

Wyden: River Democracy Act could get vote in 2022

By MICHAEL KOHN

The (Bend) Bulletin

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said Tuesday, Nov. 9 that a plan to protect thousands of miles of rivers and streams in Oregon from development could become law next year.

Wyden — meeting in Shevlin Park with students who urged the senator to get the legislation passed — said the River Democracy Act could be passed in 2022 after the dust settles from President Joe Biden's infrastructure bill.

If passed, the act would add nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The river system is a special designation that protects rivers and develops them for tourism, in the same way that a national park develops a designated area of land.

"My sense is when we get done with Build Back Better, ... when that gets done, I think there will be an effort on both sides of the aisle to lay out a schedule for the rest of the Congress and into 2022," said Wyden. "I am pushing hard to make sure that public lands is high up on that schedule, that is what I am pushing for action in 2022."



Tye Krueger, left, owner of Confluence Fly Shop in Bend, listens to Sen. Ron Wyden in Shevlin Park on Tuesday, Nov. 9.

The act, which was introduced in Congress in February, could help business owners in Central Oregon, particularly those involved in fishing and tourism.

Tye Krueger, owner of the Confluence Fly Shop in Bend, urged Wyden to pass the legislation as soon as possible,

saying that passage of the act is critical to the protection of fish spawning and rearing habitat in Central Oregon.

"Companies like mine cannot thrive without healthy, self-sustaining populations of wild steelhead, salmon and trout. These species are in desperate need of our help,"

said Krueger.

Krueger handed Wyden two thick binders containing letters of support for the River Democracy Act from students, advocates and local businesses in Central Oregon.

Wyden also spoke with students from Cascades

Academy and Pacific Crest Middle School.

Lea Heraeus, a sixth grader at Cascades Academy, said she and her classmates were meeting Wyden to share what they love about rivers and express the need to protect them from habitat loss.

"My hope is that there won't be more dams built, which makes it harder for fish to travel upstream and downstream. I wish it would be easier for them," said Heraeus, adding that she enjoys spending time watching wildlife that inhabits river areas.

Cascades Academy eighth grader Maeve Wilcox, a kayaker, said she wants the act passed in order to protect river and stream riparian areas.

"They provide essential habitat for native species of plants and animals, and I hope no dams are built, and no mining activities that make the river unhealthy," she said.

The act includes sections of several rivers in Central Oregon, including the Deschutes and Fall rivers, Whychus Creek, the North Fork of the Crooked River, and Tumalo Creek.

Oregon currently has 2,173 miles designated in

the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, but there is plenty of room to add more — statewide, Oregon is home to 110,994 miles of rivers and streams.

Wyden, with the sounds of Tumalo Creek gurgling behind him, said the bill is about protecting clean drinking water, reducing wildfire risk and helping small businesses in the recreation industry.

"It's a big economic multiplier for our state," Wyden said. "The fact is we can recreate and achieve other important goals, like reducing fire risk, simultaneously. The two aren't mutually exclusive. We can do both."

Rivers that fall under the wild and scenic designation receive assessments from federal land managers for wildfire risks. That has become more critical in recent years for Central Oregon as drought keeps forests in tinderbox conditions.

Wyden said the bill was created in Oregon with river nominations from thousands of Oregonians and is not a Washington, D.C., creation.

"It was written here in our state ... in this community and scores of others," said Wyden. "This is vintage Oregon; this is the way we do it."

COVID-19 recovery slows, but no sign of a new spike

By GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

Oregon's rebound from the delta variant spike in COVID-19 has slowed, with hospitalizations remaining high through February, a new state forecast reported Thursday, Nov. 11.

The number of people in Oregon hospitalized with COVID-19 will stay above 400 statewide through Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's, according to the forecast from Oregon Health & Science University.

Dr. Peter Graven, director of the OHSU Office of Advanced Analytics, said due to the availability of vaccines, Oregon won't experience the kind of surge in infections that swept the state last winter.

"At this time a year ago, we were going straight up," Graven said Friday, Nov. 12.

The Oregon Health Authority reported Wednesday, Nov. 10 that 67% of all Oregonians — including children — have been vaccinated. Among adults, 72% are vaccinated.

The health authority reports that only Gilliam, Grant, Malheur and Lake counties have less than half of adults vaccinated.

Seven counties have vaccinated more than two-thirds of

all residents, including children: Lincoln, Multnomah, Benton, Hood River, Washington, Deschutes and Lane counties.

OHSU forecasts that hospitalizations will dip under 200 per day by the beginning of February. That is two months longer than OHSU forecast last month and a month longer than forecast just last week.

The Oregon Health Authority reported Wednesday that 509 Oregonians remained hospitalized with COVID-19. That's less than half the number at the peak of the latest spike, when 1,178 were hospitalized on Sept. 1.

The virus continues to be the major reason for patients to be in intensive care units. COVID-19 patients make up 22% of those currently in the state's intensive care units, up from 18% last week, OHSU reported.

The overwhelming number of new infections, hospitalizations and deaths are among the estimated 20% of Oregonians who are neither vaccinated nor have been previously exposed to the virus.

Graven said that leaves a "substantial pool" of unprotected people who account for over 90% of COVID-19 cases requiring hospitalization and 99% of deaths.

But the virus is less likely to find large numbers of unvaccinated people to cause a major outbreak.

"There are more and more infections occurring and immunity is building up," Graven said. "As that happens, it becomes harder and harder to generate a surge in hospitalizations."

With boosters now available, the possible waning of the lasting power of vaccinations is less of a factor.

"I'm not seeing any data that tell me we're going to get a surge driven by breakthrough infections," Graven said.

OHA reported Wednesday that 13% of previously vaccinated Oregonians have received booster shots.

One positive side of pandemic precautions has been a second straight year of lower-than-expected seasonal flu cases.

OHSU reported fewer than 13 flu cases a week are being detected in Oregon. In a typical flu season, more than 100 cases are reported per week. Public health officials have credited the low numbers to the high rate of mask-wearing, social distancing and other safeguards against COVID-19 that also suppress spread of the flu.

La Grande football players accused of racist taunts

By DAVIS CARBAUGH

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — The La Grande High School football team is under fire for alleged racism during a state playoff matchup.

An article from The Oregonian was published on Thursday, Nov. 11, describing allegations that members of the La Grande football team hurled racial slurs at Gladstone High School players throughout the first-round matchup at Eastern Oregon University on Nov. 5, a game La Grande won 34-12.

The ending of the game was atypical in a number of ways. Gladstone was penalized after an argument between the team's head coach Cam Sommer and officials on the field with about a minute left in regulation. The game was paused for roughly five minutes as coaches and parents on the Gladstone side of the field argued with officials. Upon time expiring, the Gladstone sideline walked off without shaking hands or confronting the La Grande sideline.

This came as a result of what Gladstone players in The Oregonian article claim was a constant use of racial slurs by La Grande players during the competition.

Ricky White, a Gladstone senior, told The Oregonian that the racial slurs were



Andrew Cutler/The (La Grande) Observer

La Grande quarterback Logan Williams runs past defenders along the sideline during a first-round state playoff matchup against Gladstone on Friday, Nov. 5, 2021.

a problem from the start of the game.

"Every Black person on our team heard (the slur) all game besides the one who was injured in the first quarter," White told The Oregonian.

The La Grande School District released a statement on Nov. 12, which stated that the investigation is ongoing at this point. The school district is working with the Gladstone School District and the Oregon School Activities Association to get to the bottom of the issue and find facts on what transpired during the game.

"It is extremely concerning that our athletes have been accused of using racist language during the playoff

game and our school district will continue to look into this situation," La Grande Superintendent George Mendoza said in the press release. "The impact of racially charged language creates a great deal of strain in relationships and impacts a person's sense of safety and belonging. Our goal and intention is to ensure every student-athlete feels safe, valued, understood and protected."

The statement noted that both school districts and OSAA will continue working together on the matter. The entities involved are looking at game video and questioning players, officials and the chain crew to get more information.

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