

# The INDEPENDENT

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## Opinion

### Here come the graduates

This issue our thoughts turn toward those graduating from high schools this month. Vernonia had 60 graduates, Banks had 93. 153 new citizens going out into the world to make their way and their mark. Some of them plan to go straight to work, some to trade schools, community colleges or colleges. Vernonia grads plan to attend trade school (4), community colleges (18), colleges (15), work (7), go on missions (2), join the Marines (1), join the Air Force (1), return home to Germany (2), or are undecided or list miscellaneous (10). One student is going to school in Sydney, Australia, and one is just coming home from a year in Germany. The valedictorians from Banks (3) each plan to go to college; one for international affairs, one for virtual technology and design (this one makes us feel old since we have no real idea what it means), and one for a nursing degree. Many of them will become tomorrow's entrepreneurs and run small businesses.

Some will go forth, become successful in their chosen or found fields, and stay wherever they landed. Some will go forth, etc., and return to their small village and go about their business. Some will fail at their first attempts and, eventually, find the place they were meant to be. Some, unfortunately, will become involved in drugs or crime and will be lost to their families and friends. We hope the 'lost ones' will be 'found,' – as long as there is life, there is hope. And, here's to the hope that all the grads will stay safe while they pursue their dreams. Don't drink and drive, and don't get in the car with any driver who has been drinking or doing drugs.

Thinking about hope – we hope some of these young people, wherever they land, will become volunteers in their communities. They can help children learn to read, help feed the hungry, help organize community events, or even help run city, county or state government. There is no better way to gain appreciation for and understanding of the internal workings of the community. They don't run themselves, it takes many, many volunteer hours to make a happy, healthy, successful community.

Thank you to all the people who volunteer in the community and make a sincere effort to 'do the right thing' and help others. May your ranks swell mightily.

DID YOU KNOW THAT  
800+ SPECIES OF  
AMERICAS BIRDS  
ARE PROTECTED?

according to the FEDERAL  
MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY

ACT OF 1918 US CODE T. 16 C. 75C 2

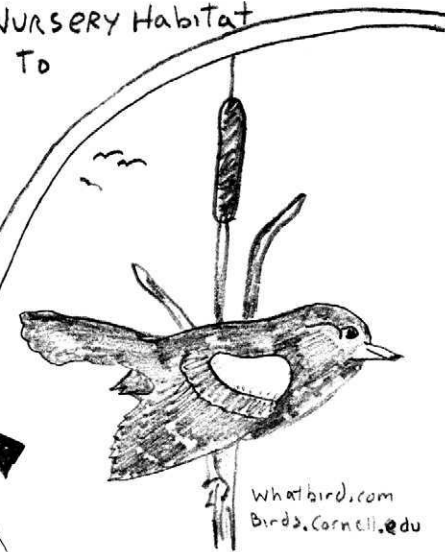
IT IS ILLEGAL TO DESECRATE \*ANY  
BIRD, FEATHER, PART, EGG, NEST  
BY DESTRUCTION OF OR DISTURBANCE  
OF NURSERY HABITAT  
DUE TO



Removal of trees, brush,  
grasses, cattails, rushes etc.  
OR From rise or reduction  
OF WATER LEVELS...

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT  
EAGLES OR OWLS, BUT  
ALL BIRDS.

The Toll Taken on the  
REDWING BLACKBIRD at the  
millpond this Year has been DRAMATIC!



### Out of My Mind

by Noni Andersen

Monday, while talking with reporters, U.S. Senator Ron Wyden told us that reauthorization of county payments remains at the top of his legislative priorities. "I will stay with it until it is done," he emphasized.

On Tuesday, he and other senators continued that effort by gaining approval for a measure that would extend funding for the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act through 2011. The amendment, co-sponsored by Wyden and six other senators, was included in the Energy Advancement and Investment Act of 2007. The Finance Committee is expected to pass the Energy Tax legislation.

Last month, Congress approved a one-year emergency extension of county payments funding in order to head off a budget crisis that was forcing lay-offs and shutting down county services in rural communities. The new proposal would extend the program for four additional years, providing a predictable stream of funding which would gradually decrease by ten percent per year through 2011. Additionally, transition payments would provide time for counties to adjust to a new nationwide funding formula. The new formula is based on both the current formula and the current acreage of U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and eligible Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands. It includes a mechanism to focus support on the communities in the greatest economic need, allowing development of alternative economies such as forest thinning programs and utilization of rural areas' natural bio-

mass.

The plan also includes five years of full funding for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILT), which compensates for the loss of tax revenue from federal lands. Full funding of PILT would help counties that lose tax revenues due to the presence of Federal lands. In Oregon, for instance, counties receive no property tax from federal lands.

This year, Wyden anticipates a better chance to gain approval for the multi-year program because two key western senators – Max Baucus (D-MT), chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), chairman of the Energy Subcommittee of the Finance Committee – are co-sponsors of the measure and will be seated at the conference table when the Senate and their counterparts in the House of Representatives work out differences in legislation.

While this is a good approach to a major problem for many rural counties, local governments will have to use the remaining time productively to structure new approaches to old policies.

In Columbia County, the county payments program contributes about 25 percent of discretionary funds, those that may be used for multiple purposes. Typically, discretionary funds are used for day-to-day administrative costs such as salaries, computer system improvements, employee training, etc.

They are also a significant source of funds for law enforcement, a huge problem in this county, which is already underserved. It is time to put on those thinking caps and develop solutions.