

Monument

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The two cases are not entirely the same. The Maine parcel was gifted to the government by the founder of the Bert’s Bees product line, while the site of the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument is already controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

Even though the Maine monument involved private land “and had

a little different twist to it, I didn’t sleep very well that night,” Mackenzie said.

Opponents worry a monument designation will severely impact the county’s No. 1 industry, ranching, as well as mining, hunting and recreation because of restrictions and regulations that would come along with it.

“Of course the national monument in Maine is causing concern,” Malheur County rancher Sean Cunningham told Capital Press in an email.

He said a lot of his operation’s recent business decisions are taking into consideration “whether our backyard becomes a monument and how that’ll affect our daily operations.”

After the OBSC ran a TV ad on MSNBC in the Portland region during the Democratic National Convention urging people to oppose the proposed national monument, its membership increased by about 2,500 in 10 days, said Mackenzie, who is a member of the OBSC board of directors.

Membership now stands at 8,100 and the coalition has also started producing videos that feature people who live near where the monument would be located explaining in their own words why it would be a bad idea.

Malheur County rancher and OBSC board member Elias Eiguren said putting a face on the coalition’s message makes it more personal and allows people to understand that what would happen would affect real people.

“I think as more people see those videos ... it will bring more awareness to what’s going on,” he said.

If the proposed national monument is created, it won’t be because people didn’t know about the local opposition to it, said Malheur County Farm Bureau President Jeana Hall.

“The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition has done a great job of voicing Malheur County’s opinion on this and making sure (people) know where we stand,” she said.

Katy

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They hope Cobra’s model of collaborative problem-solving and her calm, respectful manner will spread in state government.

Cobra herself said the Governor’s Office made multiple pitches before she said yes. She finally asked what the governor was looking for, and the answer swayed her. Brown didn’t want someone focused on the internal workings of DAS. She wanted an ambassador for public service.

“I have two passions,” Cobra said during an interview in her Salem office as her final month as ag director unwound.

“One is agriculture, the other is public service. I believe in it. I’m concerned about the disconnect between citizens and government, between Oregonians and state government.”

She asked herself if she could take the new job and make a difference.

“I would say it grabbed me right in the heart.”

Born to it

Jill Thorne says her daughter, Katy, and son, Todd, were immersed in public service.

Jill and Mike Thorne were Pendleton wheat ranchers, but their world views extended beyond the blonde stubble that covers the rolling hills of Eastern Oregon this time of year.

Recognizing the region’s isolation from Oregon decision makers in Portland and Salem, they threw themselves into politics.

“Our theory was, we’re so far from the Willamette Valley, if we didn’t get involved, who would?” Jill Thorne said.

In 1968 they found themselves hosting a campaign breakfast at the ranch for Robert Kennedy as he swung through in a bid to win the Oregon primary and secure the Democratic party’s presidential nomination. Kennedy and the campaign press corps descended on the ranch. In a favorite family story, Todd Thorne, then 3 1/2, demanded to know who CBS reporter Roger Mudd supported. “If you aren’t going to vote for Kennedy, you can’t eat breakfast here,” he told Mudd.

Katy Thorne, then 5, sat in Bobby Kennedy’s lap. A black-and-white photo of her father and Kennedy, taken during the ranch breakfast, is in her Salem office. Kennedy was assassinated in Los Angeles a month later.

Mike Thorne, now 76, served in the state Legislature, headed the Port of Portland and Washington State Ferry system, and worked on numerous state and local civic projects in the decades that followed. Jill Thorne, 75 in November, was and is equally involved, and among other things worked for Gov. Neil Goldschmidt.

The Thornes’ children accompanied them on campaign trips and sat through



Capital Press File

Katy Cobra talks with Geoff Wiggin, of the USDA's Japan office, following a presentation on trade opportunities for the U.S. in Japan.



Capital Press File

Katy Cobra and rancher Bob Skinner survey the grazing ground near Jordan Valley, Ore., that a wildfire burned earlier in 2012. Fires burned 1.2 million in Oregon that year, leaving ranchers who depend on the land to graze their cattle struggling to feed them.



Capital Press File

Oregon Department of Agriculture director Katy Cobra and U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., participate in a roundtable discussion on the farm bill in 2012.



Katy Cobra

Age: 54
Birthplace: Pendleton, Ore.
Education: Bachelor’s degree in economics with a political science minor, Whitman College
Family: Husband Marshall, daughters Claire and Meredith
Resides: Salem, Ore.
Newly appointed: Director and COO, Oregon Department of Administrative Services
Did you know: Cobra is the longest-serving director at Oregon Dept. of Agriculture:

- Katy Cobra** — 12 years, 8 months (Feb. 2003-Sept. 2016)
- Leonard Kunzman** — 12 years (1975-87)
- E.L. Peterson** — 11 years (1943-54)
- Jim Short** — 10 years, (1954-57, 1961-68)

Sources: www.oregon.gov; Capital Press research

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

a lobbyist on behalf of engineering firms, have two grown daughters, Claire and Meredith. She said her parents, Mike and Jill, are her most important role models. They took the ideals the Kennedys espoused, she said, and “put them into action that I witnessed and experienced.”

In her new job, she will seek to develop leadership within state government and attract a younger and more diverse workforce to public service. She’ll push for accountability and transparency.

She wants to restore trust in government. The occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge headquarters in southeast Oregon was an “explosion” of the public’s angst and frustration with government, she said.

The biggest change she’s seen in agriculture is consumers’ interest in food, she said. “I sometimes say ag suffers from too much love,” she said. “If you’re a farmer and figure it out and take advantage of it, good for you.”

The biggest surprise of her tenure was the development of tension within the industry over farming practices and crop co-existence. Organic versus conventional, or canola growers bumping against specialty seed producers, “Who could have predicted that?” she said.

Political challenges for Oregon ag include labor, maintaining transportation infrastructure and continuing land-use disputes and competition for water, she said.

Ag hasn’t seen the last of Katy Cobra.

“I’ve already told the governor I’ll be an advocate for Oregon’s natural resource industries, I’ll be an advocate for rural Oregon in this new job.

“And she said, ‘Good.’”

dinners and meetings where the Thornes and guests debated issues of the day. Katy Thorne absorbed it.

“She’d just sit there and listen,” Jill Thorne said. “She just grew up with it. How do you come to solutions? How do you work with people? She’s got a gift.”

Katy was a legislative page as a teen, earned an economics degree from Whitman College and her early government work included a stint at the ag department and positions in the first Gov. John Kitzhaber administration as chief policy adviser, economic development and international trade policy adviser and director of executive appointments.

But she worked the family wheat harvest, too, lettered in basketball and volleyball, competed as a barrel racer and was queen of the Pendleton Round-Up in 1982. All of that served her well when Gov. Ted Kulongoski appointed her ag director in 2003, Jill Thorne said.

“She brought to the director’s office that background and empathy for the work farmers do and their care for the land,” she said.

Being the first woman to hold the job was significant as well. Male farmers in Oregon “sometimes walk to one tune,” Jill Thorne said. “To have a woman leading them, that’s a compliment.”

Loyalty

Jim Johnson, the Department of Agriculture’s land and water planning coordinator, is a big man with big opinions. He’s a fixture at public hearings, frequently testifying as local or state officials wrestle with land-use decisions that might affect farming. By public employee standards, he is unusually self-assured, direct and plain-spoken. It’s a trait some elected officials don’t appreciate.

He says Katy Cobra is one of the best he’s seen at managing inter-governmental relations.

“She’s always had my back,” he said. “She trusted me to do my job.”

Trust

Jeff Stone, executive director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries, said it takes a certain skill to advocate, market and regulate agriculture at the same time, as the ODA director is required to do.

Katy Cobra was unique in her ability to do so, he said.

“She wasn’t just the referee between staff and stakeholders, or even stakeholders and stakeholders,” he said. “She also tried to get ahead of issues.”

An example: The recession hammered Oregon’s nursery industry, as the sale of landscape and ornamental plants is closely tied to development, especially housing. In 2010, South Carolina began

pulling aside and inspecting trucks from Oregon, the leading nursery state, looking for plant diseases.

Stone said other states were attempting to use the regulatory system to protect their own markets. One thing Oregon can’t afford, he said, is a trade war between states.

Under Cobra, the Oregon Department of Agriculture worked with USDA and other nursery states to adopt a “presumed clean until proven otherwise” stance.

“It had tremendous impact, especially at the height of the recession when any sale was critical,” Stone said. “She was an advocate of proportionality.”

Following that, the nursery association and Oregon State University wrote a Safe Procurement and Production Manual to guide the industry.

“That’s a lot of trust, when it means staying in business or not. To have faith in the department to solve a problem that really could bring you to your knees,” Stone said.

“Trust between industry and the department, those things aren’t assumed — they are earned.”

Empathy

Anne Marie Moss, communications director with the Oregon Farm Bureau, heard about it late last fall and reached out to the woman she’d met but didn’t know well.

“Oh my God,” she recalls

her email to Katy Cobra, “I have breast cancer, too.”

Diagnosis brings a flood of information, Moss said, “It’s like learning a new language.”

Over the winter months the women supported each other by phone and email, and a couple times ran into each other in the “chemo corral” at the Salem hospital where both received treatment. Each lost their hair to chemotherapy and radiation. Moss opted for a wig; Cobra chose to wear a scarf.

“I have to say she always looked healthy and radiant even going through chemo,” Moss said. “It really helped to have a friend — frankly, a friend in Oregon agriculture. It helped me a lot.”

Each is now cancer-free. As their hair grows back curly gray, each has adopted a stylish bob.

“And I kind of love that both Katy and I are rocking the chemo curls these days,” Moss said by email. “I think we look fabulous!”

Jill Thorne said Katy’s breast cancer diagnosis was a shock to the family, but Katy was always upbeat. It helped that it was discovered early.

“She just rolled with it,” Thorne said. “It’s been a family challenge, but our daughter set the tone for all of it.”

The Future

Katy Cobra, 54, says she’s blessed to have a happy and supportive family. She and her husband, Marshall Cobra,

Wolves

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A WDFW spokesman said the department didn’t ask the Forest Service to withdraw grazing allotments.

“We know of no request from WDFW staff — even at the field level — for the USFS to withdraw grazing permits in the allotments associated with the Profanity Peak pack,” he said in an email.

Efforts to reach the Humane Society’s national office and Washington state director Dan Paul were unsuccessful.

A member of the Wolf Advisory Group, Paul agreed last spring to a

policy that allows for state-protected wolves to be killed if efforts by ranchers to prevent depredations have failed.

The policy is under attack by animal-rights activists and environmental groups, some of whom have accused ranchers of willfully putting their livestock at risk.

Washington State University wolf researcher Rob Wielgus told The Seattle Times a rancher turned out cattle “on top” on a wolf den. WSU officials rebuked Wielgus and said the comment was inaccurate.

In his blog post, Paccelle said cattle were placed “right in the center” of the pack’s range.

According to WDFW, 198 cow-

calf pairs cows were released 4 miles from the pack’s den in early June. The whereabouts of the den was unknown at the time, according to WDFW.

Wolves have attacked since early July at least eight cattle in the national forest and probably attacked five others, though there too little evidence to rule out another predator, according to WDFW.

Livestock have been attacked as far away as 10 miles from the pack’s den and rendezvous sites, according to WDFW.

The department has announced shooting six wolves and says it intends to kill the Profanity Peak pack’s other five members.

Although its policy calls for at least weekly reports on the number of wolves killed, WDFW has not provided an update since Sept. 2.

Paccelle stated that the Humane Society of the U.S. wants the Washington’s wolf policy to be re-examined. “We are urging that the idea of killing an entire pack be taken off the table entirely.”

WDFW’s lethal-control policy emerged from lengthy meetings between Washington ranchers, environmentalists, hunters and animal-rights activists.

The agreement has helped ease tensions and made future collaboration on managing Washington’s growing wolf population more

promising, Washington Cattlemen’s Association Executive Vice President Jack Field said.

“I know there is a lot of attention and focus on the removal effort, but the department is following the protocol to a T,” he said.

The Wolf Advisory Group was to meet Wednesday and Thursday in Issaquah. The two-day meeting was scheduled before WDFW started removing the Profanity Peak pack.

Field said he hoped conservationists on the advisory panel can withstand the pressure exerted by other environmental groups. “Because if not, we’re right back where we started,” he said.