

# Have your say about plans for homeless camps in Bend

If Bend wants homeless people to not be homeless, that takes effort. It takes access to medical care, food and services to help them find more permanent housing.

A critical step in doing that successfully is transitional housing. And the city doesn't have enough. This week the Bend City Council is scheduled to vote on a "safe parking" plan to allow more. It would essentially permit parking lots or other spaces to function as homeless camps — with restrictions.

The plan would allow temporary camping for people if they cannot find permanent shelter elsewhere. Up to six vehicles or moveable shelters such as tents would be allowed with permission of the property owner or lessee. The city could specifically allow more than six. There are requirements for sanitation facilities and more, such as providing notice to neighbors. The proposed code is much more detailed (it is available on the city's website under the council's Wednesday agenda).

This is not completely new for Bend. There are already two locations in Bend operating in a similar manner under COVID-19 emergency orders. But if councilors approve the change, it seems likely that more locations would provide transitional housing.

Expect some bumps. At the very least, neighbors or neighborhoods may complain if a nearby lot is used. The notification requirement is only

for immediate neighbors, not to neighborhood associations. The city prides itself on using neighborhood associations to gather feedback and share information. Why not require that neighborhood associations be notified? Or is that excessive?

The city did put some teeth in its ordinance in case it had problems with a location or with individual campers. It included enforcement power to allow it to prohibit such transitional housing on any property if it constitutes a nuisance or other threat to public welfare. A property owner can revoke permission at any time and any person "must leave the property immediately after permission has been revoked." The proposal also includes giving the city the power to revoke permission for an individual if the city "has a reasonable suspicion that the person has violated any applicable law, ordinance, rule, guideline or agreement, or that the activity constitutes a nuisance or other threat to the public welfare." Implementing any such enforcement action could get tricky.

It seems likely this council will approve this policy or something very close to it. If you would like to influence it, let councilors know before their meeting Wednesday. You can reach them at [council@bendoregon.gov](mailto:council@bendoregon.gov).

# Make the bus to the wilderness a reality

The Cascade Lakes Highway out past Mount Bachelor doesn't get traffic jams so much as it has had cars jammed along the highway — parking where they aren't supposed to.

This year, because of the new U.S. Forest Service requirement to grab one of the limited permits to access the wilderness, it may not be as much of a problem. But parking at the trailheads has tended to fill up. What if you could ride the bus?

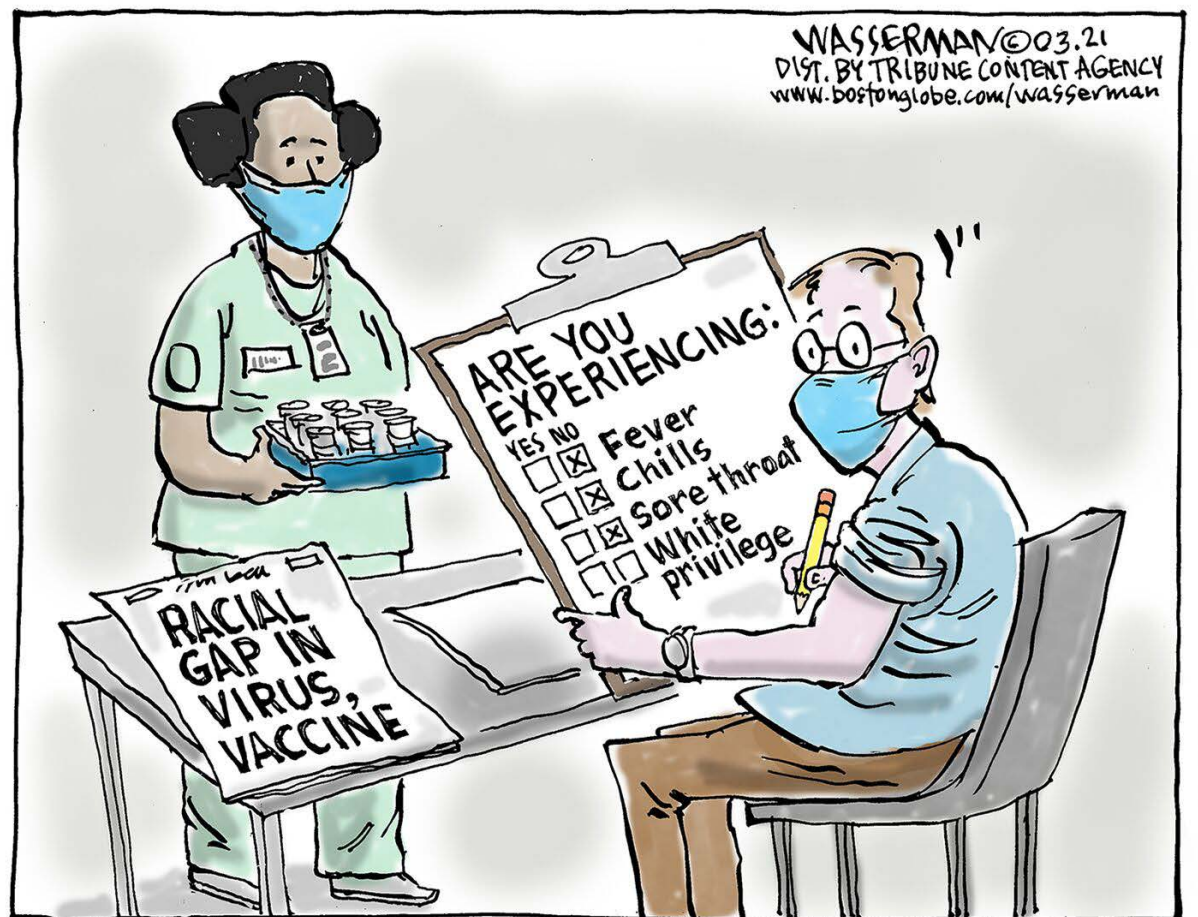
Cascades East Transit, with some help from Mt. Bachelor, is trying to make that happen. CET is working with the Deschutes National Forest to pilot a new summer shuttle service in June 2022 along the Cascades Highway.

Stops, frequency of the busses and so on have not been decided yet.

But the goal CET told us is to stop at sno-parks and "stop at all major trailhead destinations to transport hikers, walkers, tourists, and mountain bikers and reduce single occupancy vehicles within the National Forest." CET got a grant to pilot the project. There may be three or four bus runs in the morning and three or four bus runs in the afternoon and evening.

Mt. Bachelor kicked in \$25,000 to help make it happen. Thank you, Mt. Bachelor. A regional transportation group, the Bend Metropolitan Planning Organization, is scheduled to talk about the plan Tuesday.

Want less traffic? Ride the bus. It's not the best advice during the pandemic. But life will get back to more normal, and this program makes riding the bus a more potent option.



# No, we are not moving fast enough on water

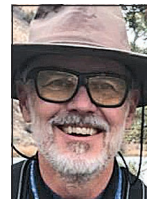
BY YANCY LIND

The Bulletin recently ran a column titled "Central Oregon Crossroads: Are we moving fast enough to protect our waterways?" I always appreciate water articles and commentary, but the column did not address numerous local issues. Here's a brief, partial overview.

Irrigators use somewhere between 85% and 90% of local water supplies. That water is mostly diverted out of rivers and supplied via canals dug into porous lava rock with a significant percentage lost to seepage and evaporation. Importantly, only part of that seepage returns to the aquifer and only after first reducing flows in a river.

Primarily at taxpayer expense, main canals are being piped, but this is a process that will take decades at an estimated cost of approximately \$1 billion. There are no plans to significantly pipe the "lateral" canals that transmit water from the main canals to irrigators.

While some irrigators have installed efficient irrigation systems, many have not. For example, Central Oregon Irrigation District, the largest of the local irrigation districts, has a System Improvement Plan, which states that 25% of their "patrons" still use flood irrigation. This is a highly inefficient distribution method first developed in Mesopotamia over 5,000 years ago. Further, significant end spills (excess water running out the end of canals) continue.



Lind

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End spills and agricultural runoff introduce pollution and raise water temperature in local rivers, especially the Crooked River. A water quality study released by Portland Gas and Electric, operators of the dam that creates Lake Billy Chinook, identified pollution in the Crooked River as a major source of degraded water quality in the lake and the Lower Deschutes.

Deschutes County tax policy can also be a source of water waste. Land categorized as exclusive farm use can get dramatic tax breaks even if the land has essentially no agricultural use or value. This leads some landowners to "water rocks," as the saying goes, simply to use their water, maintain their water right and receive a tax break.

In the county, "exempt" wells can be drilled with no metering or monitoring. I have such a well, and while the rules say I can only water half of an acre, there is no measurement of how much water I pump and there are no usage costs. Exempt wells are a small part of the problem, but essentially all new development in the basin uses groundwater.

In a 2013 report, the U.S. Geological Survey stated that local groundwater has been dropping more than one foot a year since at least the mid-1990s, primarily due to a drying climate. This rate has certainly increased

as drought conditions become the norm, glaciers disappear, the snowpack shrinks and population growth increases demands on a diminishing resource.

It may not be obvious yet, but we are already in a water crisis that will undoubtedly get worse. While the catastrophic ecological damage in the Upper Deschutes above Bend may be partially ameliorated due to recent changes by irrigators required by the Endangered Species Act, the Middle Deschutes below Bend, the Crooked River and Whychus Creek remain on life support due to low water levels and elevated temperatures.

As readers of The Bulletin already know, farmers in North Unit Irrigation District around Madras have some of the most productive farmland in Central Oregon but have junior water rights, and this year they will again have to leave some of their lands out of production due to lack of water. What you may not know is that many domestic wells are also going dry and local cities have limits on their ability to pump for municipal use. A shrinking aquifer also impacts local springs, which nourish wildlife and recharge rivers.

Water availability, quality, allocation, usage and monitoring are important issues in Central Oregon today — and will likely be critical in the foreseeable future. Without public demand for reform and strong political leadership, however, solutions will not be implemented.

— Yancy Lind lives in Tumalo and blogs at [coinformedangler.org](http://coinformedangler.org).

## Letters policy

We welcome your letters. Letters should be limited to one issue, contain no more than 250 words and include the writer's signature, phone number and address for verification. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject poetry, personal attacks, form letters, letters submitted elsewhere and those appropriate for other sections of The Bulletin. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

## Guest columns

Your submissions should be between 550 and 650 words; they must be signed; and they must include the writer's phone number and address for verification. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those submitted elsewhere. Locally submitted columns alternate with national columnists and commentaries. Writers are limited to one letter or guest column every 30 days.

## How to submit

Please address your submission to either My Nickel's Worth or Guest Column and mail, fax or email it to The Bulletin. Email submissions are preferred.

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# What information should the government collect about race?

BY RONALD M. SMITH

I would like to expand on and reinforce Valarie Anderson's heartfelt perspective in her March 11 guest column. It is true, as Anderson notes, that all humans on Earth share around 99.9% of the same DNA, meaning that their genomes have nearly all the same genetic codes in the same locations. But the variation in the remaining one tenth of a percent, equaling around 300 million genetic codes, is very consequential. It accounts for all of the observable and internal differences among people. Eye color, hair color and texture, skin color, height, allergies, body shape and intelligence are all common examples of these variable genetic traits.

Where does variability come from? It is inherited. For every individual,

traits came from a mother and father blended into a new genome. The parents passed along genetic material they inherited from previous generations stretching back thousands of years. Today we can glimpse our own patterns of inheritance by submitting a DNA sample to commercial companies like Ancestry, 23andMe, or CRI Genetics, to name a few. Through this kind of analysis we can learn where our ancestors came from geographically and



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about some of the traits that we inherited from them.

Thousands of human genomes from all over the world have been sequenced and analyzed and one finding is clear: Some human variations are not homogeneously distributed. They arose through evolution in isolated populations during the great disper-

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sion of humans out of Africa beginning some 50,000 to 60,000 years ago. Humans alive today have traces of these ancestral populations, including for some of us, even traces from Neanderthal forebearers. To varying degrees we still carry genetic variations contributed by these distant relatives. I can enjoy the milk in my latte because a milk tolerance genetic mutation occurred and spread in one of my ancestral lineages about 8,000 years ago.

Now let's tie this information back to the concept of race as used in common parlance. I agree with Ms. Anderson that the concept is poorly defined, lacks a sound biological foundation and has been politicized into total uselessness. But its demise does not imply that there are no meaningful differences in ancestral populations.

*I prefer the French model where no such self-report information is collected by government institutions at all. If this "universalist" approach was applied here, every citizen would simply be considered an American — emphasizing unity.*

Though the historical study of human population genetics is still in its infancy, the increasingly wide-scale use of genome sequencing is sure to reveal many important details about our family trees. But one thing is already certain from a genetics perspective: Skin color is irrelevant (except insofar as a high level of melanin is protective for direct sun exposure).

As for the collection of information about race, I prefer the French model where no such self-report information is collected by government institutions at all. If this "universalist" approach was applied here, every citizen would simply be considered an American — emphasizing unity. Such a change would go a long way toward reducing the negative effects of identity politics.

For a deeper dive into ancestral populations and genomic research, I recommend Charles Murray's book, "Human Diversity: The Biology of Gender, Race and Class" (2020) and my own textbook, "A Field Guide to Humans: The Natural History of a Singular Species, Second Edition" (2020).

— Ronald M. Smith lives in Bend. He has a B.A. in the earth sciences and an M.A. in experimental psychology. He spent more than 30 years working in education.