

OUR VIEW

Preserving farmland must be a priority

Mark Twain is credited with telling readers to buy land because, he warned, they aren't making more of it. Unfortunately, farmland sold is too often put to other uses and is lost forever.

A new report from the American Farmland Trust warns that the Pacific Northwest stands to lose more than half a million acres of farmland to urban sprawl by 2040 unless cities make smarter development choices.

Between 2000 and 2016 alone, roughly 11 million acres of farmland has been lost or fragmented by development.

Across the Northwest, as many as 527,185 acres of additional farmland may be lost to urban and low-density residential development by 2040 — particularly in rapidly growing metro areas around the Puget Sound, Portland, Spokane and Boise.

Washington would be the hardest-hit state, losing 238,614 acres of farmland under the worst-case scenario. That is an area roughly 4-1/2 times the size of Seattle.

Oregon would lose up to 142,267 acres of farmland, while Idaho would lose up to 146,304 acres.

Our own reporting has shown that when urban development moves into rural spaces more than farmland can be lost. As areas fall to other uses, the overall viability of the local ag infrastructure comes into jeopardy.

As fields give way to housing developments, conflicts between homeowners and farms increase. New residents don't like the dust and smells associated with farm production, and complain about farm machinery on the roads and trucks during harvest time.

And, as developments break up the landscape, farmers find it ever more difficult to move equipment from field to field.

We can't fault farm families for getting the highest value for their property. Where there are buyers, there will be sellers.

As an alternative to development, we favor easement programs that allow owners to sell their development rights and realize the market value of their land while preserving it for farming.

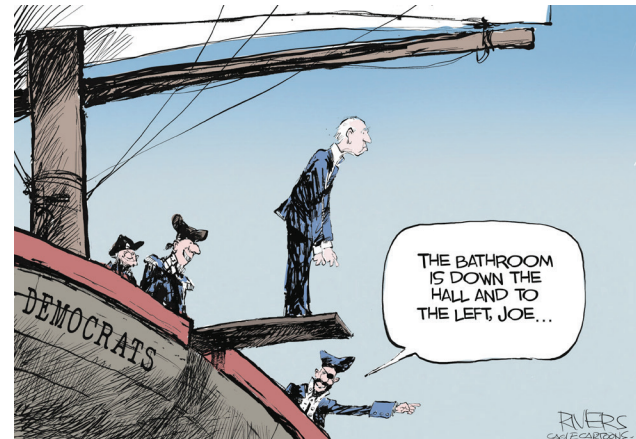
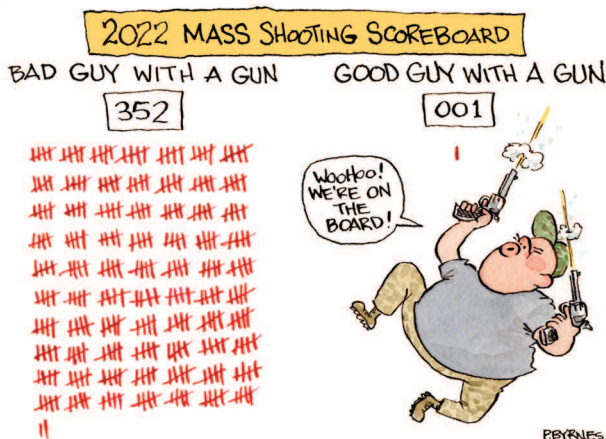
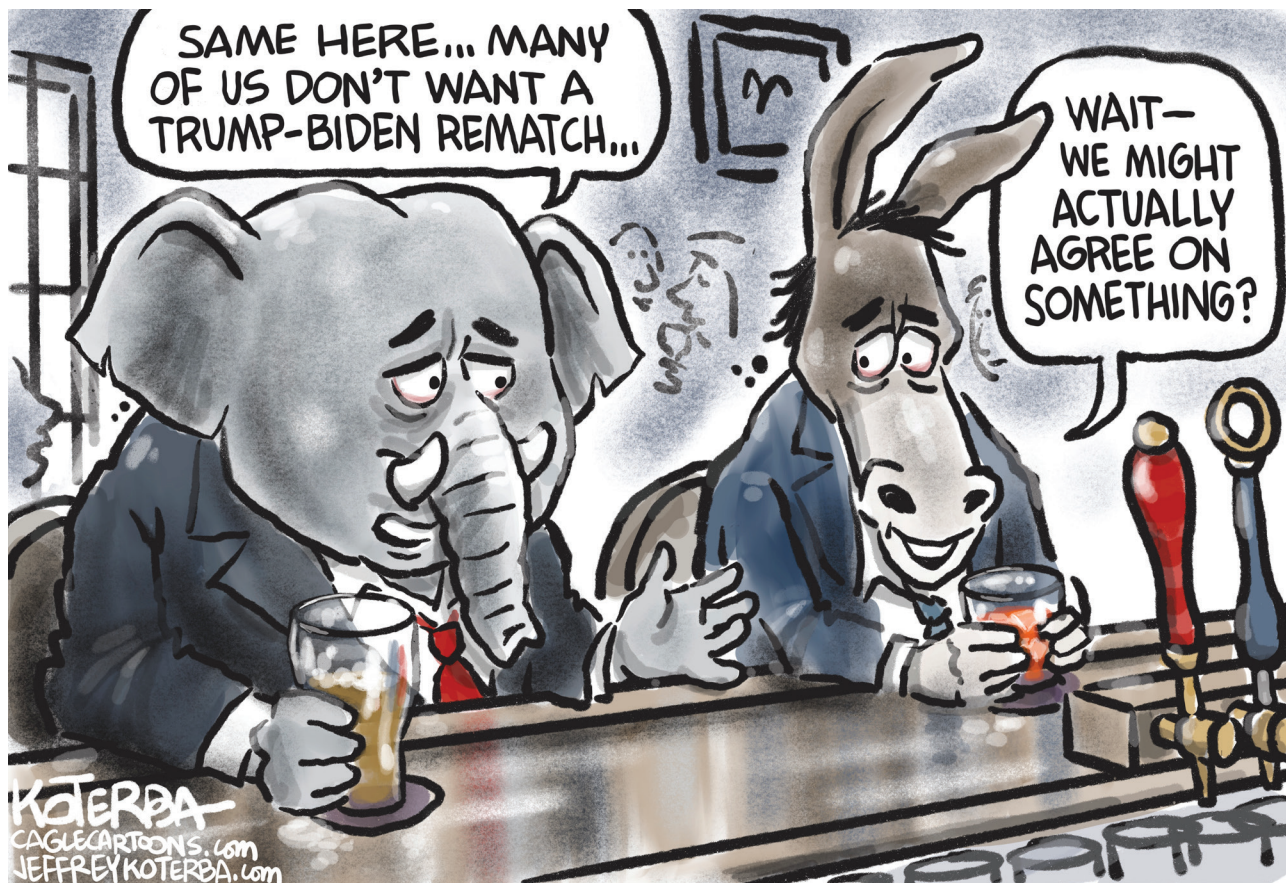
We encourage state legislatures to fund those types of programs while taking steps to rein in urban sprawl.

Preserving farmland must be a priority.

When developers look at farm and range land, they see "empty" spaces with nothing on it. They see parcels for subdivisions, apartment buildings, shopping malls and restaurants.

Farmland is far from empty. It provides the food that sustains us and the fiber that clothes us. It is a vital strategic resource. It is, as Thomas Jefferson said, the wealth of the nation.

Farmland is more than just a patch of ground with stuff planted on it. Once paved over and developed, it cannot be replaced.



Solid foundation exists for forest plan



SUSAN ROBERTS
OTHER VIEWS

The Blues Intergovernmental Council supports the USDA Forest Service's plans to reinstate forest plan revision for the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests.

The work completed by the BIC over the past two years has established key foundations that will be crucial components of an improved forest plan revision process by reflecting local values, incorporating input and providing robust opportunities for meaningful engagement.

On March 14, 2019, the Forest Service's deputy chief issued instruction to the Forest Service Pacific Northwest Regional Forester to withdraw the Blue Mountains Revised Land Management Plans, Final Environmental Impact Statement and draft Record of Decision. This decision came after nearly 15 years of a highly contentious public planning process in which numerous community members and leaders felt frustrated, misunderstood and ignored. The objection process yielded more than 350 objections to the forest plans, which made clear that the public did not see how input provided had been incorporated nor did the plans fully account for the unique social and economic needs of the affected communities.

Following the withdrawal of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan, leadership from the Pacific Northwest Regional Office and the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman national forests met with the Eastern Oregon Counties Association in April 2019 to coordinate, better understand concerns and identify opportunities to approach forest planning and management in a new way. The participants recognized the need to explore unique approaches and work together

at a larger scale, which included other government entities within and surrounding the Blue Mountains geographic area.

The various government entities officially formed the Blues Intergovernmental Council in November 2019 to serve as an overarching entity and develop joint recommendations on the most contentious issues identified in the Blue Mountains Forest Plan revision process. The BIC members include leaders from all 14 local counties as well as federal, state and tribal government entities. The diverse membership of the BIC ensures numerous perspectives and interests are represented.

Since the BIC formed, members have worked together to develop desired conditions for Forest Service consideration on several key and previously polarizing issues in the withdrawn Blue Mountains Forest Plan, including riparian livestock grazing, fisheries, hydrology, forest health and access. The BIC also commissioned and oversaw the completion of a socioeconomic analysis that will offer data to help consider impacts of forest management decisions on local communities.

The BIC-endorsed desired conditions serve as recommendations to the Forest Service to inform the forest plan revision process (with a minority report included for the access issue). The collective work over the past two years has fostered trust and strengthened relationships between the key intergovernmental groups within the BIC and the Forest Service.

The BIC members and leadership from the Blue Mountains national forests feel this unique approach will provide a crucial foundation for success in accomplishing a revision of the Blue Mountains Forest Plan in a timely manner. By building off the past plan revision analysis, the BIC's endorsed desired conditions products and connections that each member has with various community perspectives, we have an exceptional opportunity

to develop updated forest plans for these national forests that provide for the sustainable needs of the landscape and the needs of current and future generations.

Building off these accomplishments, the BIC believes the Forest Service should move forward with the plan revision process under the 2012 Planning Rule, with the goal of working together to develop sustainable forest plans that reflect local values, incorporate input and provide robust opportunities for meaningful engagement. We support the Forest Service's plan to establish a local team and would urge this be done as quickly as possible to maintain the forward momentum the BIC has achieved in these last two years. By working together through this intergovernmental forum, the BIC can serve as a bridge between the Forest Service and communities surrounding the Blue Mountains to help repair and build trust, provide clarity about the planning process and plan components, complement Forest Service public outreach efforts and bring continual feedback to the Forest Service regarding ways to improve the process or products.

While there will still be passion around important issues, we feel that through the joint efforts between the BIC and the Forest Service we have built important relationships and developed key recommendations that address much of the previous controversy. This has built a solid foundation to move forward now with forest plan revision.

Vast progress has been made in the Blue Mountains. We look forward to working together with the Forest Service to steward these national forest lands in a way that provides for sustainable land management while considering the communities' economic and social-cultural health.

■ Susan Roberts is a Wallowa County commissioner and a co-convenor of the Blues Intergovernmental Council.

EDITORIALS
Unsigned editorials are the opinion of The Observer editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of The Observer.

LETTERS
• The Observer welcomes letters to the editor. We edit letters for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons. We will not publish consumer complaints against businesses, personal attacks against private individuals or comments that can incite violence. We also discourage thank-you letters.

• Letters should be no longer than 350 words and must be signed and carry the author's name, address and phone number (for verification only). We will not publish anonymous letters.
• Letter writers are limited to one letter every two weeks.
• Longer community comment columns, such as Other Views, must be no more than 700 words. Writers must provide a recent headshot and a one-sentence biography. **SEND LETTERS TO:** letters@lagrandeobserver.com or via mail to Editor, 911 Jefferson Ave., La Grande, OR 97850

SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE

NEWSSTAND PRICE: \$1.50
You can save up to 55% off the single-copy price with home delivery.
Call 800-781-3214 to subscribe.

Subscription rates:
Monthly Autopay\$10.75
13 weeks.....\$37.00
26 weeks.....\$71.00
52 weeks\$135.00

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)

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.

COPYRIGHT © 2022

Phone: 541-963-3161

Toll free (Oregon): 1-800-781-3214

Email: news@lagrandeobserver.com

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

STAFF

Regional publisher Karrine Brogotti Home delivery adviser..... Amanda Turkington
Interim editor Andrew Cutler Advertising representative Kelli Craft
News clerk Lisa Lester Kelly Advertising representative Amy Horn
Reporter Dick Mason National accounts coordinator Devi Mathson
Reporter Isabella Crowley Graphic design Dorothy Kautz
Reporter Shannon Golden



A division of