

OUR VIEW

Third time a charm for Blue Mountains plan?

Maybe the third try will be successful in cobbling together a roadmap for the management of three sprawling national forests in Eastern Oregon.

The U.S. Forest Service, which oversees the 5.5 million acres of forestland in the Malheur, Wallowa-Whitman and Umatilla national forests, has stumbled terribly in its previous attempts to revise its 29-year-old plan. It's supposed to be updated every 15 years, so the agency hasn't even been following its own timeline.

Updating the Blue Mountains plan has turned into an old-fashioned goat rope. In rejecting the latest 5,000-page version, Chris French, the reviewing officer and Forest Service deputy chief, said it was difficult to understand and implement.

That's not good, but the biggest problems appeared to be that Forest Service managers had their own priorities that didn't mesh with those of the people who live, work and recreate in the forests.

One such issue is transportation within the forests. Logging roads and other access are critical to getting around in the forests. Many of the roads, built with public money, have been targeted for closure not only in the Blue Mountains but other national forests.

Closing the forests to logging, firefighters, hunters, hikers and other users made little sense, the Forest Service was repeatedly told in forum after forum.

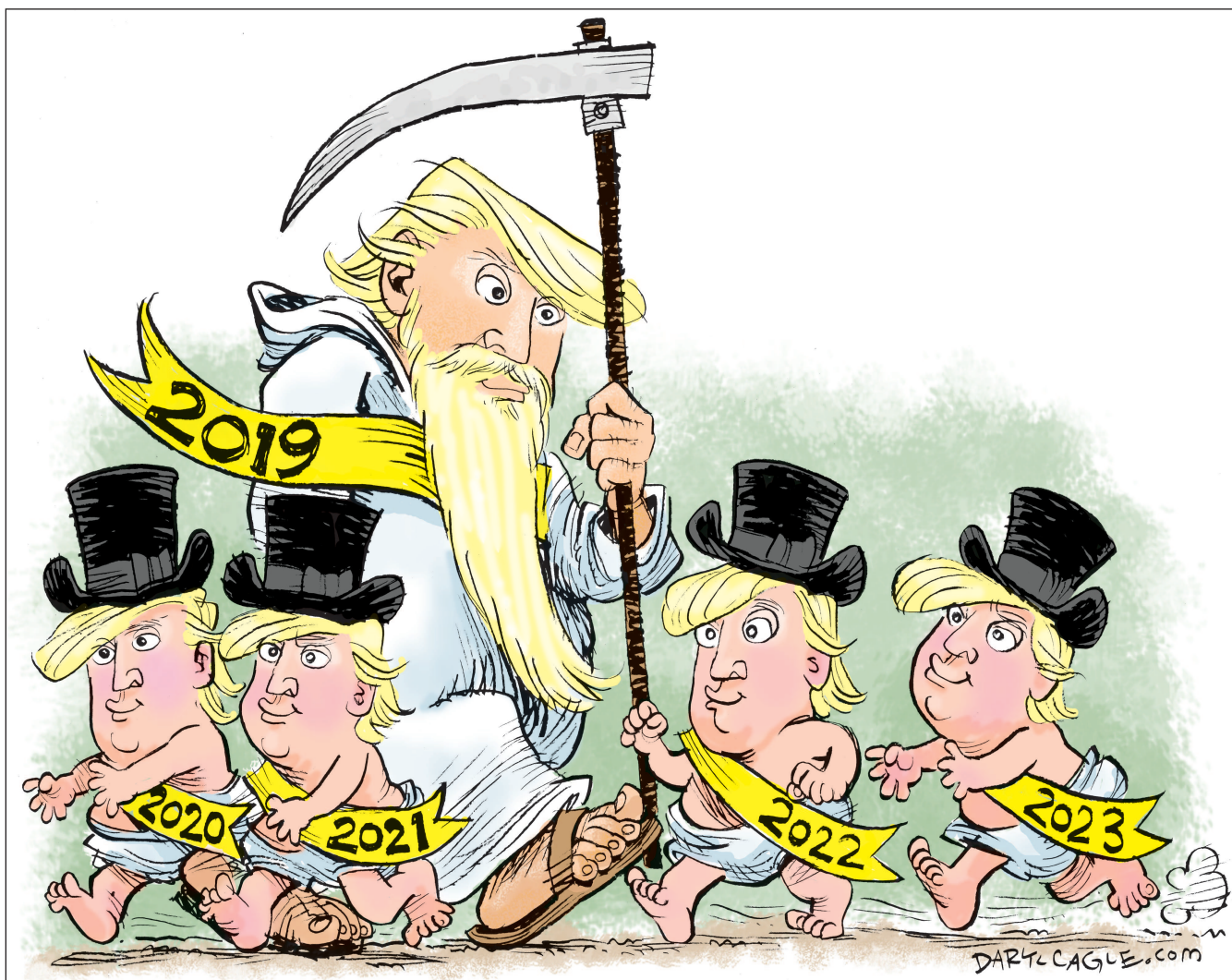
Now, the managers have apparently come to understand the people who live and work in the Blue Mountains deserve a place at the table as a third iteration of the forest plan is developed. Representatives of the region's counties, tribes and others will join the discussion.

It is our hope the words "multiple use" will be top of mind as those discussions proceed. The national forests were established under the U.S. Department of Agriculture in part to provide a source of building materials and the jobs associated with them. In addition, other uses were to be allowed.

But most important, the forests were to be managed as a resource, not locked up.

Locking up the forests, specifically, is what the new round of negotiations needs to avoid. As a public resource, the national forests of the Blue Mountains must be open for many types of uses, and accessible to all.

Otherwise, they will fail to fulfill their purpose and stifle the economy of Eastern Oregon and southeastern Washington state.



Your views

Farmers and ranchers will miss having Walden around

As someone who owns and operates a cattle ranch, I take pride in saying Congressman Walden is working harder than anyone in D.C. to cut through the red tape that we farmers and ranchers live with every day.

Greg has supported the Trump administration as they work hard to renegotiate trade deals and expand access for our farmers and ranchers to foreign markets — like the newly negotiated USMCA and the U.S. trade deal with Japan — a great win for Oregon agriculture.

In Congress, Greg has passed legislation that would improve forest management and decrease the risk of wild-fire by utilizing tools like grazing and thinning to reduce fuel loads on public lands. Greg has fought hard to ensure farmers

and ranchers can continue to rely on the protections provided in the Farm Bill. He has worked tirelessly to advance legislation time and again that would federally delist the gray wolf and give the states the ability to better manage wolf populations.

I've watched Greg as he has spoken with leaders in the agriculture industries from Eastern Oregon throughout his career in Congress. His passion for the industries is clear in those meetings, and he has always carried the message he receives in those discussions back to D.C. I have had the pleasure of working with him in Oregon and in Washington, D.C.

The farmers and ranchers of Oregon are going to miss having Congressman Walden around. Thankfully we still have one more year.

Matt McElligott
North Powder

Write to us

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541-426-4543, ext. 11; fax 541-426-0582.

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Phone: **541-963-3161**

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-422-3110
Fax: 541-963-7804

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com
Website: www.lagrandeobserver.com
Street address: 1406 Fifth St., La Grande

POSTMASTER
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