

OUR VIEW

## Hass is right on records

The Oregon Legislature created the office of Public Records Advocate and the Public Records Advisory Council in 2017. Now, in the wake of the resignation of the first advocate, Ginger McCall, state Sen. Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, hopes to persuade lawmakers to give the council the right to appoint McCall's successor.

Gov. Kate Brown agrees.

There's a problem, however.

State Sen. Chuck Riley, D-Hillsboro, who chairs the Senate Business and General Government Committee that would sponsor the bill, has reservations that could tank the effort. That would be unfortunate.

Riley's opposition is not new. He had problems with House Bill 2353, which his committee handled this year. It gives the attorney general and district attorneys the right to penalize public agencies that fail to respond or take too long to respond to public records requests. Despite that, he did vote for the measure.

Still, Riley believes, according to an article in the Beaverton Valley Times, that calling the person who heads the advisory council the public records "advocate" is wrong. He sees the job as one of moderating between the public and state agencies, not advocating on behalf of records seekers.

The original law does, in fact, talk about the need for the advocate to provide education and training for government agencies so that their employees understand the public records law and make it work. Once that was done, the theory went, the number of disputes would decline and those that remained could be settled with the help of the public records moderator.

But Brown and Hass understand how difficult and expensive agencies can make it for those who seek public records. The power, in other words, lies with agencies. Hass and Brown know that a council-appointed advocate is needed to bring some balance to the equation.

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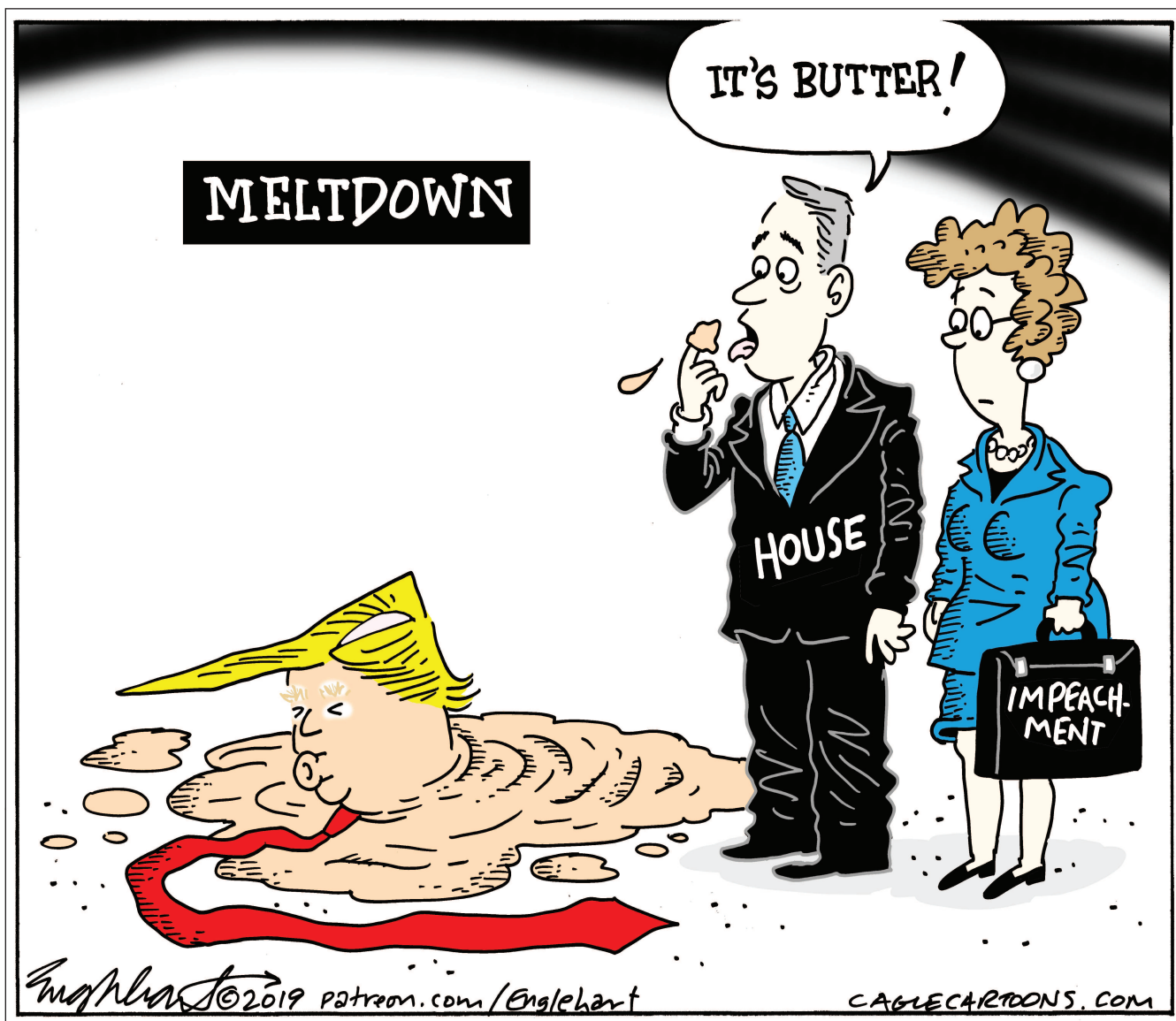
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MY VOICE

## Proactively managing forests today is better than letting them burn tomorrow

In his recent My Voice ("Science: Reducing fuel load in forests has little effect on wildfires," The Observer, Oct. 7), George Wuerthner cited weather as a reason not to manage forests to reduce wildfire risks. His opinion piece misses a key point. Fire needs fuel to burn. We can't control wind and weather, but we can control the fuel that has been steadily accumulating in the forests. Ultimately forest management is a choice, and I think the Forest Service has chosen wisely in seeking to reduce wildfire risks and public safety hazards along the Lostine corridor.

The conditions within the corridor have been well documented in The Observer and other Eastern Oregon newspapers. Land managers, public safety officials and local residents have long been concerned about the potential for wildfire in the area and the hazards posed by dead and dying trees along roadways and campgrounds. The need for action is long past due.

The Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project has public support and is based in science. Yet activist groups have used the courts to stall and delay the project, though so far their legal attacks on the project have been unsuccessful.

The project area is within the wildland urban interface area and is identified as a priority treatment area in the Wallowa County's Community Wildfire Protection Plan. It utilizes a number of forest management tools including thinning, removal of hazardous trees and fuels, as well as creations of small openings in lodgepole stands to open the canopy and promote variability in stand structure and composition.

Opponents of the project have painted a picture of unfettered logging. But to put the project into perspective, Dr. James Johnston of

About the author

Nick Smith is the executive of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a non-profit, non-partisan coalition that advocates for active management of federal forest lands.



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Oregon State University has noted the agency planned to treat only a small portion within the corridor, which itself is a small percentage of the landscape that should be treated to address uncharacteristic insect, disease and fire conditions in this forest. Within the 2,110 acres of national forest system lands, only 450 acres are being treated with thinning. The project will produce a relatively small amount of wood fiber to support jobs in nearby rural communities.

The Forest Service determined the Lostine River drainage is in a poor state of health, posing high risks to those who use and enjoy the corridor. Dr. Johnston adds that the very high fuel loadings pose a significant risk to

old-growth forest structure in the area, and all available evidence suggests thinning and prescribed fire will reduce fire severity and protect old-growth.

The Lostine Corridor Public Safety Project is an example of what public land managers should be doing to protect Oregon's communities and natural landscapes. However, the current treatments being implemented in Eastern Oregon are just a fraction of what is needed.

In many pine forests east of the Cascades, forests have become unnaturally dense and overcrowded and in some cases have been overtaken by tree species that are less resilient to wildfire. Exacerbating the situation are the impacts of drought and warmer temperatures that promote tree stress and widespread beetle and disease epidemics.

Forest management can help eastside forests better adapt to these changing conditions, and wood fiber from restoration efforts can be utilized to support the regional economy and sustain our forest products infrastructure that is threatened by a lack of available log supplies. If Mr. Wuerthner doesn't believe thinning activities can reduce the intensity of wildfires and protect nearby communities, he should ask the residents of Sisters who were spared the devastating impacts of the 2017 Milli Fire thanks to a thinning project.

After two consecutive and disastrous wildfire seasons, our land managers and firefighters got a much-needed break thanks to cooler weather. Just because we experienced a mild wildfire season doesn't mean we shouldn't be managing our forests. Though we have no control over next year's weather, proactively managing our forests today is a better alternative to letting them burn tomorrow.

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