

Wyden, Merkley introduce Owyhee wilderness bill

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both D-Oregon, on Nov. 7 introduced legislation that would designate more than 1.1 million acres of the Owyhee River Canyonlands in Malheur County as wilderness.

The area is important to the local economy because it includes significant grazing land, recreation destinations and other assets. Recent research there has focused on preserving sage grouse and other wildlife habitat, and native grasses.

The Malheur County Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act — largely a result of collaboration among ranchers, conservation groups, university researchers and others — aims to maintain and improve rangeland, preserve grazing, and protect areas important to wildlife and recreation.

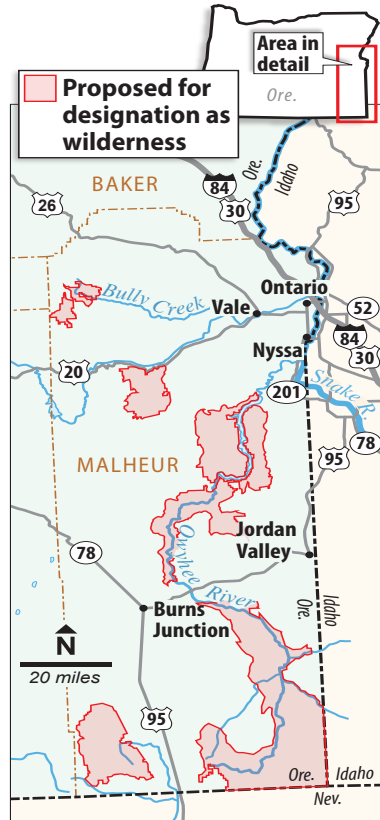
The legislation supports science-based adaptive management of federal lands “to make efficient ranching a con-

tinued conservation tool and ensure real-time management responses to threats on the ecological integrity of the lands,” the senators said in a joint statement.

Adaptive management aims to encourage flexibility by allowing for adjustments based on current or recent results. To help ensure management actions produce ecological improvements, the legislation calls for creating a monitoring network of ranchers, businesses, environmental groups and land managers.

Grazing would be allowed to continue, including in newly designated wilderness areas. The legislation would provide funding for research, active-management activities and monitoring as well as enforcement of anticipated uses. It would maintain existing roads, and establish “loop roads” to encourage tourism while improving access for firefighting.

The legislation would not create a national monument, amend the Taylor Grazing Act, impede current projects, impact water



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

rights or irrigation districts, or affect management of Owyhee Reservoir.

It would give wilderness protection to parts of the Trout Creek Mountains, Castle Rock, Leslie Gulch, Honeycombs, Three Forks and Jordan Craters. Wild and Scenic River management would be used on 14.7 miles of the Owyhee River below Owyhee Reservoir.

The legislation “ensures the safeguarded protections of desert wildlife habitat, native and rare plants, and vast wild places for future generations to enjoy” while also making sure ecological health drives management, Friends of the Owyhee said in an online newsletter.

The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition, which includes ranchers and business owners, for more than three years has played a key role in discussions that led to the legislation.

OBSC Chairman Steve Russell said in the senators’ joint statement that the coalition hoped for resolution of land designations and “a unique BLM (U.S. Bureau of Land Management) model that protects grazing and other traditional land

uses while providing for local guidance. We also hoped to create economic opportunities for Malheur County. The final result accomplishes what we set out to do, and we sincerely appreciate the dedication of everyone involved.”

BLM Vale District Manager Don Gonzalez said the agency does not comment on pending legislation. BLM has been working on amending a plan for managing about 4.6 million acres in southeastern Oregon; a final environmental impact statement is expected early next year.

“Conservation is good for everyone, and protecting the Owyhee will only strengthen this important and resilient rural economy,” Wyden said in the statement.

Merkley said the legislation “is the result of ranchers, conservationists and leaders coming together with a shared mission to protect this incredible land, and working to preserve the beauty and vitality of Malheur County for generations to come.”

Voters could be asked to decide future of Oregon’s forestry practices

By Sam Stites
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — A political fight over how Oregon manages its forests and timber activity could be resolved by voters next fall.

Two separate sets of ballot initiatives with contrary views of forestry in Oregon have been filed with the state Elections Division. One side seeks to insulate current practices from change and the other aims to create new regulations that prohibit certain techniques they feel are harmful to the environment and Oregonians.

This week, Jim James and his fellow chief petitioners filed initiatives they’re calling the

“Health Forests and Wildfire Reduction Plan.” They would keep the regulation of forest and timber practices on all state and privately owned lands in the hands of professional foresters, scientists and the Oregon Board of Forestry.

The plan would require the state Forestry Department to report new forestry regulations to the state board for review.

The measures would add four members to the board representing scientific forestry fields and timber interests. The package also would amend Oregon’s constitution to the state to compensate landowner if state actions reduce property values.

James is a professional forester based out of Foster

and the executive director of the Oregon Small Woodlands Association, a lobbying group that advocates for private forest owners.

The initiatives he’s promoting were filed in response to a set of prospective measures called the “Oregon Forest Waters Protection” package.

“I believe that our forests are at a huge risk from the ballot measures proposed by radical, anti-forestry activists. We need these petitions to be successful in continuing to protect our management of forests,” he said.

The opposing initiatives were refiled at the beginning of October by Kate Crump, a resident of Rockaway Beach, and two other

petitioners after their original package was rejected for violating the initiative process.

One goal of Crump’s initiative package is to prohibit aerial spraying of pesticides on a forest clear cut within 500 feet of forest rivers and streams, especially those that feed watersheds used for potable water. It would also greatly reduce the logging operations in proximity to water bodies.

Crump said the Oregon Forest Practices Act has been enforced for too long with little change, especially relating to watersheds that supply potable water systems. She believes the ballot is the best way to achieve her goal because people are

concerned about protecting their drinking water.

“We’ve had a ton of support, and I think people are really concerned,” she said. “This is something that’s been on the minds of many coastal residents and Oregonians across the state.”

Each campaign submitted three proposed ballot measures to the state. Once the language is approved, they will have to get 1,000 voter signatures to receive a ballot title from the state Attorney General and receive public comment. If there are no challenges to the ballot title, they will launch a full-blown signature gathering to put the measures on the November 2020 ballot.

The signature this cycle is 112,020 for statutory

laws and 149,360 for constitutional amendments.

James is motivated in part by the explosion of major wildfires that Oregon and other western states have seen in recent years. He believes active forest management — including harvesting, stand improvement and thinning — are crucial to mitigating wildfires.

“Everyone knows that unmanaged forests are more prone to catastrophic wildfires. The last thing Oregonians need are more wildfires on our landscape,” he said. “It impacts the entire citizenship of our state, and I believe these petitions will help the ability to manage forests in a way that prevents forest fire.”

Oregon wants to reunite veterans with their missing medals

By Kate Davidson
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — An Oregon agency wants to reunite veterans or their heirs with military medals now in state custody.

The Oregon Department of State Lands is the guardian of a lot of unclaimed property — about \$600 million worth.

“Could be money,” said Claudia Ciobanu, Oregon’s unclaimed property administrator. “Could be gift certificates that were not used. Could be stocks and bonds. Could be safe deposit boxes.”

Could be military medals. Ciobanu said institutions, such as hospitals, banks, law firms and retirement homes, send in about 1,000 abandoned safe deposit boxes every year. The owners may have died or stopped paying rent. Those boxes sometimes contain military medals.

“We have several World War II campaign medals. We have a Vietnam War campaign medal, and then a good conduct medal. There’s a Purple Heart in there, and



Photo courtesy of the Oregon Department of State Lands

The military medals in state custody include ones from World War II, the Vietnam War, and a Purple Heart.

then several other pins, ribbons, and other insignia,” she said.

In honor of Veterans Day, the state is reminding people that they can see these medals online and possibly claim them. You might even spot your relative’s name, as the department lists the owners of the orphaned safe deposit boxes.

A new Oregon law ensures the Department of State Lands won’t sell or destroy military medals. If the department can’t find the service member who earned a medal, or their heir, the law allows it to entrust military

medals to a custodian, such as a veterans’ organization.

Other unclaimed tangible property in Oregon eventually gets auctioned off or destroyed if no owner or heir can be found.

Administrator Claudia Ciobanu said unclaimed property speaks to her heart.

That’s not only because the state holds hundreds of millions of dollars worth of financial assets in perpetuity until an owner or heir appears. It’s because those assets are held in trust in the Common School Fund, so the money they earn gets distributed to K-12 schools.

Two unions see decline in state workers paying dues, but claim they’re bouncing back

By Claire Withycombe
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon’s largest public employee unions have seen double-digit declines in the number of state workers paying dues, state data show.

Together, SEIU 503 and AFSCME Council 75 represent about 29,000 workers employed by state agencies.

A shrinking share of those workers have chosen to be members, though, according to data maintained by the state Department of Administrative Services and provided to the

Oregon Capital Bureau through a public records request.

Until last year, unions representing workers in the public sector divided workers into two groups: members and “fair share” dues-payers.

Workers who wanted to pay full membership dues could do so, and could vote and run for leadership positions in the union.

Workers who didn’t want to support the ideological stances or political work of the union had another option. They could pay “fair share” dues instead. That arrange-

ment changed in June 2018, when the U.S. Supreme Court decided in Janus vs. AFSCME that government workers couldn’t be required to pay any fee to a union representing them, including “fair share” assessments.

The Supreme Court’s decision means that the unions representing public sector workers no longer receive “fair share” payments.

Separately from that, the number of state workers who are full union members declined since mid-2018, the data from the state show.

REPORTER

The Blue Mountain Eagle, a family-owned weekly newspaper in a stunningly beautiful Oregon community, seeks an energetic, dedicated reporter.

The Eagle is located in John Day, where seeing deer in front yards is normal and traffic is unheard of, just three hours from Bend and Pendleton. Surrounded by scenic forests and dissected by mountain streams, the location offers year-round recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, backpacking, camping, snowmobiling and horseback riding.

Despite the picturesque environment, the community is at the center of an evolving natural resource restoration economy, which gains statewide and even national attention.

Despite the small-town charm, the residents are engaged and politically active in local and national debates, and hard-hitting stories are never hard to find. Ongoing topics include state and federal policies, forest health, logging, public lands grazing, water supply, wildlife habitat improvements and wildfire resilience, in addition to coverage of small-town life and local government. The position offers a wealth of breaking news and enterprise opportunities.

Serving the community for more than 150 years, the Eagle is the oldest weekly newspaper in Oregon and is part of EO Media Group, an award-winning and innovative news organization with an active family of owners. This position offers excellent advancement opportunities in a company that prefers to hire from within. EO Media Group owns 14 newspapers and journals that provide accurate, fair and timely reporting about the people and issues impacting the communities we serve in the Pacific Northwest, reflecting the responsibility and spirit of a free press.

We seek a journalist who is passionate about local news and excited about the opportunity to publish in print, online and through social media. Candidates must be able to develop story ideas, take photographs, develop sources, prepare website and social media updates and work in a cooperative team environment. Journalistic integrity is a must.

Journalism education or experience is required for this full-time position offering insurances, a 401(k)/401(k) Roth retirement plan and paid time off (PTO). Send resume, letter of interest and up to five clips to EO Media Group, P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308-2048; by fax to (503) 371-2935 or by email to hr@eomediagroup.com.

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