

PRESERVATION OR DEVELOPMENT

It's do or die time for the Metolius Basin

In age and experience, we're two generations apart — a retired two-term governor and a young state representative — but in our devotion to this state, we couldn't be more together. Even more to the point, in our concern for the integrity and natural beauty of the Metolius, we're absolutely united.

If there's a place in our state that must be preserved in as nearly a pristine condition as possible, it's that treasured spot in central Oregon where stream and forest combine to deeply affect visitors with its mood and quiet splendor. If you've been there, even briefly, you know exactly what we mean.

But for years now, two proposed destination resort developments have been slowly working their way through the state's destination resort siting process in Jefferson County and have appeared to be nearing the point of cranking up the bulldozers. The developers made their case and seemingly followed the rules. They've appeared unstoppable.

But if not stopped, they've at least been slowed by two actions. The Oregon Supreme Court has heard a plea from conservationists that Jefferson County did not adequately consider protection of the winter deer range and the headwaters of the Metolius River. The court's decision is pending.

At the same time, the Land Conservation and Development Commission has passed a resolution, by a 7-0 vote, to designate the Metolius Basin as an Area of Critical Statewide Concern, which would effectively ban large-scale development in the basin. By law, the Legislature must affirm the LCDC action. Last week, the Senate supported House Bill 3298 by a 16-12 vote.

The bill now goes back to the House.

Efforts to protect the Metolius have a long history. Shortly before he left office, Gov. Tom McCall went before the LCDC and urged the commission to designate the basin as an Area of Critical Statewide Concern. Treasurer Bob Straub made a similar plea. The commission chose instead to move in a different direction with its concern about the basin.

So for nearly four decades the Metolius has been protected largely by public opinion and the basin's self-evident argument of environmental importance and natural beauty. That all changed when hard-strapped Jefferson County made some land-use decisions in an effort to attract destination resorts. Two areas were targeted for potential resort development. One area is partially inside the basin, and the other totally within the basin.

The issue, then, is blatant: preservation or development.

The most immediate concern is the House vote Tuesday afternoon on HB3298 to affirm the LCDC's critical concern designation. It's expected to be close at best. Oregonians who value the Metolius should let their state representative know immediately of their feelings. Phone calls and e-mails are the most expeditious way to do that, time being so critical.

Saving the public beaches from private development nearly four decades ago was probably the last time Oregonians, in mass numbers, influenced a legislative vote. It's critical that we do it again now — and save the Metolius.

**VIC ATIYEH AND
BRIAN CLEM**

IN MY
OPINION

Vic Atiyeh was Oregon governor from 1979 to 1987. Brian Clem, a Democrat and author of HB3298, represents Salem in the Oregon House of Representatives.