

Oregon wolf ruling based on facts, not undue fears

Wolves are thriving across the West. In Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon they are becoming a fixture on the landscape. A wolf pack has even turned up in Northern California.

In that context, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission made a solid decision last week to take wolves off the state's endangered species list.

Four breeding pairs have been in Eastern Oregon for three consecutive years, as is required in the state wolf plan. Actually, the number of breeding pairs is nine, signaling that the population is far healthier than the wolf plan requires.

EDITORIAL
Voice of the Chieftain

Add that to the fact that a minimum of 82 wolves are known to live in Eastern and Southwestern Oregon and there is little reason to worry about wolves disappearing. Their numbers have increased from 14 in 2009 to 82 this year.

And remember: Those are minimum numbers that wildlife managers have confirmed. The actual population may be far larger.

The criteria for delisting the wolf in Oregon were in the state's wolf management plan, which was the product of prolonged and public debate when it was written.

Now that wolves have met those criteria for delisting, some folks are looking for loopholes to back out of the plan.

They are way out of line.

First, wolves in the western two-thirds of the state remain protected just as they have been all along.

Only in the eastern one-third of the state, where all but seven of the wolves live, are they affected at all, by allowing wildlife managers more flexibility.

Second, Oregon ranchers, who have been most affected by the return of wolves, have lived up to their part of the deal. They've done it in the face of a predator that as of the first of the year had killed 114 cattle, sheep and herding dogs and injured many more.

That is only the number of killings that wildlife managers confirmed. Last year, for example, 34 depredation investigations resulted in only 11 confirmed wolf kills.

Though ranchers are indemnified for their livestock, it doesn't repay them for the weight their other cattle lost because of wolves or the extra hours and effort required to protect against wolf attacks.

Third, the Endangered Species Act was aimed at protecting plants and animals that were in danger of extinction. Wolves do not fit in that category. They are robust predators that follow the food and do not need special treatment.

In fact, wolves were never reintroduced in Oregon or Washington state; they spilled over from Idaho and British Columbia, where the estimated wolf population is 10,000. More than 50,000 wolves live in Canada and 30,000 live in Alaska. It defies logic to argue that the wolf is on the brink of extinction.

Yet earnest groups of activists insist that, somehow, wolves are getting short shrift in Oregon. Some are saying the state's biologists didn't jump through an adequate number of hoops before recommending that wolves be delisted. They say they might sue.

If they do, we'll know their concern isn't for wolves, which are continuing to thrive and multiply despite all of the fearful predictions activists have made over the years.



Land-use planning can curtail fires

The 2015 fire season was worse than any on record and summertime temperatures are steadily escalating. Increasing the average summer temperature by just one degree Fahrenheit results in an increase of 420 wildfires in the state annually, according to estimates by the Oregon Department of Forestry. Research and news articles have focused on the need for forest fuels reduction, creating defensible space around rural dwellings and improving firefighting methods.

However, effective land-use planning has perhaps the greatest potential for reducing wildfire threat.

The USDA Forest Service defines transition areas just outside communities as the "Wildland-Urban Interface." Since 1960, the population in these areas has jumped from 25 million to 140 million people. Today, about 60 percent of all new homes across the nation are being constructed in the Wildland-Urban Interface, despite one historic wildfire season after another. The result is skyrocketing firefighting costs that are ultimately borne by the public.

The Oregon Department of Forestry estimates that the average cost of \$319 to protect an additional home



GUEST COLUMN

Katherine H. Daniels

in an already developed area jumps to a whopping \$31,545 to protect an additional home in a more rural area.

Dwellings in remote and rural areas put firefighters at added risk. Historically trained in basic wildland fire behavior and safety, using fireline construction and tools, firefighters today must have numerous specialized skills geared toward protecting homes — establishing fire perimeters, conducting burnouts around homes and dealing with the dangers of propane tanks, gas and electrical lines. When the focus has shifted from fighting fire to saving homes, forests are left to burn.

Oregon's statewide land-use planning program discourages the kind of development that imperils firefighters and homes in this way. Implemented by communities statewide, it has significantly reduced the number of dwellings built in our Wildland-Urban

Interface since the mid-1980s, when compared to other states.

While over the course of a decade Oregon lost almost three times as much acreage to wildfire as did Washington, the number of dwellings destroyed was significantly greater in Washington, according to the Geographic Area Coordination Centers and the National Interagency Fire Center. In the 2014 and 2015 seasons alone, seven times more dwellings were destroyed in Washington than in Oregon. The presence of dwellings in wildland areas further increases the risk of wildfire. In the 2015 fire season four times as many acres burned in Washington as in Oregon where wildland dwellings resulted in fires with "human causes".

Over nine percent of Oregon's homes are currently at high or extreme risk for wildfire, according to 2015 data from Verisk Insurance Solutions. Current limits on dwellings and other development on forest land is paying off for Oregon by minimizing wildfire risk to new development, reducing firefighting costs and protecting human lives.

Katherine H. Daniels is a farm and forest lands specialist with the Oregon

A wilderness proposal gone wild

Residents of Malheur County, Ore., are wise to be suspicious of a plan to designate 43 percent of their county as a wilderness area.

They should continue to resist the proposal any way they can.

It's a tradition among outgoing Democratic presidents to set aside massive swaths of the West as wilderness areas. They do it to make themselves look pretty to the environmental community.

Jimmy Carter holds the record, setting aside 27 million acres of Alaska as wilderness during his single term.

Bill Clinton set aside 9.2 million acres of wilderness as he was heading out the door.

Now it's President Barack Obama's turn.

You'll note that in all of the above cases, the people who live in those areas were steamrolled.

That's why we're concerned about the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal, which would designate a little more than 2 million acres as wilderness and 50 miles of rivers as wild and scenic rivers.

Under the Wilderness Act of 1964, "no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport and no structure or installation" is allowed except as a way to meet the minimum requirements of administering the area. Even using vehicles to take out

GUEST EDITORIAL

From the Capital Press

juniper trees, which ruin greater sage grouse habitat, is banned. A federal judge recently ruled that motorized vehicles couldn't be used to help clear junipers from a wilderness study area near Steens Mountain in south-central Oregon.

And note the name of the plaintiff in the lawsuit: the Oregon Natural Desert Association, which is behind the plan for Malheur County.

Though proponents such as ONDA promise that grazing allotments would be grandfathered in, ranchers there find little comfort in the assurance.

Bob Skinner, a rancher, reminded the 500 people who gathered in the Adrian High School gym recently that proponents of the plan, such as ONDA, are litigators.

"Once this gets to court, all bets are off," he told the crowd.

The irony of the meeting was provided when Brent Fenty, executive director of ONDA, told the crowd he wants to stop mining and oil and gas drilling.

"We all care about the Owyhee and want to keep it the way it is today, we just may disagree on how we do that," he said.

Indeed.

The most troubling aspect of this plan

is the Obama administration hiding its intentions from members of Congress. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., represents Malheur County. He says he has asked the administration to tell the truth about the plan, but has thus far received no answer.

State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, organized the Adrian meeting and plans to send a video of it to the White House in hopes that members of the administration will understand what's at stake.

We often write about the "urban-rural" divide. This is the perfect example of where it's getting wider. Proponents — nearly all from cities — want to impose wilderness status on rural residents.

The urbanites don't care what the rural residents think or that it will ultimately eviscerate the local economy.

There is precious little in the record to show that the Obama administration will listen to the people of Malheur County. The administration has a long track record of imposing regulatory shock and awe on rural parts of the West. The Environmental Protection Agency's Waters of the United States regulations and the Department of Labor's "hot goods" actions against farmers are just two prominent examples of how federal agencies overstep their statutory authority.

And consider this: There is also nothing in the record to indicate that proponents of designating more wilderness in Malheur County care even a tiny bit about the people who live there — or anywhere else in the rural West.

Please share stories about Leon Lee

To the editor:

We are the parents of our beloved Leon E. Lee, who passed away April 27, 2007. We are writing a book of memories for our family and are in hopes that some of you can help to fill his memory book.

Lee worked at Hubbard Ranch for several years, later starting his own business called "Lee's Excavation." His slogan was "We dig Wallowa County." He

LETTERS to the EDITOR

also was a volunteer fireman and helped several neighbors in Imnaha by purchasing an old fire truck that he refurbished. He also helped battle several forest fires, cutting firebreaks with his bulldozer.

If you knew Lee and can remember a story or an experience that you could

share with us, we would greatly appreciate your help.

His memorial at the Joseph Church was "standing room only". Lee certainly was well thought of by numerous friends, neighbors and business Associates.

Thank you for all the help in sharing your memories of Leon E. Lee.

Edward and Carol Lee-Geek
Ashland



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