

Commentary...

Recreational shooting is part of Central Oregon culture

By Steve Poss
Guest Columnist

Many readers of the February 12 article on recreational shooting in the National Forest may not know that Federal law expressly promotes and protects such shooting, or of the importance of recreational shooting to Central Oregon.

Shooting is legal throughout National Forest and BLM land, subject to certain safe practices, and is not limited to the specific pits identified by the NFS. Bipartisan legislation enacted by Congress in 2019 provides that Federal land “shall be open to hunting, fishing, and recreational shooting,” and that the NFS, BLM, and other Federal departments and agencies must “facilitate the expansion and enhancement of hunting, fishing and recreational shooting opportunities on Federal Land” and “consider hunting, fishing and recreational shooting opportunities as part of all federal plans for land, resource, and travel management.”

Thus, the Forest Service staff in the Deschutes National Forest is required to actively facilitate the expansion of recreational shooting opportunities in the forest.

Similarly, the closure of any Federal land to shooting can only be done in “the smallest area for the least amount of time” and requires exceptional circumstances and strict procedures of need, evidence, public notice and rulemaking.

Recreational shooting and hunting on public land have been at the heart of Central and Eastern Oregon’s self-reliant culture for generations. They are woven into the soul of Sisters Country. As more than 50 percent of all land in this part of Oregon is owned or administered by the government, National Forest and BLM lands are the only places practically available for many Oregonians to teach their children to shoot, engage in recreational target shooting essential to maintaining safe shooting skills, sight-in their rifles, and hunt. These lands are also the source of the pure, natural and healthful meat their families depend on throughout the year.

While shooting and hunting are time-honored historical uses of the land, they are not limited to “old-timers.” Many new residents continue to move here precisely because of the shooting and hunting opportunities on

public lands. And shooting ranks among the safest of sports; far safer, for example, than cheerleading or skateboarding.

As firearm ownership and sales in the U.S. have skyrocketed over the past 20 years, firearm-related deaths and injuries have plummeted, thanks in large part to the gun-safety courses taught by thousands of NRA instructors and others.

Recreational shooting is a major part of our economy. Oregon’s more than 300,000 hunters annually spend more than \$23 million to buy more than 1.3 million tags, permits, and stamps, and spend more than 2.2 million days hunting, most of it on public lands. They contribute more than \$27 million in state and local taxes, \$32 million in Federal taxes, and millions more in salaries, wages, jobs, and retail sales each year. Many of these jobs are right here in Deschutes County.

Oregon’s more than 170,000 target shooters contribute many millions more. And through permits,

licenses, excise taxes on guns and ammunition, and donations to conservation organizations such as Ducks Unlimited and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, shooters have been and continue to be the leaders in the preservation of wildlife species and the protection of habitat.

As developers expand residential housing closer to the forest, and waves of people flee the urban jungles and gridlocked mountain-biking paths they created in places such as Portland or San Francisco for the beauty of small towns such as Sisters, they somehow feel entitled to tell residents to stop shooting

where they have been shooting safely for generations.

That is cultural imperialism and narcissism rolled into one. Population growth is no justification for curtailing our long-standing rights. If you are offended or scared by hearing gun shots or seeing hunters in the forest, there is a simple solution: do not move here. There are many other places where you will not have to coexist with families who safely and lawfully practice the shooting sports. If you do move here, you do so with notice of these preexisting rights and practices which are vital to our way of life in Central Oregon.



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