

ODFW funding task force to recommend bottle, income tax

By Claire Withycombe
Capital Bureau

A task force convened to suggest new sustainable funding sources for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has settled on two recommended options that each take the form of tax surcharges — one on income and one on beverage containers.

The department is operating on a biennium budget of about \$370 million. A third of that comes from hunting and fishing licenses, a third from the federal government, and the rest for various state funds.

The agency has faced a growing cash flow problem, according to a 2015 audit by the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. The task force identified an additional funding need of \$79.9 million per budget biennium, much of which would go to conservation efforts, according to a draft of the task force's report to the Legislature, released this past week.

Task force chair Mark Labhart will present the surcharge ideas to two committees during the Legislature's interim session next week.

In a vote at its meeting Friday, the group was split in terms of prioritizing either of the suggested surcharges.

The suggested bottle tax would be 2.02 percent applied to the cost of a drink at wholesale on those containers subject to the state's bottle bill on Jan. 1.

"This is intended to be applied to the cost of a beverage, rather than as an addition to the beverage container redemption deposit for those containers subject to the bottle Bill," the draft report states.

It's estimated that the bottle tax could generate \$61.5 million in revenue in



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist releases a sterile tiger trout into diamond lake to prey on invasive fish. A task force has recommended two possible sources of additional funding for the department.

2017-19, as the tax would not take effect until Jan. 1, 2018, and \$82 million in 2019-21, according to estimates prepared for the task force.

The other suggestion the task force is making would be a 0.7 percent surcharge on individual tax returns, with an exemption for people who earn less than \$20,000 per year.

The task force decided to leave open for discussion how to retain a "base" of Oregonians who pay fees to hunt and fish; suggestions have so far included tax credits or exemptions for people who have hunting or fishing licenses.

The income tax surcharge could generate \$60 million in the 2017-19 biennium and \$92.9 million in the 2019-21

biennium, according to estimates that were prepared for the task force. Those estimates take into account the possible exemptions for people earning less than \$20,000 and people with fish and wildlife licenses.

Jim Martin, a task force member and former ODFW employee, who now directs the Berkeley Conservation Institute at Pure Fishing, said Friday that the taxes would be "politically difficult," but the task force had to communicate the idea that failing to fix the agency's "broken" funding model could undermine "Oregon's livability and future economy."

In order for either suggestion to take hold, lawmakers would have to pass legislation or refer the matter to voters in the form of a ballot measure.

Report shows Malheur County rich with gold mine potential

By Amanda Peacher
Oregon Public Broadcasting

A new report from Oregon's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries shows that an area that conservationists want to protect has a rich vein of mining potential.

Malheur County has a lot of gold, silver and uranium, says DOGAMI spokeswoman Ali Ryan Hansen.

"There's enough of it that it might be economically feasible to develop a mining operation there," said Hansen.

But Malheur County is also the home to the Owyhee Canyonlands, which conservationists want to see protected, in part, from new mining.

The minerals report from the state comes two months after Democratic senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden introduced a bill in Congress that would block new mines in the Owyhee.

The Southeastern Oregon Mineral Withdrawal and Economic Preservation and Development Act would also block oil and gas drilling. The bill hasn't moved further than

introduction in the Senate. Hansen pointed out that high levels of mineral deposits doesn't mean that new mines are easily approved.

"Even though we have determined that there's high potential for gold, silver (and) other kinds of resources out there, there are so many other things that determine whether a mine can make a go of it," Hansen said.

According to DOGAMI, seven significant mines are permitted in Malheur County. Most are industrial or gold mines.

Conservationists have lobbied President Obama to create an Owyhee National Monument in Malheur County. Many local residents oppose that designation.

The President has given no indication that he plans to designate a monument in Oregon before the end of his term.

Grant County also showed high potential for precious metals — gold and silver — and base metals — copper, lead and zinc — and chromite.

The Blue Mountain Eagle contributed to this report.

GRANT

Fall



PREMIUM FLOORING FOR A MORE ELEGANT AND BEAUTIFUL HOME

- Rugs & Carpets
- Vinyl & Laminate
- Hardwood & Tile
- Cabinets
- Counter Tops



Beats Home Depot's prices on cabinets!



The Floor Store
140 E Main St.
John Day
541-575-1111

FREE ESTIMATES!



CLARK + KENSINGTON

Nydam's
ACE Hardware
The helpful place.

Tools • Paint • Home Decor • Hunting • Outdoor • Plumbing & more

Friendly service, quality products, great prices.

652 W Main St., John Day • 541-575-0549



Leave the plumbing to the experts.

CALL GARY TEEL FOR FAST, RELIABLE REPAIRS OR UPDATES.

BEHIND EVERY PROJECT IS A *True Value*

161 E Main St., John Day
541-575-0632
Open 7 days a week

CCB#205644



MISSING THE FINAL PIECE TO YOUR PERFECT LIVING SPACE?

Great deals on TVs starting at \$179⁹⁹

DP HOME ENTERTAINMENT


139 E Main St., John Day
541-575-1637
Mon-Fri 9am-5:30pm
Sat 10am-4pm • Closed Sun

GRANT COUNTY BUILDING SUPPLY

- tools & hardware
- lawn & garden
- building & lumber
- home improvement



124 N Clark • Canyon City • 541-575-3550



TIDEWATER



CONTRACTORS, INC.

Asphalt • Redi-Mix • Gravel • Excavation • Driveways

541-932-4888

JOHN DAY, OREGON