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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

APHIS should hold off on deregulating GMO bentgrass

Although we generally support the development and use of genetically modified crops, we think USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service should rethink its plan to deregulate glyphosate-resistant creeping bentgrass.

Scotts Miracle-Gro, in conjunction with Monsanto, developed the GMO variety for use on golf courses. It has been in the deregulation process since 2003.

Last year, USDA reached an agreement with Scotts Miracle-Gro, which developed the glyphosate-resistant biotech creeping bentgrass, to lift federal

regulations on the crop as long as it's not commercialized.

The problem is that in 2010 the biotech bentgrass was found growing in several miles of irrigation canals in Oregon's Malheur County.

Oregon State University experts speculated the plants originated from seed that spread from a seed field planted to the grass in 2005 near Parma, Idaho, just across the river from Malheur County.

It seems also that the company had other seed escape from field trials in Jefferson County in Central Oregon.

It's causing quite a problem for

farmers and irrigation districts. Once in the ditches and canals, the seed spreads easily and is difficult to kill.

There are limited chemical methods for treating the bentgrass. Not only is it resistant to glyphosate, but other herbicides often can't be used in irrigation canals without potentially harming crops.

Those herbicides that can be used have to be applied in the spring before the canals are filled with water. But in spring bentgrass is most difficult to identify.

Part of Scotts' deal with APHIS includes the company

conducting a 10-year management plan to control the grass. But farmers in areas where the bentgrass is found are afraid they'll eventually be left holding the bag.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has asked APHIS to hold off on deregulating the crop.

The ODA claims the biotech bentgrass doesn't meet the federal requirements for deregulation because it "clearly falls into the category of a plant pest and noxious weed," according to a letter sent to APHIS.

"It is invading irrigation canals and displacing native species in riparian areas in the affected

Oregon counties," the ODA letter said, noting that the crop should remain regulated until "a means to eradicate this pest becomes available."

We agree on this one. After all, the GMO bentgrass first escaped while under regulated field trials. It seems that danger only will increase when the regulators aren't watching.

Scotts says it won't leave Oregon farmers and irrigation districts to their own devices, and we'll take them at their word. But deregulating now and finding a management solution later seems like putting the cart before the horse.

OUR VIEW

It's time to clean up the EPA

Take more than a half a million dollars in taxpayer money, add a copious amount of misinformation and mix it together with a bungling bureaucracy, and you have the Environmental Protection Agency's latest misadventure.

This one involves funding a handful of environmental groups and a Native American tribe to attack farmers in Washington state under the pseudonym What's Upstream.

At first, the public relations outfit they hired took a survey, only to find that Washingtonians don't see a problem with the way farms are run.

Not to be deterred, they changed tactics in an attempt to stir up the public by using misleading and inaccurate billboards, social media and advertising in an effort to force massive buffer zones on farmers. The ads and website show cattle standing in a stream — without saying when or where it allegedly occurred — and a salmon that had spawned, with the implication that farmers were somehow to blame for its demise.

Only after Senate Agriculture Committee Chairman Pat Roberts pointed out the folly of their ways did EPA bigwigs reverse course and acknowledge What's Upstream was a boondoggle.

"The EPA has much to answer for in maligning those that grow the food and fiber to feed the world," Roberts said in a written statement. "How and why the EPA has allowed taxpayer dollars to be used to attack any industry, including our vital agricultural producers, demands answers."

The answer lies in the EPA itself. If farmers — or anyone else — aren't following the law, the EPA should enforce it, not waste public money on billboards, which didn't even say the EPA provided the money. That was in violation of the EPA grant, but no one at EPA even checked until a Capital Press

reporter asked about it.

We've about had it with the EPA, which consistently embarrasses itself by wasting public money or by its bizarre behavior. Some examples:

- Years ago an EPA bigwig skipped out of work for more than 2 1/2 years total while collecting \$100,000 a year. When his boss finally got around to asking about it, the employee said he was a spy.

- EPA bigwigs were found to have secret email accounts used to communicate with their friends in the environmental community, allowing them to avoid public records laws.

- An Idaho couple was forced to go to court to stop the EPA from fining them \$37,500 a day while they challenged a wetlands determination on a building lot. The EPA took the case all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court — and lost.

- An EPA regional bigwig in Texas made insulting comments about "crucifying" members of the public that get in the agency's way.

- The EPA held a series of closed-door meetings to discuss proposed regulations on dust. They even kicked a Capital Press reporter out of a meeting. The reason: Because they felt people

would be afraid to speak in public. About dust. Really.

- An Oregon farmer is being hassled by the EPA for preventing dirt from eroding into a river.

- An EPA contractor dumped a million gallons of mine waste into a river in Colorado but kept the water data secret.

- And don't forget the Waters of the U.S. rules, which were supposed to clear up federal regulations that had landed the EPA in court. Now the new version is in court, too.

When taken together, the EPA's actions embarrass its good employees and make it the bureaucratic equivalent of a Superfund site.

The EPA needs to be cleaned up, and the sooner the better. The American public deserves a clean environment, and they deserve a clean federal environmental agency that can do the job without alienating the public, wasting money or embarrassing itself.

Apparently, the current administration has no interest in cleaning up the EPA.

But there is hope.

Maybe the next administration — whoever the president is — will do it.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

Congressional, state approval should be required for monuments

By MIKE CRAPO
For the Capital Press

As active participants in the decisions made in Congress, Idahoans contact me with valuable input about the issues our country faces. Realizing that many may not have the chance to contact me, I post the top five issues of concern from Idahoans and my responses on my website. Idahoans have contacted me regarding potential monument designations and land acquisitions in Western states. The following is my response:

The Antiquities Act of 1906 authorizes U.S. presidents to unilaterally designate national monuments in the interest of preserving lands containing historic landmarks, buildings and structures, as well as other objects of historic or scientific interest.

However, this authority remains controversial, as the president is allowed to single-handedly make restrictive land-use decisions without the input of affected communities or other local stakeholders.

To that end, on Jan. 21, 2015, I introduced S. 228, the National Monument Designation Transparency and Accountability Act. S. 228 would limit the president's authority by amending the Antiquities Act to require congressional and state approval of proposed national monuments on federal lands and certify completion of provisions included in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 prior to making any presidential proclamations.

Additionally, this legislation would prohibit the secretary of the Interior from placing any restrictions regarding public use of a national monument without congressional approval and appropriate review and public comment periods. S. 228 has been referred to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee for further consideration. Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, has introduced re-

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lated legislation in the House of Representatives.

One-size-fits-all approaches to public lands management, mainly by directives from Washington, D.C., take us in the wrong direction. The designation of national monuments has been contentious for many years in the West. In fact, concerns over national monument designations and similar sweeping executive actions have, in part, motivated coalitions of stakeholders to undertake collaborative efforts to solve these difficult issues.

Collaborative efforts have organized across our state and throughout the West, and they are being utilized to address everything from public lands conflicts to resource protection and species recovery. Collaboratives seek to bring to the table interests that have a stake in the issue at hand, namely resource users, conservationists, local people and governments, advocacy organizations, federal and state governments and more.

Collaboratives are very difficult to do and do not always work out. Yet, they are the single best process available for resolving conflicts and setting a path forward that has public support and will be implemented by public land management agencies. Several collaborative efforts are currently hard at work in Idaho.

Americans deserve to enjoy a variety of benefits from our nation's abundant public land, including both recreational and commercial use. I will continue to advocate for community-based collaborative efforts to manage our public lands, and support legislative efforts that meet that end.

Mike Crapo is a Republican U.S. senator from Idaho.

How to get our message across when we talk to the media

By WILL RODGER
For the Capital Press

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Will Rodgers



For as long as many farmers could remember, the story was the same: Don't talk to the newspapers, TV or radio. The message was clear: You have nothing to gain. It's hard to think of any attitude more outdated today.

The sad truth is there's an army of ill-informed activists who want to do away with what they call "factory farming." These anti-farmer voices are loud and ignorant, but also well-placed. Farmers and ranchers have to counter them. Here's how.

Open your doors: The media seldom get a look at real

farmers. Meeting reporters on your own farm helps them understand what really goes on instead of being duped by the latest food or environmental fad. Some farms even have 24-hour webcams so the public can see what really goes on. Whether or not you want to go that far, the public needs to see farmers more. You can help.

Have an agenda: Have three or maybe four main points you want to make. You should be able to state the basics on each

in two or three sentences as well as in a longer format.

Anecdotes are good; reliable data is much better: The best reporters aspire to know as much as the people they cover. In some cases they actually get there. I recently met with a Washington Post Reporter who thought most of America's farmland was owned by major corporations which, in turn, produced most of our food. My telling her otherwise was pointless, but she was convinced when I produced a basic fact book from USDA. Having the right facts at your fingertips can be everything.

Play to the outlet's interests and biases: Ag media is seldom hostile, but mainstream report-

ers are, at best, a mixed bag. As before, you need to know the facts, but couching things in the right terms can mean the difference between good coverage and bad coverage, or nothing at all. Ask yourself what about your story will appeal to the reporter you are speaking with. Many journalists sympathize with government regulators, but very, very few will take the side of arbitrary and abusive treatment at their hands. Use what you know about the outlet to your advantage.

Explain, then explain again: Very few non-farmers know much about what farmers do, so avoid words you don't read in the mainstream media. Remember issues such as erosion,

runoff and the need for proper drainage are completely foreign to most reporters. Even basics like weed and insect control are poorly understood, if at all. If you have something to say, restate it, repeat the obvious, then ask the reporter in a friendly way why he thinks it matters to you. You'll be surprised how many questions and answers it often takes to get the story right.

Practice, practice, practice: Unless you spend most of your day talking about policy, you will need to practice what you're going to say with someone you trust. Family and friends at your county Farm Bureau can be good sounding boards. Friends who don't know farming can be better still, since they will hear

what you are saying as the average person would.

Develop that relationship: We don't all have a chance to talk to reporters on a regular basis, but it's not inconceivable you could become that resident expert a reporter relies on in the future. So stay friendly, be open, make time to talk to reporters who want to talk to you. They won't always get everything right, but the better they get to know you, the more likely they will. The world badly needs people who can explain how farming and ranching really work.

Will Rodger is director of policy communications at the American Farm Bureau Federation.