

Our View



Ellen Morris Bishop/For The Observer

The Grande Ronde River flows here about 8 miles below Troy. A bill from Oregon U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley would expand the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, designating about 42 miles of the Grande Ronde River as Wild where it runs through the Umatilla and/or Wallowa Whitman national forests.

New river protections may have unintended consequences

Oregon lawmakers at the state and national level need to do far more work regarding unintended consequences when they craft new legislation.

That isn't an easy task, especially when a politician is trying to get reelected, salve the often-sharp political edges of his constituents, or is besieged by special interest groups.

Yet, it is a real issue that typically goes unnoticed until a piece of legislation becomes law. Then, the unintended consequences are obvious and a whole new set of problems exist.

A good case in point is a recent proposal by Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley to add more than 4,000 miles of Oregon rivers and streams to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

The bill is set to greatly expand the amount of terrain protected from a quarter-mile strip on each side of a specific river to one-half mile.

At first glance there is something in the bill for everyone. The fears of environmentalists are assuaged, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts will see their favorite pristine piece of land near a river safeguarded, and it's a giant step forward in terms of conservation.

A lingering question, though, should be, "What would be the unintended consequences to this legislation?" If you are an environmentalist, the answer would be none. However, if you are not firmly rooted in the conservation camp, what does such a bill really mean?

Wyden said in a press release regarding the bill that Oregonians made it "loud and clear: They cherish Oregon's rivers and want them protected for generations to come."

Wyden is probably correct. Generally, most people want to see our rivers and mountains protected from damage, not only now but for future generations.

Still, what Oregonians made it "loud and clear?" Umatilla County? Morrow County? Folks in Union County? If so, how many?

Let's be clear. We are not in opposition to the bill. What we do hope is the lawmakers who have carefully — we hope — crafted the legislation have thought the idea all the way to the end.

Making wide-sweeping proclamations to appease conservation groups is all well and good, but the impact of the legislation to the folks on the ground should be a key question with a readily available answer.

Too often lawmakers develop a grand idea that sounds great. On paper it makes everyone happy. Then it becomes law and someone, somewhere, loses. We think Wyden's and Merkley's legislation is too important to fall into the category of unintended consequences.



Other Views

The victims of so-called 'cancel culture'



JASE GRAVES
HUMOR COLUMNIST

Along with uplifting news stories about the COVID-19 variants, former President Donald Trump's second impeachment trial and Tom Brady's unmitigated gall to continue winning Super Bowls that include terrible halftime entertainment, we've also been learning about new victims of the so-called "cancel culture," in which individuals are randomly selected to be ostracized from the "We're Good and You're a Stinky Poo-Poo Head Club" of social and professional life.

Just recently, "The Mandalorian" star Gina Carano was "canceled" by Lucasfilm for her offensive social media posts — and for having larger biceps than most of her male co-stars. (Ironically, Baby Yoda continues to maintain celebrity status, even after heartlessly devouring several of the alien Frog Lady's tadpole eggs in season two.)

Instead of wallowing in the controversy of the cancel culture's inconsistencies, I'd like to propose that we put this phenomenon to good use by canceling some of the more egregious annoyances inflicted upon the American people — especially me.

First, I say we cancel the way laundry detergent bottles hold hostage at least one full underwear load's

worth of liquid when the container is supposedly empty. Sure, I could solve the problem by using those pre-measured Tide pods, but then I'd have to worry about my daughters' two doglets accidentally swallowing them and destroying even more of my grass, notwithstanding the yard's subsequent fresh, clean scent.

Speaking of pets and underwear, I wish the good Lord would cancel static electricity during the winter months. Not only does it cause the doglets to drag most of the grass they kill back into the house with them, but there's also the problem of its effect on my wife's and daughters' undergarments. Apparently, ladies' unmentionables are electrically predisposed to adhere to the lower inside legs of my pants when they come out of the dryer, choosing only to release themselves while I'm at work, the gym or at church. Try explaining that to your boss — or a deacon.

Another candidate for cancellation is the practice of restaurants seating screaming children within shattering distance of my eardrums. During an outing for dinner at the local Olive Garden with my wife and three teenage daughters, the only screaming I should hear is my own when I get the bill. Now, don't get me wrong. I understand that families with small children have every right to go out to eat at restaurants. I just wish they were seated in a more distant location, like Greenland.

Another candidate is the robocall I

get repeatedly from exotic cities like Snowflake, Arizona, with that guy claiming he has spent every waking moment trying to contact me about my car's extended warranty. First of all, what does this dude know about the non-existent warranty on my 2013 Ford Expedition that vaguely smells like a wet sock and has a five-year-old Starbuck's coffee beverage stain on the rear floorboard? Secondly, I really don't appreciate the massive letdown I experience after having been so excited and intrigued that I'm receiving a call from Snowflake, Arizona, rather than from one of my three daughters asking for cash.

In addition to the everyday aggravations noted above, there are numerous other irritating aspects of life to criticize and even banish without turning on our fellow citizens. While I certainly believe strongly in accepting consequences for our choices, I say we follow the example of the Bible (and my wife when I screw up) to admonish one another, bear with one another and ultimately forgive one another.

In other words, we should hold fast to our beliefs, accept our differences and live in a spirit of love and unity — unless, of course, you bring your screaming kid with you to the Olive Garden.

Jase Graves is an award-winning humor columnist from East Texas. Contact Graves at susanjase@sbcglobal.net.

Letters

We all should listen to Miri Koltuv

Upon reading the recent letter to the editor from Miri Koltuv concerning inclusion and fairness, I was extremely impressed by her astute assessment of the issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc. Her urgings that "everyone should be treated equally regardless of things they can't control" was especially insightful. For a seventh grader to have such an intelligent grasp of the intricacies of these important subjects is to be commended.

The last sentence of her letter sums it up very well, and I quote, "I hope that our community can come together to support inclusion and fairness for everyone, even when it is not a trending hashtag." I would like to think that we as a community will follow her lead and support her in making an effort to treat everyone equally and fairly.

My last thought is to say how

encouraged I am to know that there are young people like this in our midst and what hope it gives for the future. I believe it is extremely important to strive for the kind of behavior Miss Koltuv is encouraging in our small communities so that it may carry out into the wider world. Much appreciation for her words.

Mary Helen Garoutte
La Grande

Dr. Omann is an amazing man, vet and friend

I want to commend The Observer on Dick Mason's article (Feb. 2, 2021 edition) about Dr. Mark Omann. What an amazing man. I would like to share an experience I had with Dr. Omann.

I awoke one morning to see my two-month-old mule foal laying on the ground not able to move. In a panic, I hooked up the horse trailer, loaded the mare and literally packed the foal in the trailer and headed to Dr. Omann.

Through extensive tests, the foal was diagnosed with tick fever.

Dr. Omann prescribed a medication that might help. He said he could sell me the medication or I could walk over to Walmart and purchase it for about one-fourth the cost of what he would have to charge me. I told him that I had left in such a hurry I had not taken my billfold and therefore had no money with me. He said he would walk over and get it for me. Noon came and here came Mark with a hamburger, fries and a Coke for me. When it was decided there wasn't much to be done for my foal, Mark rode in the horse trailer from La Grande to Elgin with the foal and a car followed to return him to La Grande.

Not many vets would do what he did for me.

That day I stopped calling him my vet and started calling him my friend, who just happens to be a vet.

Dale Thamert
Elgin

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