

Editorials are written by or approved by members of the Capital Press Editorial Board.

All other commentary pieces are the opinions of the authors but not necessarily this newspaper.

Opinion

Editorial Board

Publisher Mike O'Brien	Editor Joe Beach	Managing Editor Carl Sampson
opinions@capitalpress.com Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion		



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

It's time for Western politicians to speak up

The silence is deafening. In Oregon, Washington and California the governors and most members of the congressional delegations have been silent on the crisis created by the piss-poor management of federal lands in the West.

When the issue comes up, one or the other will chirp about how there needs to be more “engagement” or some other sort of blather meant to divert the issue.

In fact, the level of engagement is clear. The federal government, with help and cooperation from the states and their leaders, is acre-by-acre taking over management of not just public lands but nearly all lands in the West. The federal government owns 51 percent of the land in 11 Western states, and acts as though it owns the rest. With an agenda based on stopping farming, ranching, oil and gas exploration and mining, the federal agencies — the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Forest Service among them — have been methodically shutting down or dictating the circumstances under which farmers, ranchers and others who have built the Western economy for more than a century will be allowed to stay.

The northern spotted owl, the greater sage grouse, the gray wolf — the Mazama pocket gopher, for crying out loud — and hundreds of local “species” that need “protection” seem to be nothing more than a front to stop economic activities in the forests, fields and prairies across the West.

Yet, with one or two exceptions, we hear nothing from our governors, members of the U.S. Senate and members of the House of Representatives about this crisis. Rep. Greg Walden is a rare exception. The Oregon Republican has spoken about the oppression of the West on the floor of the House.

Oh, the others issue some press release or statement about the Bundy brothers and how they need to be kicked off the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County,

Ore. As an aside, it looks to us like the FBI even fumbled the simple job of ending that siege, waiting for weeks and then killing one of the men during a traffic stop. Maybe they were sending a message to anyone else thinking of protesting, just like when a federal prosecutor charged ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond under a terrorism law that would put them in jail for five years for burning 139 federally owned acres to get rid of weeds.

But the real issue isn't the Hammonds, the Bundys or the takeover of a couple of federal buildings in rural Oregon.

The real issue is right out the door of every rural resident. The real issue is what impact the federal and state governments will have on land you own, land you pay taxes on and land you love. The real issue is whether any bureaucrat sitting in a wood-paneled office in Washington, D.C., has the right, or the moral authority, to tell a landowner what he, or she, can or can't do.

We want to know why governors and U.S. senators who say they represent all of the people of Washington, Oregon and California are silent on such a fundamental issue in the West. We want to know why they bow and curtsy to their urban, environmentally conscious constituents — and others around the nation — and stiff arm their rural constituents.

Oh, they cook up ways to keep rural economies on life support after allowing the feds to shut down or curtail commercial logging, mining and ranching. They set up “programs” to take scrap wood and brush and convert it into “biofuel” and call it a “green” industry while the forests become overgrown and prone to disastrous fires and lumber mills are shut down, costing thousands of good-paying jobs. That would laughable if it weren't so pitifully transparent. Then the politicians stand around with their hands in their pockets with not so much as a peep while millions of acres of Oregon and elsewhere in the West are poorly “managed” and locked up.

We are appalled and disappointed at the way the rural West gets the shaft while the urbanites stroke checks for the campaign funds of Western politicians. For example, according to the Federal Election Commission, in the first three quarters of last year Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden received \$4.54 million in campaign money. Of those donations, 368 donors from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut gave \$714,742 and 261 donors from California — including one Beverly Hills family that gave \$23,700 — donated a total of \$418,819. Even Barbra Streisand donated. That's about 25 percent of the total. What is he doing — or not doing, in the case of sticking up for rural Westerners — that makes the moneyed elite so willing to help fill his campaign coffers?

And don't think this is about Wyden or Democrats only. Republicans who have stood by and let the Western economies be eviscerated are no better.

This is a call to action. This is a call for our elected representatives to stand up on their back legs and tell the elite in New York, Beverly Hills, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere that the rural Western economy will not be shut down to become a playground for the rich. Tell them that millions of acres of Malheur County, Ore., will not be locked up as “wilderness” and the rest of the rural Western economy will not remain under attack.

Now is the time not just to speak up but to act, to demand that our “representatives” in the state capitols and in Washington, D.C., free the rural West from burdensome over regulation, and end the attacks on farmers and ranchers, many of whom have been stewards of the land for generations.

Government officials say they want to “protect” the land. That's not true. They want to control it, and the lives of rural Americans with it.

It's up to our elected officials to get off their duffs and stop them.

‘Poverty Promoters’ taking over rural West

By **ANDY BENTZ**
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Andy Bentz



The West and the industries that created our communities have been under assault for over 30 years. The federal land that historically made them prosperous has been managed under the influence of environmental and conservation “Poverty Promoters” for enough years to make no mistake in the results of their agenda — poverty.

Poor land health, reduced grazing, runaway numbers of feral horses and their associated land damage, invasive plant species, very little logging on federal lands, with all resulting in unhealthy rangelands and forests leading to massive fires every year.

Not a very good report card, is it? In most Western states, there is little investment being made in mineral exploration along with the lost opportunities for mining and the jobs and tax income that any productive uses produce. The result — poverty.

The human cleansing of the rural West has been in motion for years, with no jobs and no hope for a productive future. Children must leave to make a living and cannot return home and raise a family. The rural counties and cities struggle to maintain a basic level of services that make their communities livable.

There is no way to invite new investment or job opportunities, but for the low-paying service sector. Schools struggle and down-size with decaying facilities. Those that remain by choice or lack of options sink further into poverty, hoping the government will backfill their shrinking tax base at the expense of the state's more populated counties. The result — poverty.

Public lands are supposed to be managed for multiple uses; that includes everyone, economic sustainability, local and federal tax production, Tribal needs and wellbeing, recreation, wildlife and healthy lands. Environmental groups want all uses off the land but for limited recreation, because they say, “It is only fair that each state has a certain percent of land mass in a special designation.”

Wow, that is some logic. Even stranger is that the activities they claim to want in the special designations like monuments can be done today and forever in the future as the land is now. The existing road systems allow the land to be accessible to everyone in the United States, young and old, disabled or healthy, rich or poor, urban or rural, not just for their interest group members.

These groups will always point to their funded economic reports and claim their studies show local towns are better off if the land surrounding them would just have a “wilderness” or “monument” designation. Their studies at best are naive number manipulation and at worst economic malpractice.

Special interest groups masquerading as environmental “fundraising organizations” have sued their way

into control of the public's lands. This cottage industry was made possible by their ability to recover legal cost with your tax dollars using the Equal Access to Justice Act. Another way to look at this is you get to pay them for suing you. Nice system for their budgets. The result — poverty.

They want no value coming from the land that is not directly related to their hobbies and wants like hiking, backpacking and the associated purchase of clothing and gear they manufacture, most often in foreign factories that care next to nothing about their employees and don't pay taxes in the U.S. The result — poverty.

Environmental interest groups see federal management lands as their private playground. Monuments and wilderness areas are a thinly veiled land grab for only those with money. This does not meet the multiple use mandates that say the land is supposed to be managed for all uses and people, rich or poor.

They have paralyzed land management agencies with their litigation to the point that no management is occurring. There is no flexibility allowed in management plans to promote land health, prevent wildfires or help communities be self-sustaining.

Adopted rules and policies to combat the litigation have made planning and permitting take too long and cost too much money to be economical.

We see the frustration played out in rural communities with harsh words and misguided anger at the “federal government” when that energy should be focused towards the groups that cause the conditions they are frustrated with.

It is time that the counties and cities of the rural West are allowed to pay for their own needed services and become net exporters of taxes again. Rural America wants to be sustainable and produce real value for all citizens. They can and are willing to do the hard work of helping feed our nation, produce the wood fiber to house our nation, locate and mine the needed mineral, gas and oil and geothermal resources so we can be safer from foreign nations that do not have our interests at heart. We can do this while protecting and improving the land and beautiful spaces we are all blessed to be stewards of.

Let's start building America again and not be driven under by “Poverty Promoters.”

Andy Bentz is the managing member of Bentz Solutions LLC, a consulting group based in Ontario, Ore. Bentz Solutions works with natural resource industries in governmental and public relations in the Western U.S. He is part of the third generation of a ranching family in Southeast Oregon and retired as the sheriff of Malheur County in 2011.

Readers' views

‘Thuggery’ to blame for death

OK, so maybe moving in and taking over the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon wasn't the wisest, best approach for patriotic justice seekers to use to show support for their imprisoned brothers, nor in any other attempts to appeal to those far-more-permanent government occupiers for “redress of grievances,” a right secured and supposedly guaranteed to us all within the freedom documents founding our nation.

Again, given everything that (governmentally) we the American people are presently up against, the sit-in probably wasn't the smartest tactic. Personally, I have to wonder if the group might even have had some outside “help” nudging them in that futile direction. It wouldn't be the first time.

At any rate, though — and much more importantly — I ask that we compare these folks' audacious “crime,” carried out non-violently, even respectfully, to what was soon to come against them from a conspiring cadre

of paid “public servants” from the FBI and from many Oregon state, county and local officials.

Is there any possible fair comparison between the courageous (even if misguided) actions of this unorganized citizen group and the murderous, conniving thuggery that took place at the massive highway stake-out, the totally unprovoked and unnecessary execution of an entrapped citizen there in the snow — that along with the absolute horrific barrage of weaponry that rained down upon the equally non-combative passengers

still inside the now deceased man's truck?! (And rogue government agencies like this preach to us about evil terrorism?!)

May Heaven deliver us all, as I believe it certainly did the survivors of this latest, demonic assault.

Just when will be the right and efficacious time for the people of this land to begin to rein in and hold accountable these types of out-of-control “authorities” obviously drunk with power and bent on destroying our lives and livelihood?

*Carol Asher
Kamiah, Idaho*

Letter missed point on civil disobedience

Kelly Niemi's piece had humorous tones, but unfortunately was not funny. It illustrated the misunderstanding many white Americans have about race relations in this country. Its implication that

black people “cause all kinds of havoc” is ignorant.

What Black Lives Matter and the group of ranchers in Oregon have in common is civil disobedience. To belittle that is to forget our history, and dishonors the very founding of our country.

*Ryan Power
Sebastopol, Calif.*

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.