

Wyden

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actually labeled as “rivers,” with most being identified as streams, gulches, draws or unnamed tributaries.

The AFRC and other opponents have argued this is a misuse of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System — though Wyden countered that intermittent streams are not only valid for protection under the law, but necessary for watersheds.

“I’ve come to think that there’s almost a transportation analogy here that’s appropriate,” Wyden said. “You don’t manage traffic

just by building highways. You need connecting streets, alleyways and sidewalks. The same, in fact, applies to most river systems.”

Approximately 2 million Oregonians, or nearly half the state’s total population, depend on intermittent streams for clean drinking water, Wyden added.

The bill also requires the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to assess wildfire risks in each wild and scenic river corridor. The agencies would then have up to six years to develop mitigation plans, working with local, state and tribal governments.

The bill would create a

\$30 million per year fund to restore and rehabilitate riparian areas that do burn in a wildfire, Wyden said.

“What I see the River Democracy Act doing is creating a multiple-use toolbox so we have this array of tools and we can build on existing law,” Wyden said.

Supporters of the bill did speak during the virtual town hall, including representatives of the Nez Perce Tribe and Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

Kat Brigham, CTUIR chair, said she is pleased with the River Democracy Act, and that it reinforces stream restoration already undertaken by the tribes.

“It moves us closer to what we are working toward — building, protecting and enhancing cold, clean water, not only for our first foods, but for ourselves,” Brigham said.

Others, however, say their questions remain unanswered.

In a memo released shortly after the meeting, the AFRC pushed back against the bill, arguing wild and scenic designations would impose restrictions on forest management and actually increase wildfire risk in the protected stream corridors.

The bill would also “dramatically increase management costs and complexity on-the-ground, create con-

flicts between user groups, and distract and overload federal agencies already overwhelmed by catastrophic wildfire management and response,” the memo states.

Prior to the town hall, the Eastern Oregon Counties Association sent a letter to Wyden outlining similar concerns related to public access, fire prevention and property rights.

Going forward, Wyden said that, while people may have differences of opinion, he hopes to keep the lines of communication open to answer questions and provide feedback.

“I’m committed to getting this right,” he said.

Workers

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have to compete against federal unemployment benefits, an increase in household income from federal stimulus funds and retirements.

Just ask Robin Clement, co-owner of Monkless Belgian Ales in Bend. Clement and her husband opened their pub just four months before the pandemic shut it down to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Fast forward to July when tourism season in Central Oregon hits a high note and the state is reopening as COVID-19 cases wane, the Clements are scrambling to get enough workers to keep the brew pub open six days a week.

In an interview with an out-of-town worker recently seeking a lead prep cook position, Clement said she made an offer on the spot to the worker. The applicant dined with his family for dinner that night.

But the next day, he told Clement he took another position because it offered slightly more money and a leadership role, something the small pub couldn’t offer, she said.

“It was really disappointing, but par for the course. He was one of the few interviews that I set up who actually showed,” Clement said. “2020 was a cake walk compared to 2021. Customers have little grace. Their patience is thin. It’s been hard dealing with expectations.”

Only 32,500 eligible workers statewide are sitting out of the labor market waiting for the pandemic to lift, who may have health concerns or child care issues, said Gail Krumenauer, Oregon Employment Department economist. And another 12,000 workers statewide, who had been in the leisure and hospitality industry, now are working in the transportation/warehousing and delivery sector because of higher wages and benefits, Krumenauer said. The average wage for leisure and hospitality in Oregon is about \$14 an hour, but in transportation/warehousing it’s \$18 to \$20 an hour.

“That’s a tough spot to be in. The hiring is 1 1/2 times greater than we’ve ever seen,” Krumenauer said.



Co-owners of Sparrow Bakery in Bend, Whitney, left, and Jessica Keatman with their sons Brooks and Abel are at the Scott Street bakery location, which is closing due to a worker shortage.

EO Media Group/Dean Guernsey

“This spring we had 98,000 job vacancies. That’s a lot of what is fueling the worker shortage.

“That’s a perfect storm: a lot of things happening all at once and it makes it hard for employers. Everyone’s hiring.”

Layer these events on top of one another and mix in pent up demand for buying and traveling, and the demand on goods and services increases, which in turn increases demand on the need for more workers, Krumenauer said.

“Expanded benefits helped families in Central Oregon and nationwide keep food on the table and a roof over their heads when workers lost their jobs through no fault of their own during this public health pandemic,” U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon, said in an email. “Research has repeatedly debunked the baloney that benefits discouraged work.

“What’s clear in my conversations with Oregonians all over our state is that the lack of child care, housing costs, the unique challenges of service industry work and other factors are what’s really keeping many people from returning to the workplace.”

The unemployment rate in July was 5.6% in Deschutes County, lower than the double-digit rates at the height of pandemic-related closures, but still above February 2020 when it was 3.3%, according to the Oregon Employment Department monthly unemployment figures. Crook and Jefferson counties too have

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—Damon Runberg, Oregon Employment Department regional economist.

seen their unemployment levels return to near-normal levels in the months following the business closures imposed to slow the spread of the virus.

Crook County’s unemployment rate was 7% in July, compared to 4.4% in February 2020. And Jefferson County’s unemployment rate was 6.5% in July, compared to 4.1% in February 2020.

Statewide the unemployment rate was 5.2% in July, just slightly below the national unemployment rate of 5.4%.

“There’s no doubt that (the federal boost of the unemployment insurance) is constraining the supply of labor,” said Damon Runberg, Oregon Employment Department regional economist. “But I don’t think it is to a significant degree.

“The labor market will likely ease some as we move into the fall, but that will be more a reflection of a reduction in job vacancies rather than a massive influx of workers who lost their federal unemployment insurance benefits.”

Child care could potentially get worse if the Bend Park & Recreation District isn’t able to hire 20 more workers for its after school programs. It takes about 90 employees working part-time hours to run the 14 programs in elementary

schools, said Julie Brown, district community relations manager.

The district has posted hiring signs everywhere, even on the vehicles, posted ads on social media, held job fairs with on-the-spot hiring and even raised the hourly pay, she said.

“We’ve worked all summer long struggling to recruit the new employees needed,” Brown said. “These things typically produce the results. This situation feels different.”

In letters to parents, the parks and recreation district asked for referrals from parents, she said. There are 1,000 children signed up for after-school care when school starts Sept. 8 in Bend.

“We’ve never experienced this before,” said Brown. “We offer training skills for those who want to do this job. Most of our workers are in their 20s, but we do have people working in these jobs in all ages.”

Nearly 18 months past the initial business restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus, Oregon has regained two out of every three jobs lost in the spring of 2020, Krumenauer said. Just in the leisure and hospitality sector alone, the state added 7,100 jobs in July, she said.

At the Monkless brew pub, Clement said she hopes that after the federal unem-

ployment subsidy subsidies, she’ll be able to take on a full complement of staff. She needs to fill about seven positions, and that’s keeping her from opening her business seven days a week.

Clement said the pub has not been able to operate at full capacity since the shutdown in March because of staffing issues. And if summer hires leave or wait staff leave because they don’t want to wear a mask, she might have to consider closing for lunch or limiting more service.

“It’s challenging as an employer,” Clement said. “The worries I had in 2020 were if we were going to make it because we were a new brew pub. This year we have an unprecedented number of customers and a lack of staff that continues to get worse.”

Sparrow Bakery’s owner Keatman said she thinks the stress of the pandemic is wearing thin on workers who have to face customers daily. With the average age of service industry workers at about 19 to 24, Keatman said, she sees anxiety at levels she’s never seen before.

“Workers in this age group don’t have a secure financial situation, and they’re trying to figure things out,” Keatman said. “They’re trying to figure things out. Being at work sucks.”

Police

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“I don’t want to look at them guys (patrol officers) two years from now and say we don’t have jobs,” Haberly said.

Relationship between the county and the city

Green said in agenda documents for the Aug. 24 meeting that Grant County “has an unfortunate history of not honoring their commitments or agreements.” Examples included failing to follow transient lodging tax ordinance requirements, not providing in-kind contributions for street projects after committing to do so and breaching a contract for managing planning services in the city’s urban growth area.

“I have no confidence based on their track record than any law enforcement agreement we make will be upheld or enforced by the current court, nor is it likely that we would receive the coverage we pay for, as the sworn law enforcement officers will respond to calls wherever they are needed regardless of whether a city is paying for additional coverage or not,” Green said in the agenda.

At the meeting, Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley called on John Day’s elected officials to set aside their differences with the county and begin working on a transition plan as the city moves to dissolve the John Day Police Department by the end of the year.

McKinley said the county is waiting for the city to reach out and that it is in “their ballpark” to start those discussions by getting on the county court’s agenda.

John Day City Councilor Shannon Adair said she does not lump the county and the sheriff’s office together.

She said she has a “significant issue” with the county court and that, in her opinion, one of the reasons the city and the county have not had a meeting is because the county has ignored the city’s request.

McKinley asked the council if they had reached out to the county about the specific topic of working out a law enforcement agreement between the county and the city. John Day Mayor Ron Lundbom said no.

Lundbom said, given the city’s past relationship with the county and what, in his opinion, was a history of renegeing on their agreements, it did not give the city a “warm, fuzzy feeling” about working with the county.

Maynard told the city council that they owe it to the citizens of John Day to at least try.

McKinley said to give up on talking to the county would be akin to him giving up on fighting crime.

County Commissioner Sam Palmer told the Eagle that he has never had a bad relationship with the city of John Day. However, he said a contentious county court session with the city back in May that ended with an unidentified caller calling County Judge Scott Myers an expletive led to part of the breakdown.

He said Green’s agenda documents blaming the county for breaking contracts and not being trustworthy have not helped the two entities mend the relationship.

He said the county would try to help, but so far, it looks like it’s been a one-way street where if a project or an improvement is going to benefit the city, then they want it, but, if it’s not going to help the city, then the narrative is that the county does not uphold contracts and are unwilling to meet — made out to be the “bad guy.”

Green said in an email last week that Palmer and McKinley plan to meet with John Day’s Public Safety Committee, but the date had not been determined.

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