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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Board of Ag appointment adds to diversity

The Oregon Board of Agriculture is a 10-person advisory body whose job is to provide a sounding board for state Agriculture Director Katy Cobb on the many issues facing farmers and ranchers.

To do that requires a board with expertise and a broad perspective. Current members run family farms, agri-businesses, diversified operations, ranches, urban farms and have even administered the state Department of Environmental Quality. They come from across the state — Klamath Falls, Portland and Eastern Oregon.

It may be among the most diverse boards the Department of Agriculture has ever had. As such, it aptly and ably represents the state's 35,439 farmers and ranchers.

If we were asked our opinion about adding a member to the board, we would suggest someone who was involved in dairy production, organic crop production, alternative energy, labor relations, conservation set-asides and innovative cropping systems. Such a person could offer value to any agriculture-related advisory board.

Gov. Kate Brown last week appointed Marty Myers, general manager of Threemile Canyon Farms in Boardman, to the board. The appointment was a master stroke. Myers brings with him a unique set of tools and experience that can benefit the board and the state Department of Agriculture by providing insight unavailable from other sources.

Having worked on small farms during high school and

college, Myers now manages one of the most diverse farms in the West. The farm's 32,000-cow milking herd produces 2 million pounds of milk a day that is made into Tillamook cheese. The farm converts the manure into electricity using an anaerobic digester that produces a third of the farm's power needs. The byproduct of that power production is used to fertilize the crops, which include 7,450 acres of organic vegetables and 6,100 acres of potatoes. Crops include corn, wheat, alfalfa, mint, peas, green beans, carrots and onions on a total of 39,500 acres.

The farm also raises its own replacement heifers and 7,000 steers in addition to a nursery for its calves. It grows its own seed potatoes and has a 23,000-acre conservation set-aside.

It also employs 330 people

year-round — many of them union members — and 400 people seasonally with an annual payroll of more than \$10 million.

By any measure, Threemile Canyon is a unique and cutting-edge farm that has pioneered many aspects of sustainable production.

Yet the appointment of Myers to the board has been criticized in some quarters as a sellout to "big ag." The Friends of Family Farmers group was particularly vociferous in its complaints that the state would somehow "take agriculture in the direction of industrialization."

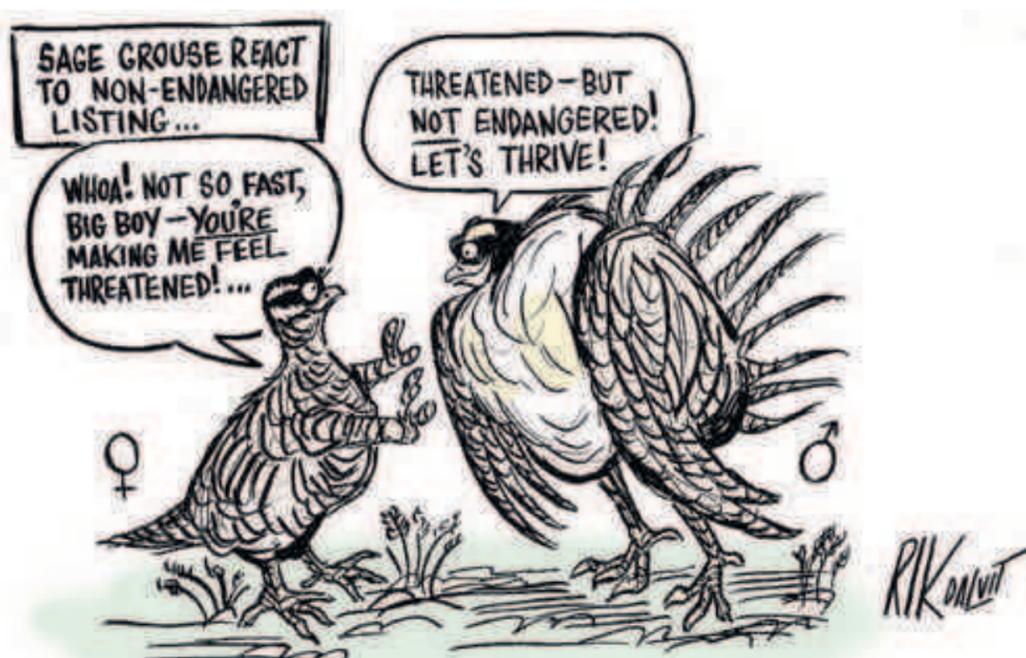
While we understand the group sees itself as an advocate of small farms, the appointment of a single person who manages a large farm cannot be characterized as pushing one type of farming any more than the appointment of

an urban farmer denotes a shift toward plowing up the streets of Portland to plant crops.

Decisions about the size and scope of individual farms are made by farmers, not in the Capitol in Salem or by the state board of agriculture. What other groups think of those decisions is beside the point.

Large or small, organic or conventional, livestock or crops, farming is rapidly evolving. Many farms, large and small, are adopting cropping systems that involve a combination of crops similar to how Threemile Canyon operates.

The Board of Agriculture met last week with Myers as its newest member. He will provide a needed voice on a diverse body that will help the state navigate the many issues facing agriculture in the 21st century.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

Sage grouse decision: New paradigm

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last week decided not to add the greater sage grouse to the endangered species list.

That's good news for ranchers and others in the western natural resources community.

In making the announcement, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell credited voluntary and collaborative measures to protect and improve greater sage grouse habitat on public and private land across the West.

With Oregon ranchers providing a key early model, producers, private landowners and public agencies adopted agreements most believe will protect sage grouse habitat while still allowing work on the land.

More than 100 Oregon ranchers signed voluntary conservation agreements with USFWS in which they took steps to improve habitat in exchange for 30 years protection from additional regulation even if the bird had been listed. Private landowners in other states followed suit, and public agencies such as the BLM revised their management plans.

Those revisions added restrictions on everyone who uses public lands. On the whole, we think these new restrictions are less intrusive than what would have happened if the sage grouse were listed.

Some environmental groups say the sage grouse can't survive without the more stringent protections provided by the Endangered Species Act.

Oil and gas interests say the voluntary conservation plans on private lands and mandatory efforts on public lands are too restrictive for energy production. At the same time, there are carve outs for a proposed transmission line for electricity produced by wind generators, a resource favored by the administration.

Though for different ends, both sides have threatened litigation.

It should be noted that it was a lawsuit brought by environmentalists to force the government to make a decision on a sage grouse listing that provided the impetus for the collaborative efforts and reworked land use plans now at issue.

Some members of Congress say the Obama administration has successfully

put even private lands under the government's thumb, what some believe was the goal from the start.

Litigation is an inevitable byproduct of any decision on an environmental issue. Congressional displeasure is also a near certainty. All of this will play out over time.

We would not suggest that voluntary conservation plans and the government efforts have not changed the West. Clearly, there is a new paradigm.

But ranchers and other natural resource advocates need to remember that they have more options under the current conditions than they would had the sage grouse been listed. That would change the West in ways that would make grazing and other productive use of public and private lands all but impossible in many cases.

The challenge now is to ensure measures taken thus far maintain sage grouse habitat and lead to an increase in the population. The only way to thwart litigation or renewed political pressure for a listing — and thus more onerous restrictions — is to actually save the sage grouse.

OUR VIEW

If Walden were to speak up for immigration reform ...

What if a politically secure Republican spoke up for farmers who need migrant labor?

In this editorial, we take the liberty of writing a speech for Congressman Greg Walden, who represents Oregon's sprawling Fourth Congressional District in Eastern Oregon.



Walden

— Labor and State.

They also must comply with housing rules that are

different than those enforced by the state of Oregon.

They must pay the prevailing wage. And if a worker does not perform, the farmer cannot dismiss him.

The farmers in the Hood River Valley are significant to one of Oregon's regional economies, but most growers are smaller operations. Mr. Omeg told me that a large grower can make H2-A work, by gaining economies of scale. But those are not available to a small grower.

Mr. Speaker, we have talked about immigration reform for months and years. Some of the biggest names in both parties have broken their picks on this topic. Most recently, the Senate passed a bipartisan reform bill. But it has not come to a vote in this House.

It is no secret that farmers, across America, feel betrayed by the Republican party. That embarrasses me.

In taking the floor on this issue today, I realize that I may be jeopardizing my standing in the House majority leadership. But I must speak up for these farmers.

If breaking my silence on this topic costs me my leadership position, so be it. The first obligation of each of us is to represent our constituents. That's what I'm doing today.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak for a group of Americans that we tend to forget in this chamber. These are farmers — farmers who absolutely depend on migrant labor. There are many of these farmers in my district. And I am sure the same is true in many of your districts.

The *Capital Press*, a weekly agricultural newspaper published in my state of Oregon, reported on September 18 that a California grower of organic figs lost \$500,000 — that is a half million dollars — in figs he was unable to harvest because he had difficulty finding workers to harvest his crops. The figs rotted on the ground.

Not too long ago, I spent part of a day listening to orchardists in the Hood River Valley, which is part of my district. One of these growers — named Mike Omeg — described in painful detail what he has to do to make the federal H-2A program work. Farmers use that program to bring guest workers to their land.

As Mr. Omeg and other Hood River orchardists told me, the H-2A program whipsaws them between the departments of Immigration — inside Homeland Security

Federal forest management is not to blame for Washington state fires

By MITCH FRIEDMAN
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Mitch Friedman



Like the drought-parched soils of our region, your claim (Forest management, wildfires and climate change, 9/24) that "The poor management of federal land ... is the primary cause of the increasing number of large wildfires" doesn't hold water.

Only a third of what burned this year in Eastern Washington was national forest. The rest was mostly private and tribal lands. Here's

a map: www.conservationnw.org/news/scat/cnw-fire-land-ownership-map.

Just as with the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire, most of what burned in Washington in 2015 wasn't even forest, but grass and brush. The Lime Belt, Tunk Block and Twisp River fires, which were the most devastating in lost property and life as

well as suppression costs, burned hot through mostly open front-country including ranches.

Of what was in forest, most was in heavily managed tribal and timber industry land. The massive Carpenter Road and North Star fires are clear examples. Under the conditions of this summer, almost everything burns hot, including the most heavily managed timber and ranch land.

There was one type of land use that seemed to hold up better than the rest: Plac-

es where the very best stewardship efforts were used. These are areas of generally dry forest types that had been not only recently thinned to remove small trees, but then burned with controlled fire to remove remaining fuels, leaving just the larger trees and snags.

Examples of this include the state's Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, where the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's forest restoration units appear to have been key to keeping the Lime Belt Fire from raging to the

town of Loomis, and some great Forest Service project areas that kept the northern parts of the Tunk Block and North Star fires from linking up.

Those projects were the product of collaboration between timber and conservation interests, including my group, Conservation Northwest. You can read more here: www.conservationnw.org/news/scat/cnw-fire-dispatch-12-inside-the-fire-lines.

Those who want to exploit the tragedy of these fires to promote an agenda like

blaming the government and pushing for more logging, might be wise to first let the smoke clear enough to give a fair view of the facts.

Mitch Friedman is the executive director of *Conservation Northwest*, a nonprofit organization working on wildlife and wildlands conservation in Washington and British Columbia. *Conservation Northwest* participates in many collaborations with forestry and natural resource businesses, including the *Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition*.