

Other Views

How national forests suffer from litigation, obstruction

Most would agree forest management is essential to reducing heavy fuel loads that contribute to unnaturally severe wildfires. Yet, anti-forestry obstruction and litigation are keeping federal land managers from reducing the risks to our national forests and nearby communities. This year's devastating wildfire season is providing more examples of how timber projects are often delayed until it's too late to save a forest.

The Crystal Clear Restoration Project was an effort by the U.S. Forest Service to reduce wildfire risks on the Mount Hood National



NICK SMITH
AMERICAN FOREST RESOURCE COUNCIL

Forest, protect nearby communities and restore habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl. It would have treated over 11,000 acres of the forest by thinning overstocked stands at risk of wildfire.

This effort was halted after activist groups filed a lawsuit. In May, a 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals panel ordered the national forest to complete additional paperwork before the thinning could begin. Unfortunately, portions of the project area have since burned up in the White River Fire. Early infrared information from the National Interagency Fire Center indicates it burned at intense heat.

Would thinning and reducing fuels have reduced the intensity of the White River Fire, and given firefighters a better opportunity to contain the blaze more quickly? Thanks to anti-forestry litigation, we'll never know for sure.

In its 208-page Environmental Assessment of the project, the Forest Service determined current overstocked conditions would lead to uncharacteristically severe fires, including crown fires that destroy forests. The agency determined forest management activities, including logging, were needed to improve the forest's resiliency to wildfire, and even to create quality habitat for Northern Spotted Owls that are currently not found in the area.

The activist groups initially challenged the restoration project in U.S. District Court, mischaracterizing the project as "commercially logging thousands of acres of old growth" at the expense of the owl. The district court rejected claims that there is scientific controversy over thinning in order to reduce the risk of wildfire, and the judge recognized that less than 1% of the project was in old-growth stands.

The district court judge had also denied a request for an injunction against the project, finding that the public interest favored action to decrease the risk of catastrophic fire and to support the local economy through the sale of timber.

The decision was appealed to the 9th Circuit, which wrongly second-guessed the agency and the expertise of professional land managers and scientists, and indefinitely postponed the project. Attorneys for the activist groups submitted agenda-driven research, and other information funded by anti-forestry groups, which criticized the effectiveness of thinning overstocked and fire-prone forests. The panel found the Forest Service didn't properly weigh this information, and ordered the agency to conduct additional analyses.

It is too late to save these forests from the White River Fire.

Even more troubling, the 9th Circuit panel's decision has negative implications for the use of forest management activities, in this case thinning activities, that are based in real science and are proven to protect public lands and communities from wildfire, and provide true conservation benefits.

This story is all too common throughout Oregon and the West, where our public lands agencies and their experts have worked to reduce severe and dangerous risks to our landscapes.

With millions of acres of federal lands at risk of devastating wildfires, projects to reduce fuels and promote our forests' resiliency to wildfires have been stymied by obstruction and litigation based on flawed and agenda-driven science.

Only Congress can provide relief by providing these agencies the tools and resources to implement preventive forest management activities that spares our forests and communities from this devastation.

Nick Smith is director of public affairs for the American Forest Resource Council, a regional trade association representing the forest products sector. He also is executive director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a nonpartisan grassroots coalition that advocates for active management of America's federally owned forests.

IN THIS ECONOMY, THE GRINCH HAD TO DIVERSIFY:



Letters

Alf Rippee is a clearheaded problem solver

My wife and I strongly support Kristine Alf Rippee for La Grande City Council. We have known her for more than 10 years, and from our first meeting have been impressed with the energy and organizational skills she has brought to homeschooling her four children. She has strong roots in Eastern Oregon and directs the same energy and commitment to her work for the La Grande community. She volunteers as the treasurer of the La Grande Swim Club and as an official for USA Swimming for La Grande High School swim meets. She volunteered for the Girl Scouts as the regional event and travel coordinator and is also director of the Wallowa Fiddle Tunes Camp. Kristine is a clearheaded problem solver. Her presence on the city council will benefit the entire community.

Jon White
La Grande

Clements is only candidate with the experience to lead in difficult times

This is the time when experienced leadership matters the most. I proudly endorse Steve Clements to be reelected as mayor of La Grande.

I admire and respect Mayor Clements for his intelligence, his generosity of spirit and his dedication to the good of the citizens of La Grande. Steve has proven to be genuine, reliable and willing to work the long hours needed for the position of mayor.

Steve's honest, pragmatic and hopeful insight into our community's problems and needs come from his years of leadership experience.

In public meetings, he examines the issues and listens closely to the public's questions and concerns. He is considerate of varying opinions.

I worked with Steve on local issues and state housing matters. I found him to be very knowledgeable about our housing needs and very welcoming of grant funds that brought housing resources and extra dollars into our community. He knew our city's needs and knew the problems of our community and of our state.

Steve has been a three-term mayor. He deserves to be reelected for a fourth term. Steve is an experienced public servant with a clear vision of where he wants La Grande to go in the future. Many residents share his vision because it focuses on keeping our city a beautiful, safe and prosperous place to live.

We need Steve. Steve needs you. Join me in supporting the only candidate with the experience to lead us in these difficult times. Reelect Mayor Steve Clements.

Zee Koza
La Grande

La Grande would benefit from Wheeler's tenacity and skills

I am voting for Denise Wheeler for Position 2 on the La Grande City Council because she is community minded, hardworking and service oriented. After moving to La Grande in 2002, Ms. Wheeler helped originate the first performances at the Elgin Opera House with her husband, Kenn, who teaches theater at Eastern Oregon University. Wheeler directs musical theater at La Grande High School and works at a local retirement center as a

life enrichment assistant.

I noticed her in action on behalf of our community when she testified at the La Grande City Council meetings in 2018 to give input on a proposal to add recreational marijuana to the upcoming ballot. La Grande voters had turned this measure down several times and Ms. Wheeler felt the voters had already spoken. She showed tenacity and testified at two different meetings. The council reversed its vote after input from concerned citizens.

Denise fully supports our police and fire departments. She supports peaceful protests. She supports the functions of our library and recreation department and, within the budget, would like to improve them all to benefit our community.

With regard to COVID-19, she told me, "I do take it very seriously. My daughter had COVID-19 and has since recovered. I also work in an elder-care facility and I know the importance of protecting our residents and abiding by all of the COVID-19 protocols. But I have also seen the consequences of the lockdown. Because of all that I have seen and experienced, I think we need to open up cautiously and start rebuilding our community."

Denise has shown tremendous organizational skills, listening ability and plain hard work as a leader in women's and youth groups. Now, she has a desire to expand her service in the community by serving on the La Grande City Council. Please join me in voting Denise Wheeler for Position 2 on the La Grande City Council.

Marie Rampton
La Grande

Contact your public officials

Local officials

La Grande: City Manager Robert Strope, 541-962-1309, fax 541-963-3333; RStrope@cityoflagrande.org; P.O. Box 670, La Grande, OR 97850; Mayor Steve Clements, mayor@cityoflagrande.org; Councilors Gary Lillard (mayor pro tem), glillard@cityoflagrande.org; Nicole Howard, nhoward@cityoflagrande.org; Corrine Dutto, cdutto@cityoflagrande.org; Mary Ann Miesner, mmiesner@cityoflagrande.org; Justin Rock, jrock@cityoflagrande.org; and through the city manager's office.

Elgin: City Hall, 790 S. Eighth Ave., Elgin, OR, 97827; City Recorder/Administrator Brock Eckstein, cityadm@cityofelginor.org; Mayor Allan Duffy, 541-240-9763, mayor@cityofelginor.org; Councilors Mary West, 541-805-0443, councilor3@cityofelginor.org; Kathy Warren, 541-786-9611, councilor6@cityofelginor.org; Risa Hallgarth, 541-437-9462, councilor2@cityofelginor.org; Rocky Burgess, 541-786-2417, councilor1@cityofelginor.org; David Reed, 541-975-3306, councilor4@cityofelginor.org; and Ryan Martin, councilor5@cityofelginor.org.

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Union County: County Courthouse: 1106 K Ave., La Grande, OR 97850; 541-963-1001; fax 541-963-1079; Commissioners Donna Beverage, dbeverage@union-county.org, Matt Scarfo, mscarfo@union-county.org, and Paul Anderes, panderes@union-county.org; administrative officer Shelley Burgess, sburgess@union-county.org.

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Sen. William S. Hansell of Athena (29th District): Salem office: 900 Court St. N.E., S-423, Salem, OR 97301; 503-986-1729. Email: sen.billhansell@oregonlegislature.gov

Gov. Kate Brown: 254 State Capitol, Salem, OR 97310; 503-378-3111; www.governor.oregon.gov.

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