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# Opinion

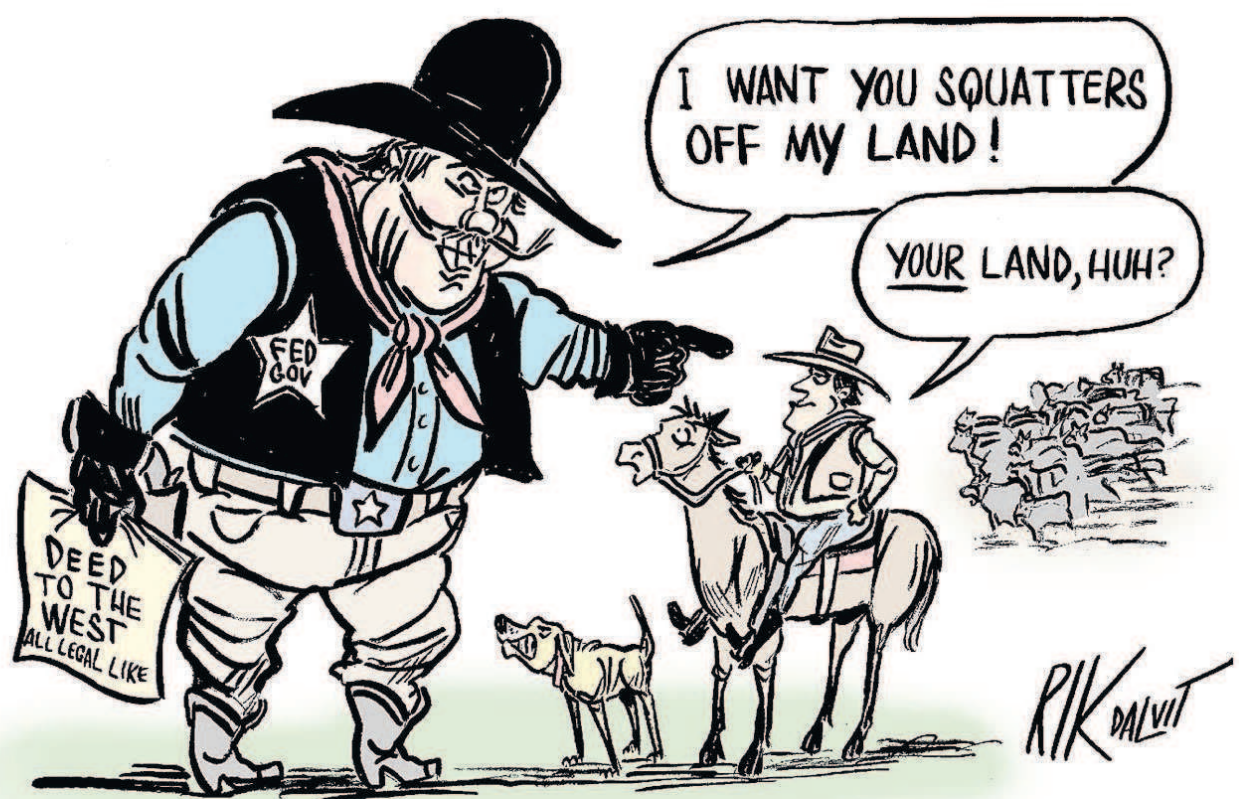
## Editorial Board

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## OUR VIEW



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

## It's time for change in rural West

Last week Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., took the floor of the House and tried to explain to his colleagues the frustrations his constituents in Harney County, and farmers, ranchers and loggers throughout his sprawling Eastern Oregon district, feel regarding the federal government's management of public lands.

It was a powerful speech that has given voice to rural Americans across the West who feel oppressed "by the government that they elect and the government they certainly don't elect."

For 17 years Walden has represented Oregon's 2nd Congressional District. It includes Harney County, where since Jan. 2 a group of armed protesters has occupied the headquarters compound of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

The protesters allegedly came to town to support two local ranchers recently resentenced to five years in prison in connection with fires that burned Bureau of Land Management land. When protesters couldn't convince the ranchers to hold up and resist their

incarceration, a splinter group took over the compound as a larger protest against federal control of western lands.

That occupation, peaceful so far, has managed to get the attention of the mainstream media and East Coast establishment. Unfortunately, too much of the attention has focused on the religious and "anti-government" beliefs of the protesters, and their guns.

Walden's speech attempted to focus the attention of Congress back to the real issues — the problems created by a "government that has gone too far for too long."

For Walden, Harney County is representative of many in the West. It has a land mass greater than any of the eight smallest states. But unlike those states, 72 percent of Harney County is owned and operated by the federal government. The occupied refuge, only 4 percent of the 4.7 million acres of federal holdings in the county, is larger than all the federal properties in New Jersey combined.

Federal agencies hold 50 percent of the land in the West. The real issue isn't that they own the land,

but that they too often administer it poorly, and without regard to the local community.

Decisions take too long because the bureaucracy is paralyzed by analysis required in futile attempts to prevent environmental lawsuits. Agency leadership too often ignores the clear intent of legislation in favor of political policy, and gives greater consideration to the opinions of distant interests than to local property owners and lease holders who depend on the best stewardship of these lands to maintain their livelihoods.

The bureaucracy has become too big, too unresponsive.

"You see, how do you have faith in a government that doesn't ever listen to you?" Walden asked. "That is what is breaking faith between the American people and their government, and that is what has to change."

Indeed.

It was a fine speech, but Walden and other responsible leaders, in and out of government, must use this opportunity to affect that change.

Otherwise, the audience the sideshow in Harney County has attracted will be wasted.

## Saving spotted frogs will mean healthy rivers for fish, birds, people

By NOAH GREENWALD  
For the Capital Press

For eons, the Oregon spotted frog bred and thrived in the wetlands that blanketed Oregon's river valleys, including the Deschutes River where some of the last populations of this once abundant, but now extremely rare, amphibian survive.

In the last hundred years, we've lost the vast majority of our wetlands to urban and agricultural sprawl and the damming and channelization of rivers. And as go the wetlands, so goes the Oregon spotted frog, along with thousands of other wildlife species, from salmon to waterfowl.

That's why last year the frogs were protected as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act. And that's why the Center for

Guest  
comment  
Noah Greenwald



Biological Diversity, where I work, filed a lawsuit against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to spur much-needed changes in the operation of the Crane Prairie and Wickiup dams on the Deschutes River.

The frog survives in the shallow fringes of the reservoirs behind both dams and in the river itself below the dams, where in both cases it is directly threatened by dam management. The reality is that these frogs have virtually no chance of survival if the Bureau fails to change how it operates these two dams.

The Bureau has turned the Deschutes River on its head, creating unnaturally high

flows in late summer and low flows in winter — exactly the opposite of how a natural river should flow. These changes in flows often occur very rapidly, giving the frog and other wildlife little time to adjust. The frogs and their young are alternately left high and dry or flooded by high waters.

The need for change is great. The Oregon spotted frog is now known from fewer than 100 sites, making the Deschutes critical to its survival.

But the truth is, we can save these frogs and the livelihoods of farmers, and everyone who relies on the river to make their living. Truly, we can.

Needed changes in dam management do not mean the end of irrigation, nor will they result in the shut-off of water for a single farm. Instead, it will require careful management to ensure the frog is

protected in the short-term, movement towards more natural flows in the long-term, and where needed, better water conservation.

These changes will not just benefit the frog, but also salmon, steelhead and all of us who depend on the health of the river.

Compromising the long-term health of our environment for short-term economic interests, never pays in the long-run, particularly where wasteful water practices are involved.

In reality, saving frogs and the health of our rivers will help to preserve the health of the landscape farmers and the rest of us depend on. Failing to do so fails frogs, farmers and future generations.

Noah Greenwald is the Portland-based endangered species director at the Center for Biological Diversity.

## Readers' views

### Protest needs to take up new banner

The cattle ranchers have it all wrong in their protesting against the Bureau of

Land Management and Forest Service. It is against the law to occupy public buildings, block traffic and cause other disruptions claiming governmental excessive authority.

Instead, I think they

should protest under the banner, "Black Cows Matter" — as in Angus. That would give them the authority to occupy buildings, block traffic and even engage in destruction of public and private proper-

ty. They could disobey law enforcement and cause all kinds of havoc. They might even get an endorsement for their actions from President Obama.

Kelly C. Niemi  
Kelso, Wash.

### Letters policy

**Write to us:** Capital Press welcomes letters to the editor on issues of interest to farmers, ranchers and the agribusiness community.

**Letters policy:** Please limit letters to 300 words and include your home address and a daytime telephone number with your submission. Longer pieces, 500-750 words, may be considered as

guest commentary pieces for use on the opinion pages. Guest commentary submissions should also include a photograph of the author.

Send letters via email to opinions@capitalpress.com. Emailed letters are preferred and require less time to process, which could result in quicker publication. Letters also may be sent to P.O. Box 2048, Salem, OR 97308; or by fax to 503-370-4383.

## Speaking out for rural Oregon

By GREG WALDEN  
For the Capital Press

Guest  
comment  
Greg Walden



In recent weeks, the people of Harney County have become no stranger to national headlines. On Jan. 3, a group of armed protesters overtook a federal facility in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. And on Jan. 5, Dwight and Steve Hammond, father and son ranchers from Harney County who were convicted of arson for setting a backfire that burned 139 acres of federal land, reported to prison to serve the remainder of a mandatory five-year sentence.

While these stories played out across every major media outlet, it's important to understand what is driving this anger and what steps we can take to improve the situation.

The thread that ties the Hammond family's case together with the calls of those who took over the Refuge is decades of frustration, arrogance and betrayal that has contributed to the mistrust of the federal government.

Too many people often don't understand the culture and the lifestyle of the great American West — and how much the ranchers and farmers who live in this vast, beautiful, harsh landscape care about the environment, their children's futures, and about America and the Constitution. Nor do they realize how hard they work to produce the food we eat. We're seeing now the extent they will go to in order to defend all that.

While I understand their passion, I cannot condone the actions of the armed protesters, led largely by people who are not from our state. They've made their point loud and clear, and local community leaders, including many ranchers, have asked them to leave. They should do so.

The day after the Hammonds went to prison, I went to the U.S. House floor intending to give a five-minute speech on what was unfolding in Harney County. But when decades of my own pent-up frustration with the federal government's treatment of rural Oregonians came to the surface, I spoke before my colleagues for nearly half an hour. (You can watch my full speech at [www.walden.house.gov/speech](http://www.walden.house.gov/speech)).

In my years representing the people of Oregon's 2nd District, I have worked with local ranchers and the citizens of Eastern Oregon to resolve disputes, to find solutions and to create a more cooperative spirit and partnership with the federal agencies. After all, more than half the 2nd District is under federal management, or lack thereof.

The Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act is a prime example of those cumulative efforts. But after it was signed into law in 2000, little by little, the agencies decided to reinterpret it and follow it at their own convenience, or ignore the law altogether. At the suggestion of local ranchers, the law created the first cow-free wilderness in the United States, but the tradeoff was a legal requirement for the federal government to provide the fencing. And yet bureaucrats within the Bureau of Land Management wouldn't listen and wouldn't follow the law. They told ranchers they had to build the fence. When I pointed out their error, they basically told me to stuff it. When I provided them with the documentation from more than a decade before that proved the intent of Congress, they doubled down. And finally, when I got Congress to pass a restatement of the original intent, they said they'd review it.

I don't get angry very often, but this arrogance really got to me. And while there are very good federal workers in our communities who do follow the law, and do

work cooperatively to find solutions, it only takes a few of the others to cause us to lose faith.

A similar experience is taking place across the West through the so-called travel management plans. Originally intended to minimize damage from off road vehicles, it quickly became a powerful tool to close roads and shut people out of their forests.

What happened in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is a classic case in point. After years of community meetings, public workshops and incredible efforts to update the government's faulty maps, a forest supervisor decided she knew better. Her choice of a management plan was such an affront that more than 900 people packed a meeting in LaGrande in protest. I, too, was incensed and called upon the Forest Service to withdraw the plan, and they did. But the damage was done. How can people be expected to have faith in a public process when they see outcomes like these?

Meanwhile, other threats loom on these same people. From the onerous "waters of the United States" rules, to threats of more national monuments, the federal government is aggressively trying to get cattle off the range and people off their public lands.

Right now, it's strongly rumored that the Obama administration will declare more national monuments, including one in Malheur County, next to Harney County. It could be up to 2.5 million acres — bigger than Yellowstone National Park. Ranchers and community leaders are being told to either agree to a big wilderness area or plan on getting a monument shoved down your throat. Is it any wonder we feel our way of life is threatened by our own government? If the president wants to help reduce the tension, and try to restore a bit of trust, he would publicly back off this proposal.

The Hammonds made a mistake and went to prison for five years for lighting a backfire that burned 139 acres of federal land. We all know fire is a tool on the range to deal with invasive species and to stop other fires. In 2012, more than a million acres burned in Harney County alone. All too often, I've met with ranchers who were burned out by backfires they say should never have been set by the agencies. And while I have the greatest respect for the power of a fire, and the courage and talent of firefighters, they make mistakes, too.

The Hammonds were tried and convicted under a law written after the Oklahoma City bombing. The presiding judge in the case made clear that its penalties when applied to a fire on the high desert of Eastern Oregon didn't make sense. But a court found he lacked the authority to invoke a lesser sentence.

We need to revisit the 1996 law that landed the Hammonds with a punishment disproportionate to the severity of the crime. I'm working with my colleagues to do just that.

We need to have the president understand that more monuments may bring cheers from certain companies and communities, but in reality they leave behind more mistrust and mismanagement.

And those not familiar with the high desert of the West need to understand what we face before they quickly condemn the frustration and anger that is so evident.

Greg Walden represents Oregon's 2nd District in the U.S. House of Representatives.