

OUR VIEW

Give thanks for a miraculous bounty

In a country that has not known famine in more than 300 years, food is probably taken for granted in the United States more than any other necessity.

It was not always so.

The Pilgrims barely survived their first winter in New England on meager rations left from their Atlantic crossing, supplemented by what food they could hunt themselves or borrow from their Indian neighbors. So in November 1621 they gave thanks to God that their bountiful harvest would spare them the privations of the previous winter.

Nearly 400 years later, Americans have the luxury of thinking about food one meal at a time without any concern the grocery shelves will run empty before the next harvest. We can have what we want, as much as we want, when we want it.

We are fat and content.

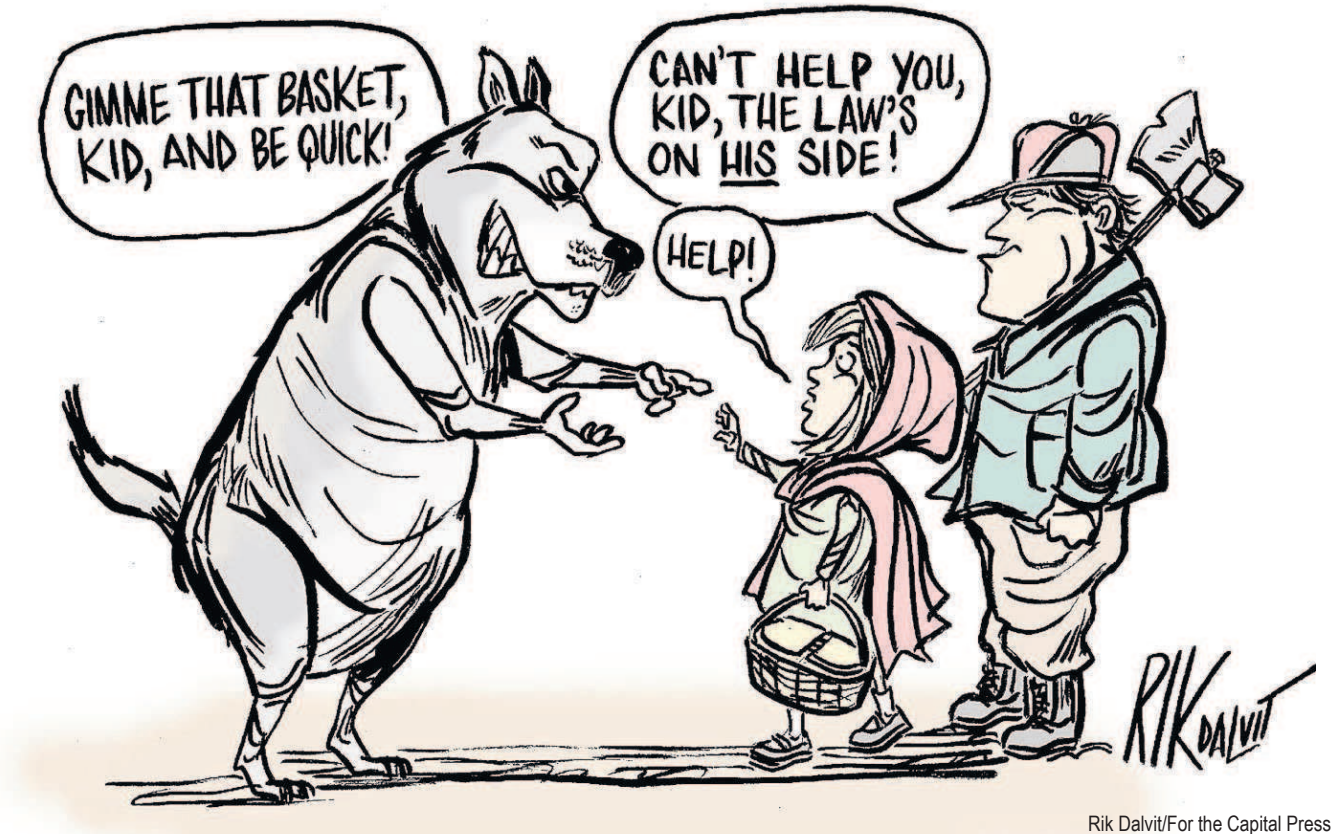
The tradition of the Thanksgiving feast endures, but

in the midst of so much we have become less thankful. We take for granted the miracle of the bountiful harvest.

Where does it come from and who do we thank?

There would be no bountiful harvest without the farmers and ranchers, who year after year work harder and longer to produce more food on less ground to feed an ever growing population.

As did the Pilgrims four centuries ago, those who tend the land know that there is more at work. Farmers and Ranchers provide the sweat and the tears, the miracle comes from somewhere else.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

A tale of two wolf shootings

An Eastern Oregon man who accidentally shot a protected wolf near Prairie City may be able to take solace in the outcome of a nearly identical case last year in Washington state.

On Oct. 12, 2014, 38-year-old Jonathan Rasmussen notified state authorities that he had accidentally shot a wolf in a farm field southwest of Pullman, Wash. Wolves in Washington state are protected under the state Endangered Species Act.

Rasmussen was initially charged with taking a state endangered species, a gross misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

Whitman County, Wash., Prosecutor Denis Tracy had a tough choice to make, whether to prosecute Rasmussen to the maximum extent of the law — which would be legally correct but patently unfair — or seek a more even-handed outcome.

He chose the latter, and in September of this year reached an agreement with Rasmussen's lawyer in which the hunter would forfeit his rifle and pay \$100 in court costs and vow to commit no further game violations for six months.

Short of dropping the case altogether, this was about the best conclusion that could have reached.

Fast forward to last week in Oregon.

Brennon D. Witty, 25, was charged with killing an endangered species after he accidentally shot a wolf on private property south of Prairie City. He was also charged with hunting with a centerfire rifle without a big game tag, Harney County District Attorney Tim Colahan said. He is handling the case because the district attorney in Grant County, where the accident happened, knew the defendant's family.

Each charge is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

Witty notified authorities immediately and told them he had been hunting coyotes and accidentally shot the wolf.

The similarities between the facts of these two cases are striking, and the outcomes should be, too.

The federal Endangered Species Act and its state counterparts were written in an effort to bring species back from the brink of extinction. Wolves are not teetering near extinction, or anywhere close to it. Tens of thousands of wolves

OUR VIEW

FAA plays Santa, not Grinch, to Christmas tree growers

Picking Christmas trees out of the field with helicopters exposes growers to regulatory challenges not experienced by earth-bound operators.

Beginning early in the fall the normal rhythms of the Willamette Valley are punctuated with the whirling blades of helicopters lifting trees from deep in tightly sewn fields and depositing them in clearings where they can be loaded onto trucks.

It seems crazy to the uninitiated, but that's how it's done. And it works well.

But this year it looked as though the Federal Aviation Administration was going to play Grinch and steal Christmas for growers around Salem. Happily, commonsense has prevailed, and the agency gets credit for being more flexible than is the norm when farmers meet the federal government.

Earlier this year, the FAA effectively imposed new restrictions on helicopters operating near Salem during times of low visibility.

The agency expanded "Class D" airspace around Salem — in which aircraft are more strictly regulated — from roughly four to eight miles.

Christmas tree farmers feared this would prevent their crop from being harvested during the cloudy, rainy days that are common in autumn, thereby delaying shipments and reducing overall sales.

But as in the Dr. Seuss story, once they heard what their new rule could do to Oregon growers, the bureaucrats' hearts must have grown three sizes.

The FAA reconsidered and expanded the airspace to five miles.

And because a formal rule change would take too long to be in place for this year's harvest, the agency inked a letter of understanding between the Salem control tower and helicopter pilots that outlines a protocol that will keep choppers in the air under most conditions.

It's not ideal, but it's far better than it could have been.

We are harsh critics of federal bureaucrats when they are heavy handed, if not thuggish, in their writing and implementation of regulations.

We must be equally enthusiastic in our praise of those officials who take the time to craft solutions that work to everyone's benefit.

We hope Santa leaves something special under their tree — their real, grown-in-the-Northwest tree — this year.

Best course forward — give sage grouse plans a chance to work

By PAUL HENSON
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Paul Henson

By now most everyone in the West has heard about the Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to not list the greater sage grouse under the Endangered Species Act in September. In the ensuing debate, what has been most interesting — and inspiring — is how so many people on all sides of the issue have come together to give the decision, and the plans upon which it is based, a chance to work.

As Oregon state supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I was one of the decision makers in 2010 who recommended to our director that we should list the species. At that time, I and my agency colleagues from the western states believed that much more effort was needed to conserve greater sage grouse and the sagebrush ecosystems on which they and so many others species — not to mention our entire western economy — depend.

We felt that if nothing was done, or the status quo was allowed to persist, the species would continue to decline. Our leadership supported that recommendation.

What's different now, and why do I strongly support the decision to not list the species? Our 2010 finding, with the court-ordered deadline to make a final decision by September, served as a major catalyst for unprecedented action at all levels: private, state and federal. The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service produced comprehensive plans that made major changes to how their sagebrush lands will be managed.

Several states, including Oregon, developed conservation plans with strong voluntary conservation incentives. And many private landowners, including Eastern Oregon ranchers, saw collaboration as the

best way to preserve their local economies and culture.

Taken together, we now have a paradigm shift for how these iconic Western landscapes will be managed. We will see more responsible grazing on all lands, especially public lands. Development within sagebrush habitat is now better planned and mitigated, with mining and energy development significantly reduced in core areas.

And hundreds of millions of dollars in federal, state and private funds are being put towards proactive greater sage grouse conservation projects.

Any way you look at it, the major threats to the species that were identified in 2010 are now greatly reduced. Are these threats fully eliminated? No — such threats can never be completely eliminated from wild ecosystems and for most other native species. Here in the Great Basin, climate change, wildfire and invasive species are the biggest challenges. But efforts to manage these challenges and fight these threats have increased by orders of magnitude compared to where we were in 2010.

We are confident that if these plans are fully implemented, the greater sage grouse is not at risk of extinction now or in the foreseeable future. This combination of new regulation, voluntary measures, and funding resources is completely unprecedented.

The best course forward now is to give these plans a chance to work over the next five or ten years. Let's see how the sage grouse and the habitat respond. If people fail to follow through on their conservation commitments, the Fish and Wildlife Service can and will step back in to reconsider listing the bird.

But the best possible conservation outcome right now is to give these plans — and all the people who have come together — a chance to make it work.

Paul Henson is Oregon State Supervisor U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.