

OUR VIEW

States can best manage wolves

For all of the gnashing of teeth and worries about the impending decline of Idaho's wolves, any predictions of their demise are greatly exaggerated.

Last year, the Idaho Legislature modified the law related to hunting and trapping wolves. Since it's the state's job to manage them, such laws were well within the purview of lawmakers.

Wolf advocates said the legislators were threatening the state's 1,500 wolves and any efforts to reduce that number would mark the beginning of the end for the predators.

In the year since the law was passed, not much has happened. The state's wildlife managers keep tabs on the wolves that have taken up residence in Idaho. What they found is — drum roll, please — the wolf population is about the same as before.

The wolf population peaks in the summer, after the pups are born. After that, any deaths are counted. The Idaho population's annual low point is about 900 in the early spring, before the next batch of pups is born.

State wildlife managers say that if for some reason the population began to decrease too far, they could make mid-course adjustments.

That's the sort of thing wildlife managers do.

Montana's Legislature passed similar legislation. For the vast majority of the state the new hunting and trapping rules had little impact on the overall wolf population. However, they found that some wolves from Yellowstone National Park had a tendency to drift outside the park and were killed by hunters and trappers.

When wildlife managers saw this, the hunts in that area were called off. The Yellowstone wolf packs will no doubt rebuild.

There is a concept that continues to be circulated about wolves: They are timid creatures that need the help of man to survive in the wild. Environmental groups use that concept to build a case for protecting wolves, and raising money.

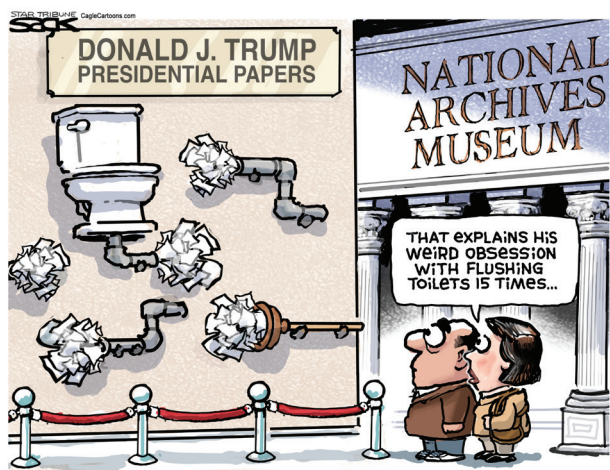
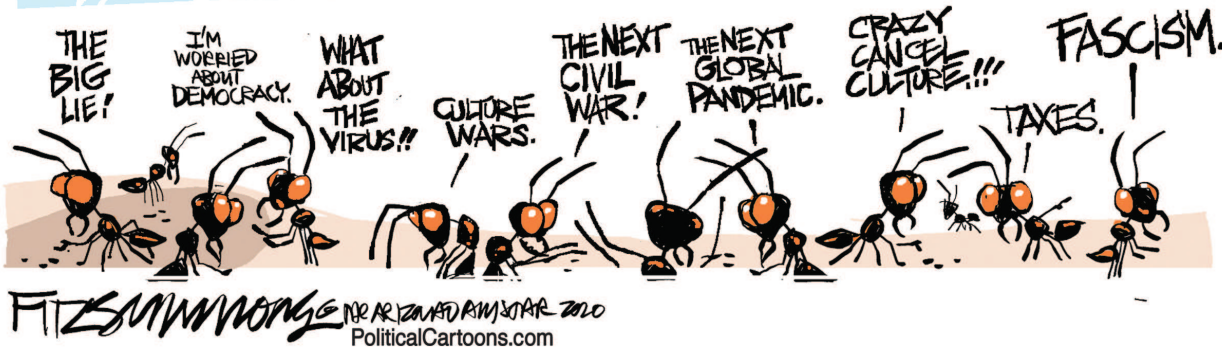
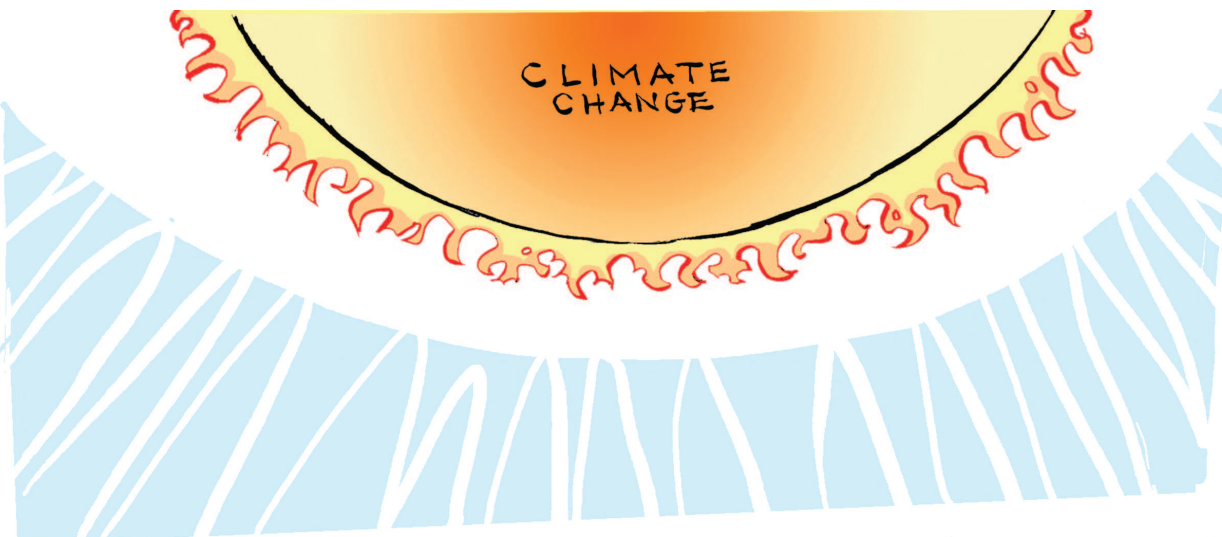
Unfortunately for them, wolves are robust, smart and reproduce rapidly. Idaho started with 35 wolves imported from Canada in the mid-1990s. Now the population peaks at 1,500 each year, even with hunting, trapping and culling wolves that attack livestock.

Similarly, the wolf populations in Washington state and Oregon are healthy, yet the way they are managed has frustrated many ranchers.

Idaho and Montana have shouldered the responsibility of managing wolves in those states. They are held accountable and able to make changes as needed to maintain the health of the wolf populations without sacrificing the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers.

Our hope is that, some day, political leaders in the nation's capital, Washington state and Oregon will allow wildlife managers to do the same statewide.

The last thing any of those states need is for the federal government to take over all management of wolves. Idaho and Montana have demonstrated that it's not needed, or wanted.



OTHER VIEWS

Managing our irrigation good for business, good for salmon



TONY MALMBERG
OTHER VIEWS

Droughts are becoming more frequent and intense. It can feel like climate change is stalking farmers and ranchers. The good news? Irrigators can play a unique role in helping ourselves through these trying conditions.

I've lived on ranchlands in Nebraska's Sandhills, Wyoming and now the grasslands of Northeastern Oregon. My wife and I have run a direct-to-consumer, grassfed beef and lamb business for more than two decades. Our successes have come when pursuing regenerative agriculture, which means adding more life. When biodiversity thrives, there's a good chance our revenue will do the same.

This is increasingly urgent for other reasons as well. Salmon in parts of the region are perilously close to extinction. Our livelihoods, regional prosperity and the future of salmon are all linked. It may come as a surprise, but the irrigator vs. salmon debate is not a zero-sum game. We can coexist, prosperously.

Regenerative management practices — like minimizing overgrazing, scheduling irrigation and ensuring plant recovery — can increase soil organic matter (SOM) and retain water in our soil mantle.

Better irrigation and grazing practices during the good moisture years make us more resilient during dry years. It's also good for salmon habitat, which benefits the whole region.

On the flip side, over-irrigation, hot-season irrigation and down-cut rivers

make us more susceptible to drought. Over-irrigation suffocates our soil through compaction. Compaction creates a barrier, preventing roots from accessing deeper moisture, minerals and nutrients. By monitoring available water content, we can avoid this.

Irrigation saturates the soil. If one were to make a ball of the soil and squeeze, water would ooze out, indicating there is more than 50% available water content (AWC). As days go by, the surface dries. If we can't form a ball, that tells us the soil is drier than 50% AWC. On our ranch, we generally don't want to irrigate until the available water content of 50% drops to at least 8 inches. This allows the roots of grasses to follow water down and build regenerative soils for better water retention and less exposure to drought.

In hot-season irrigation, we shouldn't lose sight of the geography we work within — and use it to our advantage. High-mountain meadows in most of the western United States are composed of cool-season plants. These plants evolved to shut down, or senesce, when temperatures reach 70 degrees.

In Northeastern Oregon, this happens around mid-July. Continued irrigation may keep cool-season plants green, but they will not produce significant biomass. By keeping this potential irrigation water in stream during the hot season, we can keep rivers alive, grow riparian vegetation and cool rivers for salmon — a win-win.

By contrast, down-cut rivers are a lose-lose. They drain the productive floodplain, dry up meadows and destroy critical salmon habitat. We should instead be slowing the flow of water on the uplands with SOM, sat-

urating the floodplain for continued cold river recharge in the summer and keeping rivers flowing during the hot season.

The health and wealth of our region is connected to the salmon runs that define our rivers and streams. The loss of salmon imperils Tribes, fishermen, main street businesses and Northwesterners' very identity, from the Pacific coast to the Rocky Mountains.

Fortunately, a solution is within reach. Last year, Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, presented a plan to remove the lower Snake River dams to advance salmon recovery — and replace the services the dams provide, like irrigation. It's a far-reaching and visionary proposal with investments to ensure all communities remain whole, to transform and strengthen our region.

His proposal includes mechanisms to ensure ranchers and farmers have the water they need to do the work we're all proud of. And with regenerative management, we can increase our production as we heal the landscape. We now know that our sector can actually build biodiversity, increase SOM, reconnect rivers to floodplains, address climate change and insulate ranchers from drought.

When we have regenerative soil and functional rivers, we better our own livelihoods — and the sustainable existence of salmon as well.

Tony Malmberg has been a rancher and practitioner of holistic management for more than 30 years. He's received numerous awards for his work including the National Environment Stewardship Award from the National Cattlemen's Association. He and his wife, Andrea, ranch in Union County.

LETTERS

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THE OBSERVER

An independent newspaper founded in 1896

www.lagrandeobserver.com

Periodicals postage paid at Pendleton, Oregon 97801
Published Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays (except postal holidays) by EO Media Group, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850 (USPS 299-260)

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POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Observer, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

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