

OUR VIEW

# State gives Oregonians whiplash on wildfire map

The Oregon Department of Forestry said it knew from the start that it did not have enough time to do public outreach for the new state wildfire map.

Why wasn't it upfront with Oregonians? The state released the map on June 30. It notified more than 80,000 property owners that their properties were considered at high or extreme risk for burning. Most of those owners could face new requirements for removing vegetation around any homes and new building codes.

And now the map has been pulled. The notices to property owners are withdrawn and any appeals to the state that concerned property owners have made are canceled. That's because the map is likely going to be changed.

Could this have been implemented more poorly? It would have taken some work. Property owners may feel like they have whiplash courtesy of their government. Surprised by the announcement. Surprised to learn what they might have to do. Surprised to learn that the state has not finalized what they would have to do. And then surprised as they gather information to appeal the classification of their property that the state cancels any appeals.

It's not how Oregonians want their government to treat them.

It's unfortunate because Gov. Kate Brown and the Oregon Legislature got serious about wildfire with the legislation that led to the creation of this map — Senate Bill 762. The law required so much important action to reduce wildfire risk — utilities needed to have wildfire plans, the state needed to look at building codes and the wildfire risk map.

Those are all things the state should be looking at. It's how the state did them that is the problem.

The core of the bill was the wildfire risk map and new requirements for property owners. The state didn't do a big ad campaign to notify Oregonians this was going on. It didn't announce that it knew public outreach was insufficient because the deadline dictated for the map by the legislation came so fast.

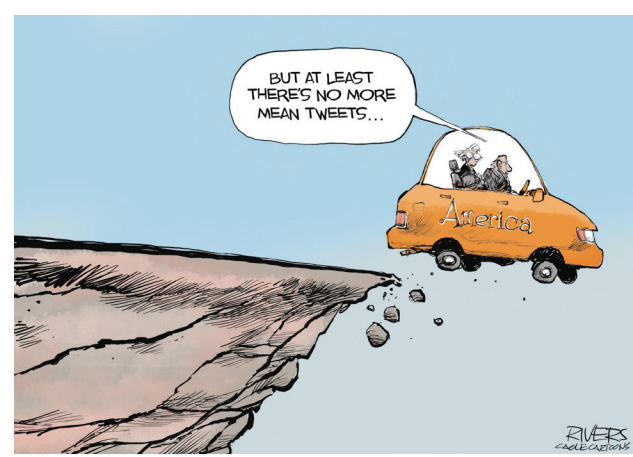
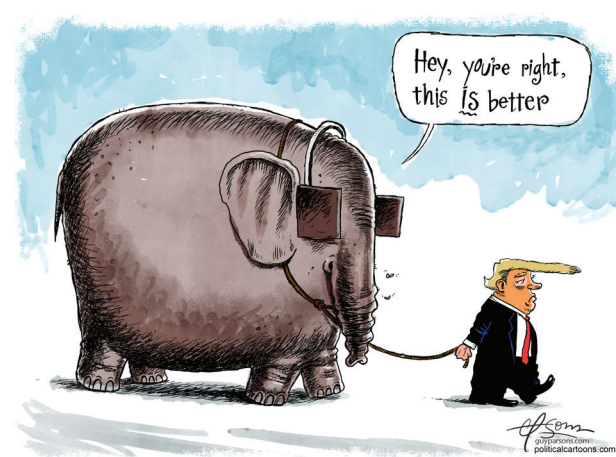
When Doug Grafe, the wildfire programs director in the governor's office, gave a presentation in early June to a Senate committee about wildfire and SB 762, he didn't have slides highlighting the possible problems. He talked about how much Oregon was doing on wildfire. He joked he was a bit overwhelmed by the eight grant programs and six sets of rules and codes in progress.

"I'm reaching my peak ability to keep up, honestly, with all the goings on," he said.

If he is in charge and was having trouble keeping up, it's no wonder Oregonians are, too.

To be fair to Grafe, he did know property owners were going to be concerned. Grafe and Mark Bennett, chair of the wildfire programs advisory council, both acknowledged that in response to questions from the committee. Should that concern, though, of how a state program would impact Oregonians — no matter how well intentioned — have been the focus of the presentation?

The best thing that can be said about the way the map was implemented is that it raised a ruckus. If Oregonians didn't know what was going on before, many more surely do now. But it's going to undermine confidence in the map and the ability of the state to implement programs.



# Logging interests now dominate forest collaborative organizations



PAULA HOOD  
OTHER VIEWS

Mark Webb, director of the Blue Mountains Forest Partners collaborative, recently attacked a colleague who dared to shed light on what's actually happening across public lands in eastern Oregon.

Forest collaborative groups, such as the BMFP, were initially created to bring together diverse interests, such as loggers and environmentalists, to restore forests. Unfortunately, collaboratives no longer work toward common ground and are increasingly dominated by extractive interests. Collaborative groups have ample financial incentives to promote logging, with millions of dollars in government subsidies going to collaborative members, staff and intermediary groups.

Regrettably, there is a tremendous disconnect between what the U.S. Forest Service and collaboratives put forth to the public and what is actually happening on the ground. Despite Webb's claims that the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest no longer logs old growth, there are centuries-old fresh stumps that say otherwise. I know there are hundreds more acres of old-growth at risk in the Big Mosquito project on the Malheur. I've read documents that show the Umatilla is proposing logging up to 27,000 acres of pris-

tine forests. I've been in meetings where the agency admitted they are developing proposals to log roadless forests while side-stepping standard environmental review.

Collaboratives don't want to hear inconvenient truths about climate change and carbon storage, or protecting clean water and wildlife. I spent years working in good faith at the BMFP. Unfortunately, it was all too clear that there is no place at the collaborative table for people who aren't on board with logging more and bigger trees at an ever-increasing pace and scale, while scrapping previously agreed upon environmental sideboards.

Folks can split hairs about how and why big trees continue to be cut down in timber sale after timber sale on National Forests in eastern Oregon. The fact of the matter is that they are being cut down. Ultimately, whether big trees are cut down to clear cable corridors for steep slope logging, because they're designated "hazards" or to simply get the cut out — at the end of the day, it doesn't change the fact that those big trees are gone.

Collaboratives may have good intentions, but results matter. That's why I raised alarm bells when I found dozens of big old trees cut down in the Big Mosquito Large Landscape Restoration Project in Malheur National Forest. In justifying the Trump administration's efforts to weaken protections for big trees, the U.S. Forest Service and the BMFP collaborative said that Big Mosquito was a model for what

we could look forward to across the region. With so little of our mature and old forests remaining, how much more can we afford to lose?

Big trees greater than 20 inches in diameter comprise only about 3% of trees in our region, because most were logged over the past 150 years. They're the foundations of mature and old forests, and critically important for wildlife, stream habitats and clean water.

The reality we're seeing on the ground is that logging is commonly heavy-handed and destructive. The U.S. Forest Service and collaboratives repeatedly gloss over and ignore the damage logging does to mature and old forests, wildlife, water quality and fish.

Restoring our forests requires protecting what we have left. It doesn't involve logging steep slopes, cutting down big old trees and arguing semantics while the world gets hotter.

My colleague Rob Klavins was right — the logging of 18 big trees near Bend was a big deal. However, in places obscure to many Oregonians, these things are happening on a much larger scale and without scrutiny.

As we face a climate and biodiversity crisis, we can't afford to take a single step in the wrong direction just to get along.

■ Paula Hood is co-director of Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, a fossil-based nonprofit that works to protect and restore the ecosystems of the Blue Mountains and eastern Oregon Cascades. This column originally appeared on the Oregon Capital Chronicle website.

## CONTACT YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

### GOVERNOR

**Kate Brown**  
160 State Capitol  
900 Court St.  
Salem, OR 97301-4047  
503-378-4582

### STATE REPRESENTATIVES

**Bobby Levy, District 58**  
900 Court St. NE, H-376  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1458  
Rep.BobbyLevy@state.or.us

**Greg Smith, District 57**  
900 Court St. NE, H-482  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1457  
Rep.GregSmith@state.or.us

### STATE SENATOR

**Bill Hansell, District 29**  
900 Court St. NE, S-415  
Salem, OR 97301  
503-986-1729  
Sen.BillHansell@state.or.us

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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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Phone:  
541-963-3161

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

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news@lagrandeobserver.com

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911 Jefferson Ave.,  
La Grande, OR 97850

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