

Groups sign letter backing the River Democracy Act

Signers include conservation groups, outdoor organizations

BY MICHAEL KOHN
Oregon Capital Bureau

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 al-



Jayson Jacoby/Baker City Herald, File

Rock Creek in the Elkhorn Mountains west of Haines is among more than a dozen streams that would be added to the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers Act list under the River Democracy Act sponsored by Oregon's U.S. senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley.

lows 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 sedimentation 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."

Actor Jack Black, family, visit Wallowa Lake

BY JEFF BUDLONG

Wallowa County Chieftain JOSEPH — "School of Rock" star Jack Black proved to be a quick study when it came to fishing lessons during his weekend trip to the Wallowa Lake Marina.

Black and his family were in Wallowa County, where they dined and enjoyed a day on the lake with the help of marina staff.

"(Store manager) Duncan Christman met him down at the (Glacier Grill) and offered to have him come out on a pontoon boat with us the next day," said Brandon Keeling, who is the Wallowa Lake Marina Inc. vice president. "We took them around the lake, we took them fishing and they went swimming."

Black was there with his family — which included his parents, siblings and aunts and uncles — because his father had previously visited the area with a hiking group. A member of the group recently died, leading to the Blacks choosing Wallowa County as a place to come together as a family.

Keeling said the entire party picked up on fishing fast after he gave a quick lesson with Black snagging the biggest rainbow trout of the group and his father a close second.

The entire family reeled in at least one fish with Black's father snagging the first within 30 seconds of dipping his line.

And, yes, both Black and his father cleaned the fish they kept.

"The family was absolutely wonderful and a joy to be around," Keeling said. "He was out here picking up kids and taking pictures with everybody. He is out here spending hours out of his day doing photo ops around the community."

A quick search of Facebook reveals the numerous Wallowa County residents and visitors who got to snap a picture with the actor. Keeling credited Black for his down-to-earth nature and willingness to engage with everyone who approached.

Black isn't the first celebrity to take in the impressive nature views the area has to offer. "Napoleon Dynamite" star Jon Heder has hiked in the area, but did not make it to the marina.

The experience is something that the marina's staff, including Wallowa Lake Marina Inc. President Casey Barstad's daughter, Jaiden, won't forget anytime soon.

"It made our week pretty dang awesome," Keeling said.

Hotline

Continued from A5

The Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) team from White Bird Clinic has been operating for more than 30 years, and it's only getting more attention over time.

The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline was authorized by Congress back in 2005. It now has 180 independently operated and funded local call centers. The national network also includes 38 call and chat programs and three that are specifically for Spanish speakers.

Lines for Life is just one

component of the national program. The nonprofit's counterpart down in Marion County, for example, is called Northwest Human Services.

Starting July 16, all of these call centers share the 988 phone number. Anyone calling will be routed to the closest one based on area code.

The goal will be to give someone a person to talk with, and if needed, someone to talk with in person. If necessary they can also provide someone a place to go.

It's an ambitious program that will be paid for by the federal government. It's expected to cost taxpayers \$282 million in 2022.



Tires LES SCHWAB

Celebrating **70** Years!

GET THERE Safely

STOP BY OR SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT ONLINE
LesSchwab.com

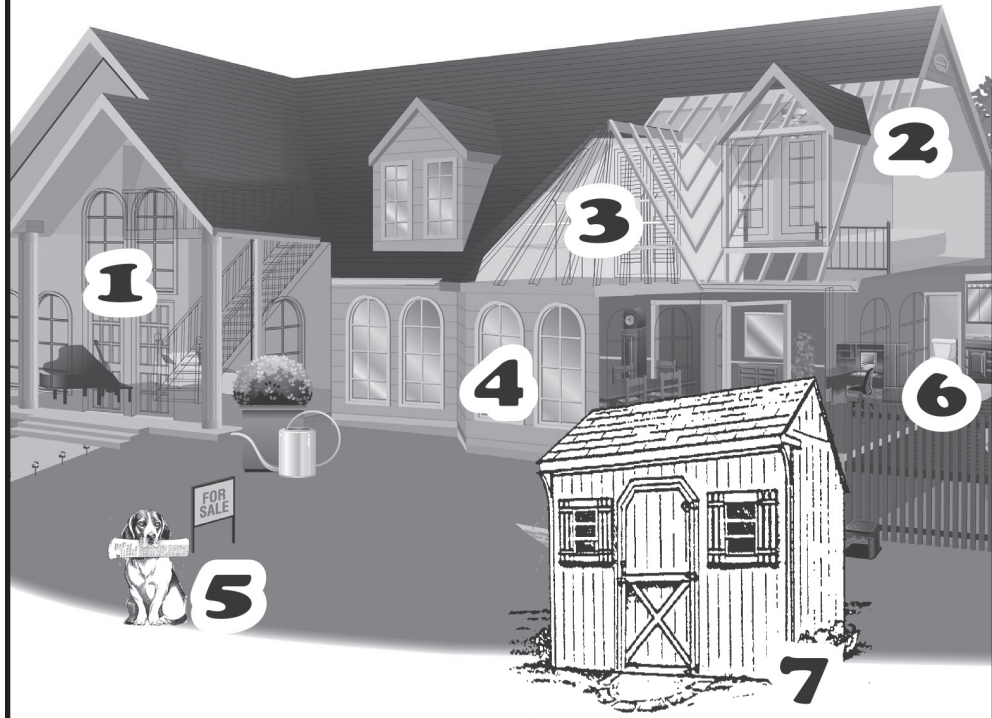


Lew Brothers Tire Service

541-523-3679

210 Bridge St. Baker City, OR

DREAM HOME



Insurance from
State Farm
Gregg Hinrichsen
1722 Campbell
541-523-7778 **1**

Electrical By:
Eastern Oregon Electric, Inc.
Brent Joseph, owner
CCB 151441
541-523-9176 **2**

Lumber by:
Miller's Lumber & Truss
Lighting & Cabinets
3815 Pochontas
541-523-6404 **3**

Vinyl Windows by:
NeHi Enterprises
2122 10th Street
541-523-6008
ccb#155399 **4**

Paper Delivered by
Baker City Herald
PO Box 807
541-523-3673
Call to have your home related business added to this ad monthly **5**

Garage Door by:
NeHi Enterprises
2122 10th Street
541-523-6008
ccb#155399 **6**

Storage Building from
Countryside Sheds
www.countrysidesheds.com
Shop Display:
10505 S. McAlister Rd., Island City
541-663-0246 **7**



Do you have a business to help our readers build or maintain a "dream" home?
Call 541-523-3673 to ask about advertising in this space!