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Contributed photo/Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
The fire lookout on the summit of Mount Ireland, 8,346 feet, is staffed each summer. The lookout has a view that extends over parts of three national forests — Wallowa-Whitman, Umatilla and Malheur. The metal building replaced a wooden structure in 1957.



The Eagle/Sean Hart
The South Fork John Day River south of Dayville.

River Democracy Act facing headwinds in Grant County

Locals express concerns about proposal to designate more Oregon rivers as wild or scenic

By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

A bill in the U.S. Senate mandating more local streams become designated as wild, scenic or recreational has been met with skepticism and outright opposition by some.

The River Democracy Act of 2021, written and co-sponsored by Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, would add 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system, bringing the total length of protected rivers in Oregon to almost 6,900 miles, or 6.2% of the state's 110,994 miles of streams.

Many concerns were raised and questions were asked during a meeting of the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District June 3.

In a letter from the South Fork John Day Watershed Council to the Eastern Oregon Association of Counties, Joanne Keerins, the council chair, wrote that the bill leaves out who would create the management plan.

Wyden spokesman Hank Stern said either the Bureau of Land Management or the Forest Service would and that it would depend on which agency manages the segment.

He said the bill establishes a "flexible" time frame to determine wildfire risks. Additionally, he said, the bill requires the land manager to assess the risk of fire and implement a plan to reduce risks.

"WE ARE CONCERNED THAT ADDING DESIGNATIONS OF THIS SORT TO STREAMS, RIVERS OR LAND IN GENERAL WILL ADD RESTRICTIONS FOR MANAGING ENTITIES, PRIVATE LANDS INCLUDED."

—Amy Stiner, South Fork John Day Watershed Council coordinator

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High-level position

Forest Service officials had to scramble to find fire lookout to work this summer on Mount Ireland

By Jayson Jacoby
EO Media Group

Joel McCraw needed to find someone willing to spend the summer atop a mountain that has a three-state view but is far out of sight of any coffee shop or grocery store.

His task wasn't as daunting as it might sound, thanks in part to Facebook.

The job is fire lookout on Mount Ireland. The 8,346-foot peak is the apex of a granitic shoulder that extends several miles west from the spine of the Elkhorn Mountains and forms the divide between the Powder River and North Fork John Day River basins as well as the boundary between Baker and Grant counties.

Mount Ireland is one of more than a dozen prominences in Northeastern Oregon where the traditional method of finding wildfires — a person working inside a tiny building on a high point, looking for the telltale tendrils of smoke — persists.

Several decades ago there were more than 50 lookouts in the region that were staffed each summer.

But over time, with surveillance by airplane more feasible, and a proliferation of roads



Contributed photo/Wallowa-Whitman National Forest
The lookout at Mount Ireland might see as many mountain goats as human visitors.

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State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, faces potential recall

Findley voted against gun legislation, but petition says he should have walked out

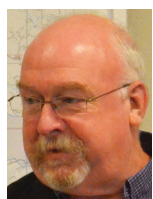
By Steven Mitchell
Blue Mountain Eagle

State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, faces a potential recall effort.

Chief petitioner Patrick A. Kopke-Hales of Mt. Vernon filed a prospective recall petition with the Oregon Secretary of State's Office on June 14.

Kopke-Hales wrote in his justification that Findley had acted "against the values and principles of the constituents he represents" for supporting Senate Bill 865, and for not walking out to prevent the passage of Senate Bill 554 on gun control legislation.

Findley — who represents Senate



Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale

District 30 covering all of Baker, Grant, Harney, Jefferson, Malheur and Wheeler counties and parts of Deschutes, Lake and Wasco counties — told the Eagle he was in the final days of the legislative session and that there is too much going on right now to be "distracted" by "something else." Kopke-Hales declined to comment.

Kopke-Hales wrote in the prospective petition that Findley betrayed the "will of the people" by introducing Senate Bill 865. The proposed legislation would have prevented elected officials at the state level — including governor, secretary of state, state treasurer, labor commissioner, state lawmaker, supreme court judge or appeals court judge — from serving as an elected officer on

the state central committee of a political party.

Senate Republicans have since pulled back on the bill.

Senate Bill 554 sets storage requirements for firearms and bans holders of concealed handgun licenses from bringing them into the Oregon Capitol and Portland International Airport passenger terminal.

Kopke-Hales wrote that Findley "facilitated the passing" of SB 554 by not walking out of the session of Democrats from having the required quorum to approve the bill in the Senate, where it passed 16-7. Findley voted against it. It was signed two weeks ago by Gov. Kate Brown.

Findley said SB 865 was a bill constituents requested he introduce that has since been withdrawn.

Findley said he had been questioned on SB 554 and that he chose to stay in session and fight the bill's passage.

"I chose to stand and fight and put stuff on the record," he said, "and by staying in the session, I was able to work hard for the constituents. And that's what I'm supposed to do."

Aaron Fiedler, press secretary with the Oregon Secretary of State's Office, said Kopke-Hales must collect and submit at least 8,289 valid signatures from active electors in Senate District 30 no later than 5 p.m. Sept. 13. He said the recall becomes void if there are not enough signatures submitted by the deadline.

If at least 8,289 signatures are submitted, the Elections Division will have 10 days to complete the signature verification process.

Fiedler said the petition is not approved to circulate yet. The Elections Division is waiting on Kopke-Hales to submit printed examples of cover and signature sheets and create a petition committee.

