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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Endangered Species Act created environmental industry

When it comes to environmental groups, extremism pays. A review of the tax forms filed by many of the most active — and radical — groups operating in the Western U.S. shows that the top 10 groups received nearly \$1 billion a year in contributions and legal fees.

That's billion, with a "B."

If they wanted to, those groups could fully fund the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's endangered species programs — for five years.

Instead, they go for the money. They snipe at the federal government and, as importantly, at farmers and ranchers. Many prefer to drag their targets into court instead of seeking compromises that would help species and allow farmers, ranchers and others to stay in business.

In fact, the litigation precludes such compromises.

"When you're litigating

something, you almost can't really talk to anyone," said Don Stuart, former American Farmland Trust Pacific Northwest director. He wrote a book about the clashes over the ESA.

The reasons for suing the government and ranchers are clear. Many environmental groups don't like animal agriculture. They want a vegetarian lifestyle. And they don't like large-scale farming. Anything they can do to get rid of ranching and large farms would be a feather in their cap.

But there's more to it. Environmental organizations cannot raise money if they solve problems. They must make sure the problem remains, or they can't produce the glossy ads and pamphlets and hold fund-raisers.

You'll never hear an environmental group announce to its donors, "Well, we've solved that problem. Thanks for your help, and

we're now going to dissolve the group."

Environmental groups need a perceived problem — preferably one that's "getting worse and that, through your donations, we can make a difference."

Here's the format they use:

"The (insert an animal, fish or insect) needs your help. We will fight to save the (insert an animal, fish or insect). With your donation, we can save the (insert an animal, fish or insect) for our children and generations to come."

The environmental groups came up with this formula decades ago, when Congress wrote the Endangered Species Act and President Richard Nixon signed it into law.

With its deadlines and protection not of species but of specific populations, the ESA was a gift to the environmental movement.

Suddenly, these groups had

an open playing field to petition the government to protect local populations of salmon, smelt, wolves, owls, grouse and other critters as though they were the last of the species.

Take, for example, the gray wolf, which is protected as "endangered" in parts of the Lower 48 despite the fact that just over the border in Canada there are more than 50,000 — and about 10,000 in British Columbia alone. Yet under the ESA, American wildlife managers must protect wolves as though they are the last of a breed.

The ESA is the blunt instrument that turned environmentalism into big business. If the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or any other federal agency does not follow the letter of this poorly written law environmental groups drag them into court.

The result is not more protection

for the (insert an animal, fish or insect) so much as a payday for the environmental group, which can then chalk up another "victory" in the "battle" to protect the (insert an animal, fish or insect).

It's also another source of cash. The federal government must pay the environmental groups if they can convince a judge that the agency missed a deadline or failed to meet some other requirement.

For environmental groups, it's a great deal. Groups spend all of their time suing the government and other bystanders. Instead of solving problems, they make sure the problems continue.

It's like shooting fish in a barrel that the ESA provided.

"We do have some pretty terrific environmental protection laws," Center for Biological Diversity spokeswoman Amaroq Weiss said.

For environmental groups, that is a statement of the obvious.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

Carbon tax punishes producers

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee has proposed a billion-dollar-a-year tax on carbon emissions, to be paid by 130 businesses and institutions that emit more than 25,000 metric tons of carbon a year.

Ag-related businesses on the governor's list include Lamb Weston, Simplot, Tyson Fresh Meats, Agrium Kennecott Fertilizer Operations, McCain Foods and Basic American Foods.

To emit any carbon at all, businesses on the list would have to bid for credits at auctions. The base price is set at \$12 per ton, and there's no limit on how high it would eventually go. The governor's office estimates the auctions would raise approximately \$1 billion a year. Over time, those credits will become more expensive, forcing businesses to pay more or to reduce their emissions through more efficient technology or reduced production.

The money would be used to fund transportation projects and spare Washingtonians increases in fuel

taxes. At first blush that sounds good, but what they save at the pump will be paid out in higher utility bills and in the increased costs of the goods and services provided by the affected businesses. If they survive.

Inslee's proposal is a tax on producers and Washington's largest employers. While the governor would have Washingtonians believe that the plan will be cost-neutral, the assertion ignores simple economics.

Nucor Steel, the state's only steel mill, told The Associated Press that the plan would cost it an additional \$3 million the first year. The steel industry is an extremely competitive, international business. The more costs associated with production, the less competitive Nucor's Seattle plant will be.

Clark County Utilities told the Columbian newspaper that the emissions from its natural gas generating plant would add \$8.4 million to its expenses. Those costs will be passed along to rate payers.

As their costs increase, producers

will make adjustments. They will cut expenses — jobs — and increase prices. If the cost of reducing carbon doesn't pencil out, they will move on to more welcoming jurisdictions, taking their payrolls and state tax revenues with them.

Nonetheless, supporters say the measure is necessary to save the planet from climate change.

Even if you concede that carbon emissions must be reduced to avert calamity, Washington's emissions are less than negligible. If it were possible to eliminate all of the state's greenhouse gas emissions, the impact on global temperatures would be zero.

Inslee's plan faces long odds in the Republican Senate. There's also a campaign afoot to get an alternative carbon cap/tax scheme on the 2016 ballot. It faces better odds.

That's a pity. We think big, national problems require national solutions. Otherwise, a patchwork of competing state regulations leaves producers at a competitive disadvantage.

Every farmer should be an environmentalist — and most are

By JONATHAN SPERO
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Jonathan Spero



The sour relationship between farmers and ranchers and environmentalists comes from misconceptions on both sides, and neither the agriculture community nor the environment benefit. It is the resource community that has the greatest potential to maintain and improve the quality of the soil, water and air we all depend on.

Where the urban commuter riding a bike instead of driving a car may save a few pounds of carbon, the farmer planting a legume cover or maintaining a vibrant grass pasture can sequester that carbon by the ton. Where the homeowner fixing a drip may save a few gallons of water from the treatment plant, the rancher who keeps a stream shaded and free of erosion protects thousands or millions of gallons.

Farmers who disrespect the fundamentals of environmental protection do themselves no good. We all breathe the same air and drink the same water. We all want a healthy place for our children. Farmers need the confidence of the much larger consumer population. Otherwise there will be obstacles at every turn.

There is a reason groups such as Earthjustice and the Center for Biological Diversity repeatedly receive court-awarded attorney's fees. They win lawsuits because the agencies routinely flout the law. If those agencies took the legally mandated protections of our laws seriously, they would not be losing those lawsuits.

Everybody eats. Nobody wants agriculture and food production to go away. Yet topsoil loss, species extinctions, intensive pesticide use, degraded streams, over-

crowding of animals, hidden engineering of crops, and patent ownership of life to do not have to be central to food production. It is not either-or.

There are detectable pesticide residues in most of our streams and evidence that this is harmful to at least some species. There is residue in mother's milk and in most foods, and at least a correlation with increases in autism, dementia and cancer. We do not yet know if there is causation. The ag community should not insist on an innocent-until-proven-guilty approach to what is allowed in our food and water.

Farmers should be taking the lead role in environmental protection. It does not all need to be organic. Farmers should implement and then highlight and show off practices that increase soil fertility, minimize pesticide residues, protect wildlife, and provide what can be seen as an acceptable life for food and dairy animals. Ranchers should not defend those who allow allotments to be over-grazed or degraded. On public lands, the rights of the public should also be respected.

Farmers can be the heroes of the environmental movement. A few already are. If, however, farmers continue to position themselves as opposed to environmentalism, the concerned public will see no choice but to seek to force what they see as acceptable standards, standards that may prove unworkable for many farm operations.

Jonathan Spero grows vegetable seed in Southern Oregon.

Readers' views

Ranchers need to get used to wolves

I would like to make a few comments on the wolf stories you regularly run.

I have been in forestry and agriculture for 30 plus years, I have been producing over 4.5 million tree seedlings annually for reforestation stock for the last 20 years. Yes, I am not familiar with livestock production.

I understand your viewpoint and the desire to side with ranchers in the wolf debate. Some issues I see as erroneous and/or misrepresented

are as follows.

In a recent article you were discussing a sheep rancher who lost 4 sheep to wolf depredation. You stated he was running 1,200 head. This is a .3 percent loss. Really? That is a problem for him? I currently lose 10-15 percent of my crop to disease, mice/voles, insects, winter damage, harvest damage, etc. If a new problem added .3 percent it would have absolutely no effect on our bottom line.

Your most recent story about lifestyle changes stated, "What that means is any newly arrived wolves take priority over ranchers who have

been there for generations. Ranchers now must accommodate the behaviors of their new neighbors." Get used to it. Airports have to accommodate new neighbors regarding noise, farmers accommodate new neighbors due to dust, smell, etc. It isn't just ranchers. Forestry/Timber accommodated the spotted owl which put thousands of people out of work and took valuable ground out of production.

As far as "ranchers who have been there for generations." Really? I believe the wolf was there long before any ranchers ever settled North America. In agriculture we also ac-

commodate the predators (coyotes). They eat the mice and voles.

Robert Moore
Vice President
Lava Nursery Inc.
Woodland, Wash.

Not all W. Wash. residents back wolves

Not everyone in the metropolitan areas of Western Washington supports the reintroduction of wolves from Canada, which destroy not only our livestock but also wildlife.

It took years for farmers and hunters to get rid of wolves, but now

they're federally protected in much of this country, including the western two-thirds of this state. Unfortunately, they breed prolifically.

Coyotes we can cope with — there are at least three on our suburban farm, but no one worries they might threaten young children.

Environmentalists should cease and desist from offering rewards for "information leading to a conviction in the shooting death of a wolf in October in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest." (quote from the Jan. 2 Capital Press)

Maxine Keesling
Woodinville, Wash.