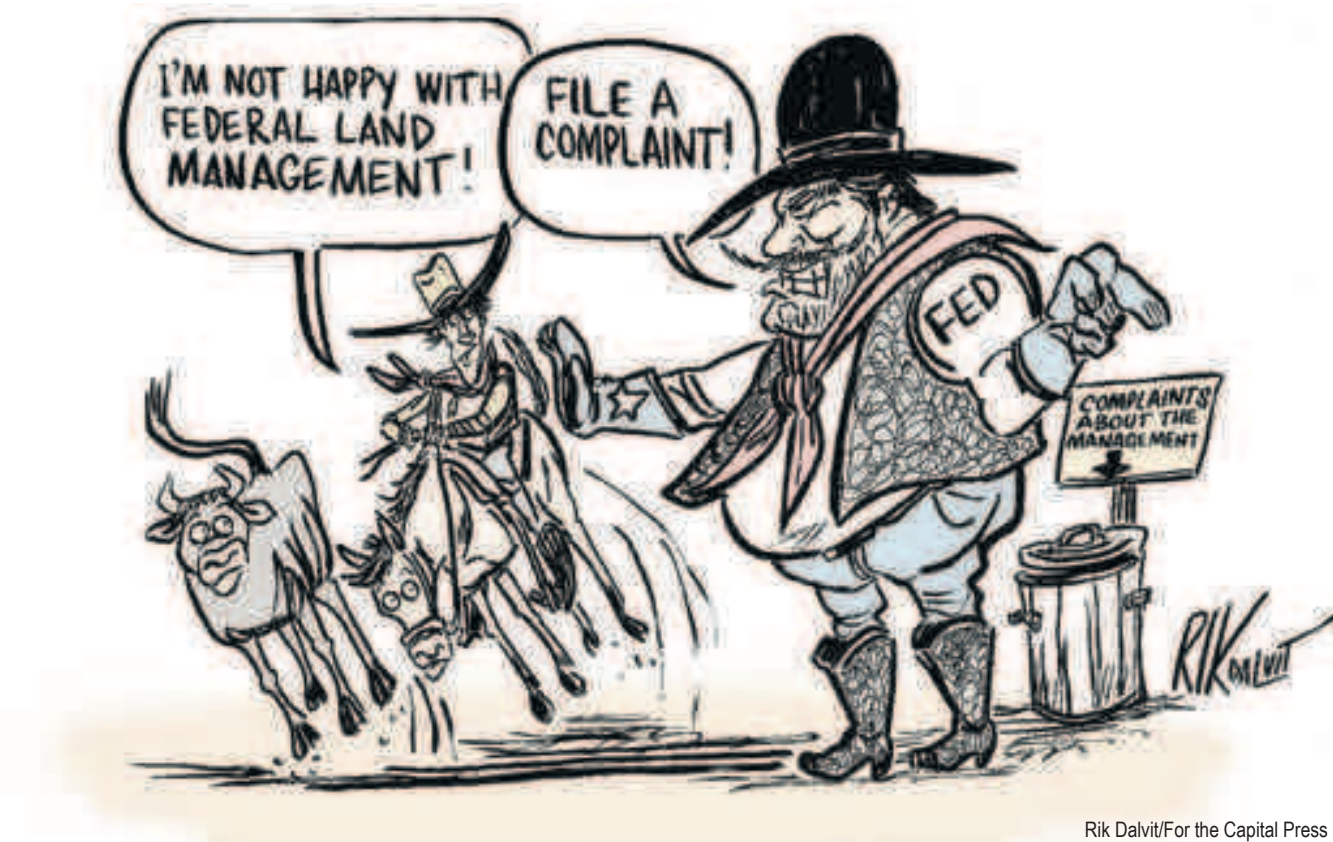


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Opinion

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Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

It's time to tell story of Western public lands

The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon's Harney County is over. Had it not cost a man's life and divided a good community, this ridiculous farce could be written off as a comic diversion from the blustery Eastern Oregon winter. Instead, it was a tragedy.

The greater tragedy would be for responsible stakeholders to allow this story to focus on the "yeehadist" protesters and not the legitimate issues surrounding the management of public land and the over reach of the federal government.

Self-styled, armed militia members supposedly came to town to support Dwight and Steven Hammond, two local ranchers recently given new, stiffer sentences for having set fire to federal land. Protesters tried to convince them to hold up under the protection of the militia rather than report to prison.

Failing to whip the ranchers and the townspeople into a revolutionary frenzy, protesters took over the refuge as a larger protest against federal control of Western lands.

The protesters justified their actions with a mix of Mormon

theology and an alternative interpretation of both the Constitution and the duties of local officials. They backed it all with guns. It was their guns that got the most attention.

We support every citizen's prerogative to exercise their Second Amendment rights, and see some validity to the notion that those rights safeguard the First Amendment rights to free speech. But the guns did more to coerce locals and provoke confrontation than to convince anyone of the legitimacy of their arguments.

Their strategic goal of seeing the Hammonds released and public lands turned over to local control could never be met.

In the end, the hubris of the occupation's leaders facilitated their capture and the death of one of their own. To the wider world, that could well be the end of the story.

Now is the time for stakeholders to educate America about what's happening in the West.

The federal government holds title to massive parcels of public lands throughout the West. That's settled law. The scale of these holdings, and their impact on local economies,

is difficult for those in the East to comprehend.

They need to be told how that land should be managed and how grazing and natural resource extraction must remain viable and part of the multiple-use doctrine that historically governed public lands.

Many Westerners don't think their government listens to them and say their concerns are given short shrift. Their livelihoods and lifestyles are in the hands of bureaucrats controlled by interests outside their communities.

They have seen the government's heavy-handed enforcement of regulations, and ham-handed management of wildfire. They have been subjected to endless environmental litigation bent on driving even the most conservation-minded producers off public lands.

They have watched the government aggressively add to its empire at the expense of local taxpayers and private opportunity.

They want to be good stewards, but want a fair shake.

It's time we tell this story. We think good people everywhere will empathize when given the facts.

OUR VIEW

Communication allows farmers to breathe easy

Good communication is a wonderful thing. In the case of the federal government, that goes double. In the case of protecting farmworkers' health, that goes triple.

Consider the TC-21C respirator. Because of a lack of communication between federal agencies, pesticide applicators could be needlessly exposed to harmful chemicals or directed to buy protective helmets costing hundreds of dollars more than is needed.

The reason: a lack of communication.

Enter Garnet Cooke, a pesticide coordinator for Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health Administration, the agency that helps protect farmworkers and others from injuries on the job.

She noticed that the label on a pesticide that formerly required only a simple face mask had been changed to require a TC-21C respirator, which is a helmet or enclosed face mask with a powered air purifier.

As an expert on respirators, she believed that type was overkill. At a price of more than \$800 compared with the \$18 it costs for simpler respirators, the added expense was a factor, too.

Three agencies address respirators and their use — the National Institute of Occupational Safety and

Health, which approves and classifies them; the Environmental Protection Agency, which assigns them to pesticide labels; and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which enforces their proper use.

Unfortunately, when the first agency changed the numbering system used to categorize respirators, it didn't adequately inform the second agency, which in turn didn't update the labels on several pesticides.

What they had was a failure to communicate.

Cooke, the Oregon OSHA expert, has been talking with pesticide manufacturers and the agencies in an attempt to correct and update the labels.

To its credit, the EPA has set up a task force to address the label problem.

In the meantime, Cooke has also come up with a guide to help farmers and others determine which type of respirators are appropriate.

Pesticide manufacturers are also working to fix the problem.

This is most assuredly not the only failure to communicate that even happened in the federal government. It is, however, an example of how important communication is to protect the safety — and pocketbooks — of farmers and farmworkers.

An example of how important communication is to protect the safety — and pocketbooks — of farmers and farmworkers.

Readers' views

Arguments were simplistic

I'm unsure whether "Environmental laws primarily benefit lawyers" reflects benign sloppiness or a malignant disregard for the value your readers place on intelligent discussion.

Focusing narrowly on the benefits to lawyers and nonprofits, the editorial notes that 30 percent of environmental lawsuits filed in federal courts were filed in the 9th Circuit, suggesting that litigants "believe the 9th Circuit offers the most friendly judges to hear their cases."

Unless your purpose is to mislead us into thinking that environmental lawsuits are vastly overweighted in the 9th Circuit, it is worth noting that the 9th Circuit includes over 38 percent of the U.S. and its territories by square miles and over 20 percent of the population.

You note that the Center for Biological Diversity had expenses of \$10.2 million and revenue of \$14.1 million, of which all but \$1.2 million came from charitable donations. "Any business executive would be pleased to have that sort of balance sheet," you say. Your readers know better than you that revenue and expense are not part of a balance sheet.

More importantly, do you really mean to say your business would be pleased take a chance in court to get reimbursement of less than 12 percent of your expenses, requiring you to go hat in hand seeking charity to cover your remaining costs?

A letter headlined "Walden torpedoes Klamath deal" illustrates how resolving disputes is long, hard work that can end in futility despite best efforts of the parties at interest. If people feel that "litigation is the best tool to advance their environmental views," explore whether there are reasons beyond lawyers' fees and expense reimbursement. I want your thoughtful perspective, not what appears to be slipshod pandering to a simplistic viewpoint.

Barbara Bailey
White Salmon, Wash.

Editorial got it wrong

Boy when you get it wrong, you really get it wrong! Your editorial, "It's time for Western politicians to speak up," is an angry diatribe based on falsehood, wrong-headed assumptions about who is responsible for the rural economy in our land and about who rural folks' friends (and enemies) really are. You sound angry.

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.

You have no right to such anger.

The recent "occupation" of the Malheur Wildlife Reservation by a group of armed thugs led by the kook Ammon Bundy and his now wrongly martyred buddy Robert Finicum is an event you seem to approve of. Shame on you for this. You are using your newspaper to fan the flames of vigilantism and you are supporting the actions of people who fully intend to violate the law. Our law, the laws of civilization.

Your editorial excoriates the federal government for the way it has managed publicly owned lands, and then belittles our elected officials who are in charge of setting policies to see to the preservation and conservation of these lands. To the best of my knowledge, both from first-hand experience and

from what research I have done, the truth is that our government has made every effort possible to see to its charge, to protect the land and keep it well. To keep it as well as it can be kept, for all people, for all of us.

Your words of kindness and approbation of U.S. Rep. Greg Walden are inappropriate. Walden may have spoken about "oppression" of the West, but it's not because it's something he believes. It's also not because it's something he's heard from his constituents. For a lot of years I lived in Baker County, Ore., and not once had Walden ever held a town meeting there. He doesn't answer his email or his phone either, at least not about the issues I have contacted his office about. He doesn't care what the people of these rural areas think.

He does, however, talk to the editorial boards of all of the rural newspapers, people like you....

To the best of my knowledge, he has never held a town hall meeting in these places. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have, though. Why did you omit mentioning them?

The mess in Harney County has been an embarrassment for me and for every other right-thinking American. The FBI and all other related law enforcement should have jumped on those boys from the get go. Put them in the hoosegow one by one. ...

Those boys bullied and harassed all of the people in Harney County and Burns, and I agree with the editorial cartoon that showed what would have happened if President Teddy Roosevelt, the man who saw to the creation of the refuge in the first place, had been in charge. Teddy would have jerked the slack out of those thugs first thing, and I would have been proud of him for doing so.

Our problems in the rural West are many, but the way the government is managing the land is not one of them. That the economic conditions have deteriorated is quite true. My community in Burnt River, Oregon (south Baker County) has only 35 kids in the school

system, it had 180 when I was growing up there. Land has become so expensive only the extremely wealthy can afford to buy it, and the ones who have bought the farms have made them into private game reserves and posted guards to protect the boundaries.

These people aren't concerned with building up the community. What they are concerned with is amalgamating all the wealth they can and then keeping in power the politicians who will see to their continued ability to do so. ...

You want to speak for the rural population? The people who actually to do live in rural areas and make the effort to try to live off the land? Stop complaining about the government, and start supporting policies that will let ordinary people once again prosper for their effort. For a broad and simple statement to begin with, start getting rid of economic policies that began with Ronald Reagan and start putting into place laws that will begin building up the middle class again. And start championing those who support the laws of civilization. Supporting those who live by the laws of the jungle is likely to lead to finally being judged by them. I might even be among them.

John Aschim
Oakland, Ore.