

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Bond amount city seeks for wastewater facility is too much for residents

The bond issue being sought by the City of Vernonia for wastewater facility improvements, at \$400 per \$100,000 of assessed property value, is simply not affordable for most of its residents. That amount would be in addition to existing property taxes.

It has been only a few years since the city's preliminary planning proposed annual increases of \$6 per month, up to approximately \$55-56 per month for most users, not the \$99 that residents are being threatened with. These gradual increases were designed to go only as high as needed and were combined with the purchase of mill site property that would be used for irrigation.

The use of treated wastewater for irrigation was intended for May to November, the period when the city cannot legally discharge into the Nehalem River because water levels are too low. Currently, there is not enough storage room, which can create unpleasant odors and causes overflow during heavy rainfall.

Because of changes to the original plan, an additional \$1.6 million has been added to the initial estimate – from \$8 million to \$9.6 million.

At this time, instead of just blaming the Department of Environmental Quality for the situation, it would be sensible to review the plans and see what modifications can be made. For instance, is the additional pump station needed now? Even though there was a public hearing on the plan, the costs weren't adequately understood by most residents.

Available resources also need to be revisited. The city has 20 acres that might be appropriate to sell for development.

Vernonia *can* tell DEQ that the current plan simply isn't affordable. The state is not in the business of bankrupting small towns and, in the past, has worked collaboratively with Vernonia to achieve the needed resolution.

Let's go back to collaborating instead of blackmailing citizens with the threat of \$99 per month sewer fees.

HECK FIRE! GAS IS OVER
3 BUCKS A GALLON.
I CAIN'T AFFORD THAT.
I'M GUNNA HAVE TO MOVE TO
MEXICO WHERE IT'S CHEAP.



Ike Says . . .

By Dale Webb, member
Izaak Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter



Hey, come out and paddle this Saturday, May 6th, it's Vernonia River Festival time. There are going to be boat races this year, complete with trophies. There are four race categories – kayak, raft, canoe and drift boat – so bring your fastest boat. Registration is at Anderson Park starting at 8:00 am, if you want to enter the race a \$5 donation is suggested, but not required. There will also be kayaks available for rent and yours truly will be one of the people helping renters navigate the river. The Nehalem River is Class I and this will be an easy trip, so get the family out for some fun family bonding time!

Recently the news media reported on the winter kill of elk on St. Helens Mountain in Washington State. Sportsmen were outraged by the number of animals that succumbed to malnutrition. So, what is going on up on the mountain? Mt. St. Helens is a national viewing area because of the volcano. Elk have re-established themselves in the area since the blast, but the nutritional value of the forage is not adequate for them to survive, at least in the numbers that they expanded to.

The problem is that the Washington Department of Fish and Game is trying to manage this area as a wildlife viewing area and has limited

hunting, probably because it is viewed as incompatible with the sight-seeing nature of the area. While this may be politically correct, it is not biologically correct. The pictures of dead and dying elk were, in my opinion, criminal.

For a managing agency to allow this to happen is shameful at the least. By not allowing hunting, they have sentenced these animals to a slow miserable death; hunting is by far more humane. WDF&G has allowed a very few limited tags in recent years, but too little too late. This winter was a tough one for wildlife, but not a devastating one, while some elevated mortality would have been normal; a loss of more than 10 percent of the herd is not. There are those who are suggesting that WDF&G is fudging on the mortality reports also. WDF&G has three options: One, allow hunting to maintain the herd at an acceptable level; two, feed the elk in the winter (this will cost a lot of money); three, do nothing and let elk starve to death again in about five years.

One of the hot topics around town recently is the proposed upgrade to the waste water facility. This is going to be a costly under taking, but a necessary one. So you ask why is it necessary? First we are out of compliance with the Clean Water Act of 1972. We currently dump treated sewage water into the Nehalem River during May and June, and sometimes in October, times that are not allowed.

Why is this a bad thing? Treated sewage, while degraded from its original form still has a lot of nutrient value, is oxygen depleted and is

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