

OUR VIEW

Farmers right to be skeptical

The results of a study of stakeholder attitudes regarding the proposed breaching of Snake River dams were hardly surprising, but ag interests say the document may serve to educate proponents of the complexities the issue presents.

We can only hope so.

The study was recommended by a task force on reviving the orca population in Puget Sound. Scientists blame a declining orca population on a lack of chinook salmon to eat.

All Snake River salmon runs are federally threatened or endangered species. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and the Legislature supported the \$750,000 study to catalog different perspectives on breaching the dams as a way to increase fish runs.

The preliminary study represents the views of farmers, tribes, environmentalists, fishermen, shippers and government officials.

Breaching the dams would make it impossible to ship grain down the Snake. Loss of water impounded by the dams would impact irrigation on thousands of acres of farmland, and the loss of electricity generated by the dams would increase the cost of pumping groundwater.

Proponents of breaching the dams have suggested that subsidies to farmers could be built into the multibillion-dollar price tag.

“It is important to make agriculture ‘whole,’ so farmers do not suffer significant economic losses if the dams are breached,” the study reported.

But, according to the study, farmers don’t believe they will be made whole.

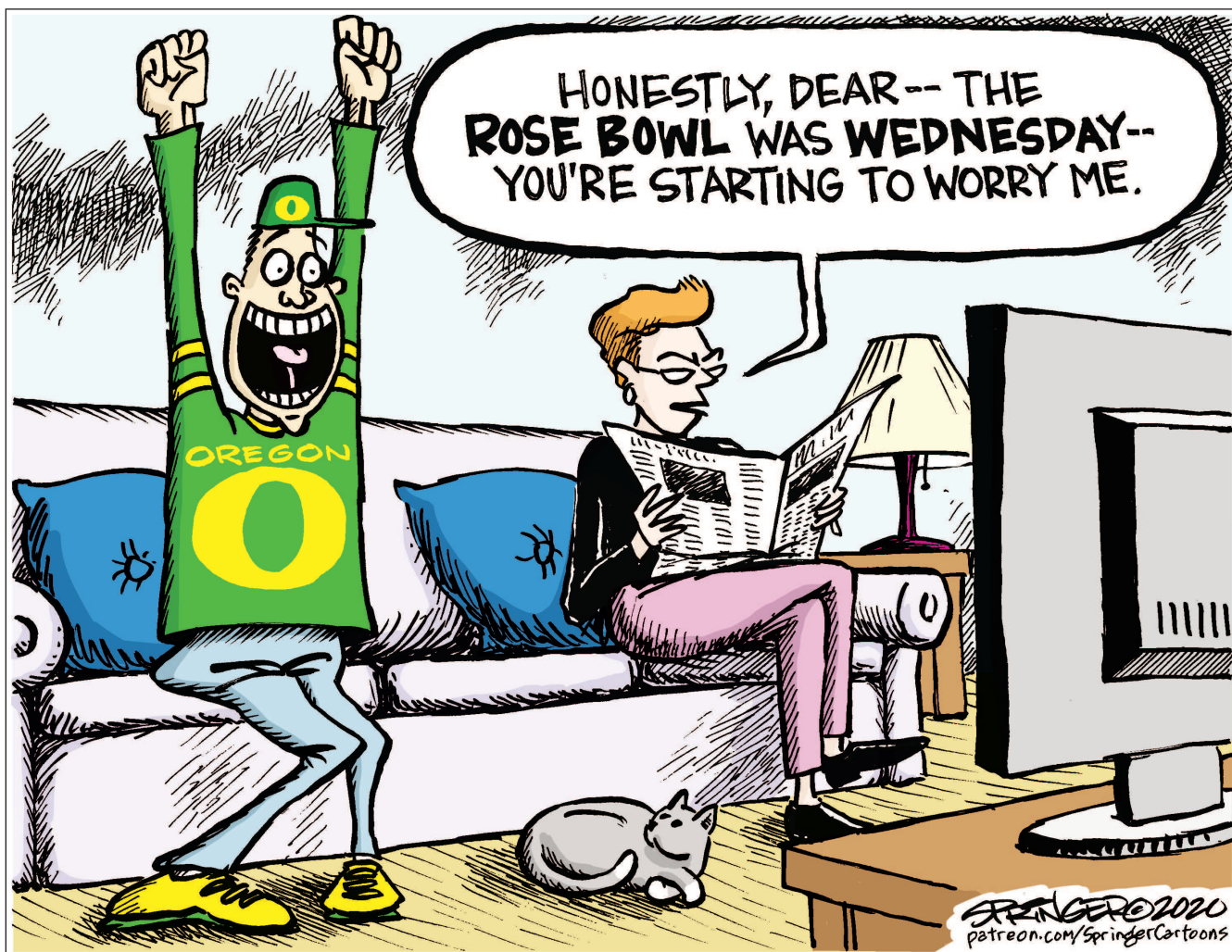
Farmers are worried about being “at the mercy of railroads” that would take over shipping and “skeptical” about switching to crops that use less water, according to the study.

Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires said he appreciated the report’s writers captured different views on breaching the dams.

“I think they genuinely listened and began to realize this whole thing is more complicated than meets the eye,” he said. “It’s not as easy as giving a farmer a nickel, dime, 20 cents a bushel — case solved.”

Indeed, it is complicated. The livelihoods of farmers, barge operators, deck hands, dock workers and the vendors who support them hang in the balance. The loudest proponents of breaching the dams seem to have the least personally at stake.

We don’t know anyone who is against saving the orca or the salmon if the real human costs and impacts can be realistically addressed. Count us as skeptical that could ever be the case.



MY VOICE

If you want economic growth, start with a little housekeeping

Considering Mrs. Dutto’s response to my letter about the now implemented non-horn status of the five main UP crossing through La Grande.

First: I applaud Mrs. Dutto and others for their public service. Making decisions for us all as representatives is not without difficulty and usually with little applause.

Now a few things to dig deeper into and some comparisons.

As reported in The Observer, the price tag for the new policy has been near \$200,000. If not, then what is it? Whatever it was seems a lot of money out of a poor community.

While UP runs about 23-24 trains per day through La Grande, the averages would say that only 10-12 run through during nocturnal hours.

Many people have sleep difficulties, but I have never heard personally that UP train horns were the cause of those problems. That does not mean there are none.

As for the tourist trade: I would direct a comparison to Sandpoint, Idaho, where the BNSF Railway Co. and UP run at least three times more trains than the UP does through La Grande. Sandpoint is a slightly smaller city (yet arguably more affluent) that is all about tourism and health. No restrictions are there as to railroad horns. Hotels and condos exist with very close proximity to the railroad right-of-way.

In talking with a person who has lived in Sandpoint for a very long time and runs a business, no concerns seem to come up about the train horn situation.

As for the street comparison: If the city were to spend a large amount of money for improvements, I would suggest that the streets, water and sewer systems are of much higher priority than that what has been spent on the crossings. Yes, street funds normally come from another pot entirely in the budget.

About the author

Curt Howell, 64, lives in La Grande.



A fourth-generation resident of Union County, he is the owner/manager of Oregon Trail Seeds. My Voice columns

should be 500-700 words. Submissions should include a portrait-type photograph of the author. Authors also should include their full name, age, occupation and relevant organizational memberships. We edit submissions for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We reject those published elsewhere. Send columns to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande 97850, fax them to 541-963-7804 or email them to news@lagrandeobserver.com.

Write to us

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. Letters are limited to 350 words and must be signed and carry the author’s address and phone number (for verification purposes only).

We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish poetry, consumer complaints against businesses or personal attacks against private individuals. Thank-you letters are discouraged. Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.

Email your letters to news@lagrandeobserver.com or mail them to La Grande Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, Ore., 97850.

Streets and sidewalks are used by all. My point is that if you were to spend precious cash funds, why not put it in a place that benefits all?

For as long as I can remember, La Grande city councils have not instituted comprehensive street maintenance plans. These failures have led us to the sad situation we have now with rapidly deteriorating street infrastructures. In the early 1980s I served on a committee that recommended to the council several policies to ensure the streets/sidewalks were maintained. I can’t see where those things have been followed.

Some policy toward proper more thorough clean-up of leaves and other debris at curbs would help prevent deterioration of curbs, sidewalks and asphalt. A possibly more aggressive program of using tar to fill cracks in streets may help a lot. Maintaining the

investment in good surfaces cuts long-term costs. Is there an ongoing plan to repair broken curbs damaged by mostly snow removal?

Preventive weed control is another area that is relatively cheap to perform and can reduce the unsightly and damaging weeds growing in many cracks and joints of concrete and pavement. If you want economic improvements, start with housekeeping.

Homeowners/landlords could enhance their properties’ look considerably with some maintenance. Is there no ordinance to not allow parking on curbs and front lawns? Could the city provide some incentives to property owners to more highly maintain their properties?

Perhaps the present city council could provide some leadership in directing staff to explore ways to turn the situation around? Provide guidance and deadlines, and report to the citizens what you are doing.

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE
NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 34% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 541-963-3161 to subscribe.
Stopped account balances less than \$5 will be refunded upon request.
Subscription rates per month:
By carrier.....\$11.80
By mail, all other U.S. \$15

THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896
(USPS 299-260)

The Observer reserves the right to adjust subscription rates by giving prepaid and mail subscribers 30 days notice. Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850. Published Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (except Dec. 25) by EO Media Group, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

COPYRIGHT © 2020 THE OBSERVER
The Observer retains ownership and copyright protection of all staff-prepared news copy, advertising copy, photos and news or ad illustrations. They may not be reproduced without explicit prior approval.

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
Send address changes to:
The Observer, 1406 Fifth St., La Grande, OR 97850
Periodicals postage paid at La Grande, Oregon 97850

STAFF

Publisher.....Karrine Brogotti	ClassifiedsDevi Mathson
Regional circulation directorKelli Craft	Home delivery advisor.....Amanda Fredrick
EditorPhil Wright	Customer service repMollie Lynch
News clerk.....Lisa Lester Kelly	Advertising representative.....Juli Bloodgood
Sports editor.....Ronald Bond	Advertising representative.....Amy Horn
Reporter.....Dick Mason	Graphic design supervisor.....Dorothy Kautz
Reporter.....Sabrina Thompson	Graphic designCheryl Christian
	IT supportNicole Gilbride

Chris Rush, Regional Publisher

