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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

EPA funds water quality campaign to mislead public

The controversy over the Environmental Protection Agency's role in an advertising and social media campaign to influence Washington state pollution-control laws continues to grow.

More members of Congress are asking the EPA to explain what it knew about What's Upstream, the campaign launched by the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission and Swinomish Indian tribe using funding from an EPA grant.

The campaign's goal was to convince Washingtonians to press for increased regulation to protect their water.

Oh, there's trouble, they say a

la Professor Harold Hill, terrible, terrible trouble.

Just one problem. Washingtonians don't think they have a water quality problem, according to a survey conducted by a public relations firm for the tribe.

"Water quality is not a top-of-mind concern for most Washingtonians and their opinions on this issue are malleable," stated a memo from Strategies 360 to a tribe official. "There is no clearly defined problem in people's minds, as most do not perceive a problem with existing water quality."

So Strategies 360 developed a marketing plan to build

public support for a "regulatory remedy," setting farmers up as the patsy.

The campaign developed a website and social media accounts, and erected two billboards that feature a photograph of three cows standing in a stream.

Now it turns out the photos used in the campaign don't depict Washington cows standing in Washington streams. No, three of these cows are on an Amish farm and others are across the Atlantic in England.

"When you look at the imagery, it's a very clear that it's a sophisticated attempt to create outrage against farmers,"

said Gerald Baron, director of Save Family Farming, an advocacy group in northwestern Washington. "It's designed to create a real 'yuck' factor and blame farmers."

Chris Wilke, director of Puget Soundkeeper, one of several environmental groups connected to What's Upstream, defended the content, including the images.

"There are fish dying, cows in streams and cows crapping near streams and areas with zero riparian buffers. Regardless of where the photos are sourced, they do tell a story," he said.

So did the Brothers Grimm. To recap: The public didn't

perceive that there's a problem with water quality, so campaign backers needed to gin up imagery and a fall guy that would move the public to demand increased regulations. They just couldn't find real examples in Washington that would illustrate what they say is a persistent and dangerous problem.

It's happening, they say, but it was just easier to illustrate it with stock photographs of out-of-state Amish cows and animals in Great Britain.

For the campaign's backers, the ends justify the means. It seems a bit slippery to us, and should raise questions for the people of Washington.



Rik Dalvit/For the Capital Press

OUR VIEW

W. Oregon plan attacked from all sides

In the 21st century, government agencies follow a step-by-step protocol for any resource management plans they put together. It goes something like this:

- Talk about the plan.
- Write the plan.
- Show the plan to people.
- Change the plan to reflect what people said.
- Get sued by special interest groups.
- Defend the plan in court.
- Rewrite the plan according to what the judge decides.

This protocol appears to be in play as the U.S. Bureau of Land Management puts together its Western Oregon Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement. The plan will guide BLM leaders in the decades to come as they try to manage the 2.5 million-acre legal mine field of forests and other public land in the western portion of the state.

Included are the Coos Bay, Eugene, Medford, Roseburg and Salem BLM districts, and the Klamath Falls field office of the Lakeview District.

Neither the timber industry nor the conservation industry like the plan, which, by our lights, offers hope that some level of balance may ultimately be achieved.

Complicating the plan is the legal requirement to protect the northern spotted owl, which is listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Because the owls like old-growth forests, their presence can limit the amount of timber that can be cut.

The timber industry, however, is right to want to talk about more logging, since the barred owl, an aggressive cousin, appears to threaten the spotted owl more than cutting trees.

The conservation industry objects that the plan somehow offers the timber industry too much, an argument that can best be described as laughable. About 75 percent of the land in the plan bans logging.

Conservationists further argue that not cutting timber would somehow reinvigorate the region's economy — again revealing a robust sense of humor.

We have already seen what not

cutting timber does to the region's economy, and it isn't reinvigorating.

Counties that receive a portion of the money from timber harvests on former Oregon & California Railroad land are especially unhappy. They have been financially struggling since the logging there was first stopped. Some have teetered on the verge of collapse. About 80 percent of the land covered by the new BLM plan is O&C land.

The counties had hoped the plan would allow more logging as a means of re-inflating a financial life raft.

Our hope is that all of the groups will give their lawyers the day off and, if they have problems that deserve discussion, sit at a table and work them out with BLM's managers in a way that accomplishes the goals of adequately protecting the resources and offering sufficient timber to improve the region's economy.

We may be naive, but we believe such a resolution can be achieved. If that proves to be the case it would be unique in an era when lawsuits are seen as a first resort for resolving nearly every dispute.

Farmers do more than feed the world

By KATIE HEGER
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Katie Heger



We're probably all familiar with the phrase, "Farmers feed the world." And, yes, farmers truly do feed the world. Some from a very small-scale farm to provide for their own family or neighbors and others for larger markets near and far, but the phrase itself has started to irritate me. It is just so cliché and doesn't nearly cover all that agriculture is about. On our family farm, we do so much more than feed the world.

Now, let me explain. Yes, my farm grows crops and some of those crops are made into food products such as bread, tofu, soy milk, wheat cereal flakes and refried beans. But that is not all. Much of our crops are used to make things like ink, insulation, crayons, carpet, livestock feed and ethanol. Not all of what is grown on my farm and many other farms solely provides a commodity that is used as food — food that is used to feed a growing population here in my small rural town and places all over the world.

So what do we do on our farm besides grow food, livestock feed, soybeans for insulation and crayons, and corn for ethanol? We analyze the soil looking for its specific nutrient values; we enrich our knowledge base by attending classes; we shovel and scoop; we climb and sweep; we plan and evaluate; we repair; we research new seeds available and weed issues; we plant and harvest, and nurture and protect the plants that grow in our fields. We make decisions every minute of every day to be sustainable and leave this third-generation farm better for the upcoming generations.

On our farm we draw out an outline, perhaps one would say the frame of a puzzle with the squiggly lines defining interior pieces. Each one of those interior pieces is a plot of land we farm. Then we identify

soil types and nutrient levels in various places on each field, layering one level of information onto the base of the puzzle, piece by piece. Then we take the available seed varieties, match them to the soil type, weed and disease pressure, and any insect issues. (And yes, we do use some seed that has been researched and developed to be resistant to pests and weed controls to meet our needs, raise a healthy crop and attempt to minimize applications of substances aiding in growing healthy plants. These genetically modified seeds are one of many tools we use to grow healthy crops.)

We then transfer all the information into a computer program, called Precision Farming software, in our planter and seeder to plant the seeds. We also use that information in the sprayer to care for plants as they grow.

We can monitor how much seed is planted, how far apart the seeds are planted, how much fertilizer and exactly where it is placed, and adjust these settings as we go. That means that we can take a map and data from the past years, analyze it and know that certain parts of a field grow a smaller amount of crop than another. We then can adjust how much seed and nutrients we place in those areas.

The future of farming is much more than planting a few seeds to feed the world. It is technology, ongoing training, sharing our story, protecting our rights and preserving our resources for generations to come.

Katie Heger, a dedicated advocate for agriculture, blogs at hegerfamilyfarms.wordpress.com and shares at Heger Farms on Facebook. Katie and her husband farm corn, soybeans and wheat in central North Dakota. Courtesy of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

Readers' views

Sorting out the buy-local study's winners, losers

Your issue of April 8, 2016, reports that a mathematical model of commodity exchange developed by University of Idaho economists demonstrates that regional specialization and trade leads to greater efficiency and thus prompts the conclusion that the buy-local food movement is a bad idea.

While the model may be

accurate, the conclusion is certainly wrong on grounds of fairness and the looming climate catastrophe we now face.

By its nature, a model that examines the efficiency of exchange within an economic system must take that system's structure as given, the results reflect the existing distribution of wealth, income and power; the model has no tools to assess the fairness or desirability of the outcome.

With economic theories

of trade, it can be shown that while there are always losers and winners from trading, it is often the case that the gains of the winners are greater than the losses of the losers, so that the winners could afford to compensate the losers and still retain a margin; some traders would be better off and none worse off.

When specialization takes place, it is producers who specialize and trade, and we should expect to find that the largest, best capitalized, most nimble producers in a special-

izing region do most of it, at the expense of the smaller, less nimble.

But the U.S. economic system lacks effective political and regulatory mechanisms to enforce compensation to the losers, so the rich (agriculture included) get richer and the poor get poorer. This is the central theme of the current presidential contest, ask either Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders.

Every ton of food moved an additional mile by truck, train or container ship is an

explicit commitment to not doing enough to avert our impending climate catastrophe. The dollar cost of shipping is not the true cost, but the burning of fossil fuels required to do it. The true cost of shipping apples to Florida in exchange for oranges to Washington is the certainty that one day Florida will be too wet (or under water) to produce oranges and Washington will be too hot and dry (or hot and wet) to produce apples.

Peter M. Gladhart
Dayton, Ore.

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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.