perce Tribe and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Kat Brigham, CTUIR chair, said she is pleased with the River Democracy Act, and that it reinforces stream restoration al-

ready undertaken by the tribes.

"It moves us closer to what we are working toward — building, protecting and enhancing cold, clean water, not only for our first foods, but for ourselves," Brigham said.

Others, however, say their questions remain unanswered.

In a memo released shortly after the meeting, the AFRC pushed back against the bill, arguing wild and scenic designations would impose restrictions on forest management and actually increase wildfire risk in the protected stream corridors.

The bill would also "dramatically increase management costs and complexity on-the-ground, create conflicts between user groups, and distract and overload federal agencies already overwhelmed by catastrophic wildfire management and response," the memo states.

Prior to the town hall, the Eastern Oregon Counties Association sent a letter to Wyden outlining similar concerns related to public access, fire prevention and property rights.

Going forward, Wyden said that while people may have differences of opinion, he hopes to keep the lines of communication open to answer questions and provide feedback.

"I'm committed to getting this right," he said.

— LOCAL BRIEFING —

Rally planned Thursday, Sept. 16 in Baker City to address vaccine mandate

An "Eastern Oregon Liberty Rally" supporting health care workers, teachers and other employees subject to Oregon Gov. Kate Brown's mandate for COVID-19 vaccinations is set for Thursday, Sept. 16 in Baker City.

Vehicles will gather at 5:45 p.m. at Windmill Lane east of Interstate 84 and travel west on Campbell Street, south on Main Street, west on Broadway Street, north on 10th Street, then east on Campbell Street to Geiser-Pollman Park.

At the Powder River Pavilion in the park, constitutional speaker Scott Stuart will address the audience, as will Baker City Mayor Kerry McQuisten, who is seeking the Republican nomination in the Oregon gubernatorial race.

Food and beverages will be provided.

Long, heavy load will delay traffic on Highway 86 later this week

Drivers on Highway 86 east of Baker City should expect delays of up to 20 minutes starting at 10 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 15, through 5 a.m. on Thursday, Sept. 16 as a trailer hauls a large electrical transformer.

The trailer is 16 feet wide and 185 feet long, and its load weighs almost 422,000 pounds, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The trailer will travel at between 25 and 50 mph. Motorists should expect pilot cars, flaggers and traffic control crews while the load is on the highway.

To evenly distribute the unusually heavy load, the trailer will be in the center of the highway at times, depending on the road width, according to ODOT.

STORM

Continued from A1

Owen said that although the city's current development codes require that property owners keep stormwater from flowing off their properties, she's not sure what requirements, if any, were in place when the Oliver's property was developed.

"We're looking at what options we may have," Owen said.

She said she's willing to talk with the Oliver's about a "partnership" that could include seeding grass or other vegetation, or possibly terracing parts of the property to make debris flows less likely.

"It would be nice if we had some cooperation with

the property owner," Owen said. "This is costing us time and money."

Sharon Oliver said on Monday morning that the storm was "terrible."

"Most of it washed down to the other neighbors," Oliver said. "It's sad but you can't do nothing about it."

She said they cleaned the catch basin at the base of the hill but it wasn't able to capture all the debris.

"It's a mess," Oliver said. "It was pretty bad up here. I opened the door there and man, the wind was just so strong, it just blew right in just about and rain at the same time. It was pretty bad, really."

Owen said the city had to pay overtime to workers Friday and over the weekend to scrape debris from streets.

Fisk said the city dis-



Samantha O'Conner/Baker City Herald

A mixture of mud and livestock manure flowed across several streets in east Baker City on Friday evening, Sept. 10. Here, a backhoe was used Saturday morning to clear debris from streets.

patched a pair of two-person crews Friday evening to clear debris from catch basins and help the water

drain more quickly.

He said crews closed Birch Street between Court and Washington avenues

due to thick mud on the street. Fisk said some drivers were going through the mud and splashing residents' yards.

On Saturday, workers used backhoes to push debris into piles so it could be hauled away. Fisk said the city hauled at least 60 cubic yards of material. The city will need to periodically sweep the streets throughout this fall to try to remove as much debris as possible, he said.

Flooded intersections

Although the storm's biggest and messiest effects were on the east side, the heavy rain also overwhelmed storm drains in several other spots in town, including the intersections of Fourth and Broadway streets, and Main and Campbell streets.

Both intersections are prone to flooding after downpours, Fisk said.

He said city crews will be working this week to clear many clogged catch basins.

Owen said the situation would have been worse had the storm happened later in the year, when leaves are falling from trees.

Outside the city

Baker County Roadmaster Noodle Perkins said Monday morning that he hadn't received any reports of county roads sustaining significant damage.

County crews did remove some fallen trees in the Sumpter Valley area, he said.

Samantha O'Conner of the Baker City Herald contributed to this story.

WOLVES

Continued from A1

In a letter sent Monday, Sept. 13 to ODFW Director Curt Melcher, Ash wrote that the nonlethal measures several ranchers have taken, including firing guns to try to frighten wolves away from cattle, are failing.

"The financial burden, physical strain and exhaustion they are going through in what has become a fruitless effort to keep the Lookout Mountain Pack from killing their animals is extreme," Ash wrote. "I believe the most humane way of dealing with this problem

wolf pack is to remove the adult breeding pair that are teaching the negative learned behavior of targeting cattle to their offspring."

The most recent confirmed wolf attack happened last week, when ODFW employees found a dead 600-pound calf the morning of Sept. 9 on a 2,800-acre pasture that includes private and public land.

Biologists who examined the carcass estimated the calf died the night of Sept. 7. The carcass was partially consumed but most of the hide was intact, according to an ODFW investigation report.

Biologists skinned the

carcass and found numerous pre-mortem tooth scrapes on the calf's rear right leg and on both front legs, along with tissue damage up to two inches deep.

The location, size and number of tooth scrapes, and the severity of the tissue damage, are both consistent with wolf attacks on calves, according to the report.

Melcher issued a permit on July 31 that allows ranchers who have lost cattle to kill up to four subadult wolves from the pack. The permit also allows the ranchers to designate someone else to kill wolves, and ODFW employees can also kill wolves under the permit.

ODFW employees shot and killed two wolf pups from the lack on Aug. 1. No other wolves have been killed since, according to ODFW.

The permit was set to expire Aug. 21, but Melcher extended the permit through Sept. 14 after wolves killed a calf on Aug. 19. It's not clear whether Melcher will again extend the permit, or change the parameters to allow the killing of adult wolves, including the breeding pair.

Ash included with his letter a list of the wolf attacks on livestock this summer.

The two most recent, a calf killed in late August and the calf killed last week, both belonged to the Phillips

Ranch, according to Ash's letter.

Wolves have also killed one calf belonging to the Bloomer Ranch, and two calves owned by Deward and Kathy Thompson.

In his letter to Melcher, Ash wrote that in his estimation the balance between grazing and predation is skewed toward the latter in the Lookout Mountain area.

"Wolves are pursuing cattle as a food source rather than hunting their natural prey — elk and deer, which are plentiful in the area," Ash wrote. "Wolves can spend much less energy killing a cow than chasing an elk or deer."

COUNCIL

Continued from A1

Cannon said he will propose specific uses for the money during the meeting.

Potential projects include leasing a property near Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative that serves as a firefighter training center.

The city could also upgrade its financial accounting software.

That "gives us the ability to do more contactless

billing and more contactless payments so that people can feel safer as they reach out to the city and to pay their utility bills," Cannon said.

City Council vacancy

Councilors will also discuss the vacancy on the seven-member Council created by Lynette Perry's resignation in August.

Four people have applied to serve the remainder of Perry's term, which continues through the end of 2022.

• Randy Daugherty, a

former City Council member

- Thomas Hughes
- Michael Meyer
- Boston Colton

Also on the agenda for the meeting is an update from Cannon about his discussions with attorneys regarding the city either filing, or joining, a lawsuit against Oregon Gov. Kate Brown challenging her executive orders requiring health care workers and school employees to be vaccinated, and requiring students and school staff to wear face masks.

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