

# UC commissioners approve letter opposing River Democracy Act

By DICK MASON  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — The Union County Board of Commissioners wants no part of the River Democracy Act.

The trio voted Wednesday, Oct. 6, to send a letter to Oregon U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden asking him to remove all of the waterways in Union County that are included in the proposed federal River Democracy Act legislation. The letter was signed by Union County Commissioners Paul Anderes, Donna Beverage and Matt Scarfo.

The bill, co-sponsored by Wyden and fellow Oregon U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley, would add 4,684 miles to the Wild and Scenic River system in Oregon, including 135 miles in Union County.

The 135 miles would be on 26 waterways, the largest of which



**Matt Scarfo**

is an 11.6-mile stretch of Beaver Creek and a 10.8-mile stretch of Five Points Creek.

In the letter to Wyden the commissioners wrote they are making their request based on a number of criteria. One, the commissioners claim, is that the traditional process for considering waterways for Wild and Scenic designation, one which includes extensive public input, has not been adhered to.

“This failure to follow the guidelines that have been in place since 1968 as a well-vetted system for designation is resulting in waterways that do not meet the criteria, spirit, intent or letter of the Wild and Scenic Act,” states the letter, which Anderes read at the



**Donna Beverage**

Oct. 6 meeting.

The commissioners’ letter also stated their concern that the federal government failed to hold public meetings in communities that would be impacted by the addition of the waterways to the Wild and Scenic designation. In lieu of such meetings, at least one Statewide People’s Town Hall was conducted virtually, which was not not a good substitute for localized community meetings, according to the letter.

Another concern expressed by the Union County commissioners is the half-mile buffer zone each proposed waterway would have on both sides of its banks.

Restrictions on activities in the buffer zones, including log-



**Paul Anderes**

ging to reduce fire hazards, might be imposed. This would affect 86,000 acres of Union County land that would be in the buffer zones along the 26 waterways proposed for inclusion in the River Democracy Act.

“I do not want to put 86,000 acres under federal jurisdiction,” Beverage said.

The letter noted there are a number of projects now underway where the buffer zones would be, ones designed to protect and restore the waterways and their banks, which could be derailed by the River Democracy Act.

Beverage wants the process of selecting additional Oregon waterways for inclusion in the Wild and

Scenic Act to be started over in order to conduct it in a way that would include greater public input.

She said that if this is not done, the next best option would be for officials to delete all of the 26 Union County waterways proposed for inclusion in the River Democracy Act.

The commissioner noted that some Oregon counties have succeeded in getting certain river and stream sections proposed for Wild and Scenic designation removed from the list following a negotiating process.

*Dick Mason is a reporter with The Observer primarily covering the communities of North Powder, Imbler, Island City and Union, education, Union County veterans programs and local history. Dick joined The Observer in 1983, first working as a sports and outdoors reporter.*

## Chaplain

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“I do think chaplains are some of the only people that nurses can talk to who do understand on at least a level what they’re dealing with and what they’re going through,” Hardin said. “Because we’re there, and we see it.”

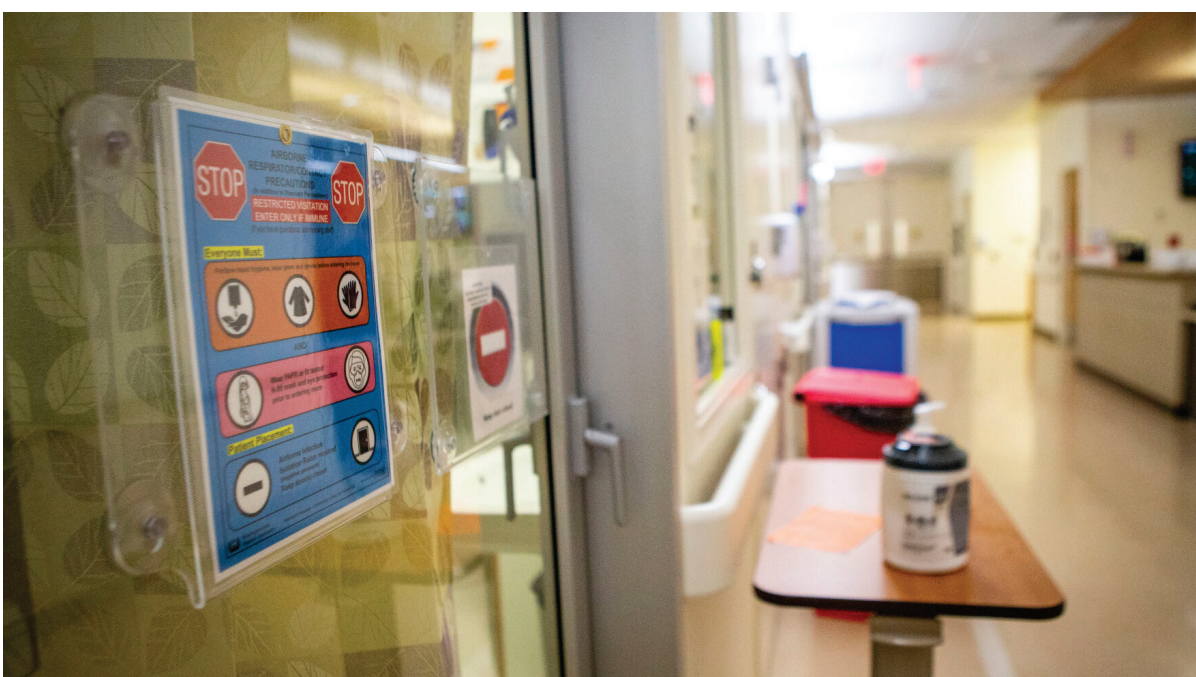
She listens in the hallways and at the nurses stations as the staff relate the stress of their job. She said health care workers can often be reluctant to seek help themselves, so she enjoys finding them and giving them an opportunity to talk, even if all they utter are sarcastic remarks:

“I had one girl tell me, ‘It’s going to suck for a while, and then it’s going to get better,’” she said. “It’s an acknowledgement that we’re just working through this and doing the best we can do, one patient at a time, one day at a time.”

She called her job a privilege, but one that comes with responsibility.

“The notion of saying something wrong and making something worse is terrifying,” she said. “But it is an incredible privilege to help bring a bit of balance and healing into their life.”

She joined the hospital as an on-call chaplain in 2019. A math teacher at Blue Mountain



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

A list of precautions adorns the door of a COVID-19 patient Aug. 19 in the critical care unit at St. Anthony Hospital, Pendleton.

Community College, she felt compelled to help health care workers through their day-to-day work while hearing stories from her husband, an emergency department nurse at St. Anthony. Now, she works evenings and weekends.

“I’m not somebody who likes to be bored,” she said.

Throughout the pandemic, she has stood by as infection has ebbed and flowed. She has

listened to health care workers whose patients improve and decline over weeks of treatment, and always in isolation, away from their families.

She told of a nurse whose patient had to go on comfort care, a stage where a nurse helps soothe a patient at the end of their life. The nurse had given the last dose of medication, and she came to Hardin struggling to cope.

“She had almost felt like she had killed the patient,” she said. “So I suggested to her that, rather than think of it that way, she should think of it as giving the gift of a peaceful passing.”

And over the past two months, the staff have only grown more tired and anxious, she said.

“The energy level has dropped,” she said. “People are tired. They’re feeling stressed and there’s a lot of worry right

now because of impending staff losses and no impending decrease in patients.”

The hospital, already short staffed, could lose many of its workers in the coming weeks when the state’s vaccine mandate goes into effect, forcing health care workers to get the shot or lose their jobs. That impending reality has sown a new kind of division, Hardin said, between unvaccinated employees worried about finding new work and vaccinated employees fearing what work will be like without them.

The mandate comes as Umatilla County reported weekly case counts exceeding 350 for the 11th straight week, making the delta crisis the largest the county has faced by far. And a recent spike, driven partly by an outbreak linked to the Pendleton Round-Up, means the hospital could see yet another surge in patients.

“There’s some uncertainty, which leads to worry and concern,” Hardin said.

But for Hardin, she knows there’s only one thing a chaplain can do.

“We try to pass it on to God,” she said. “We’re chaplains. We try to pass those things on along to that higher power that can maybe do something, or at least take that burden so that we don’t have to carry it.”

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