

OUR VIEW

Maine designation may foretell fate of Owyhee monument

Residents of Oregon’s Malheur County, who strongly oppose a plan to turn more than 2 million acres of BLM land into a national monument, can only be dismayed by what happened in the woods of Maine last month.

The story of the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument and the Down Easterners who opposed it bear strong similarities to the ongoing saga of the Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument proposal.

According to the New York Times, Roxanne Quimby, a founder of the Burt’s Bees product line, for many years bought up parcels of woodland in northcentral Maine. Her objective was to gift the land to the government as a national park. But it takes an act of Congress



Capital Press

A sign posted in Jordan Valley opposes the Owyhee Canyonlands National Monument in Malheur County, Ore. President Obama has just designated a national monument in Maine. to create a national park, and park backers could never get enough support to push it through. No worries though.

Last month, President Obama designated 87,500 acres gifted to the Park Service by Quimby as the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument. The president has the authority to create a

national monument under the Antiquities Act of 1906.

Backed by the Oregon Natural Desert Association, the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness and conservation area would cover 40 percent of Oregon’s Malheur County — about 2.5 million acres of what is now controlled by the Bureau of Land Management.

Residents believe designation would be accompanied by restrictions and regulations that would prohibit or severely complicate grazing, mining, hunting and recreation.

While proponents say traditional uses of the land will be allowed, local opponents don’t believe them.

Last spring, 90 percent of Malheur County voters opposed the monument proposal in a county-wide advisory vote. It is

opposed by Rep. Greg Walden, and Oregon’s two Democratic senators are trying to work out a way to preserve the site and current uses with congressional action that would stop short of the national monument designation.

None of that mattered in Maine. The administration has said it would work collaboratively with Congress, local interests and elected officials in making such designations. But it ignored the results of non-binding votes in several Katahdin region towns that found locals opposed the monument. It ignored the Maine Legislature and the governor.

Gov. Paul LePage called Obama’s declaration a “unilateral action against the will of the people.”

And the administration

ignored members of the Maine congressional delegation.

“He should not have used his executive authority given the objection lodged by the Maine Legislature, the lack of consensus among Mainers who live in the area, and the absence of congressional approval,” Sen. Susan Collins told the Portland (Maine) Press Herald.

Owyhee supporters and the White House are quick to point out that there is no specific plan awaiting action. But that’s easily remedied, and opponents worry such a plan will appear after the election and before inauguration day for the president’s quick signature.

We only hope he listens to the people of Malheur County, and trusts them to be good stewards of the land they’ve cherished for 150 years.

OUR VIEW

Crafting a 2018 Farm Bill to provide shelter from the storm



Courtesy of West Texas A&M University

Students pose with Alpha, a cloned bull intended to sire cattle with a higher grade meat. The university cloning project began in 2010 and has produced two bulls and three heifers. Their offspring are being evaluated for meat quality.

By ZIPPY DUVALL  
For the Capital Press

Guest comment  
Zippy Duvall



It has been said that if it takes five weeks to build a barn, a wise carpenter should spend the first three drawing up plans, gathering material and preparing the site. In Farm Bureau’s mission to advance sound public policy that helps America’s farm and ranch families earn a living from the land, we know essential spadework must be tackled before any nail can be driven and any rafter hoisted into place.

In the vast barnyard of national issues that affects agriculture in one way or another, one structure rises above all others in offering shelter from the storm — the farm bill. As the 2018 Farm Bill approaches, we have already begun preparations.

This barn raising is one of the biggest events coming up on the ag calendar, and it’s important that we do everything in our power to make sure Congress gets it right — with squared-up corners and leveled-up beams.

Change is constant

No farm bill is ever perfect. The challenge is that in the life cycle of all farm bills, complete with shifting weather challenges, drifting market patterns and unpredictable global economics, defects can come to light after the law is approved.

There have been unforeseen commodity sector and regional challenges in the current farm bill, and as we draw up our plan for what we would like to see in the 2018 farm bill, it is clear that Congress needs to address program shortfalls for cotton and dairy producers. We also need to consider ways to overcome discrepancies in how some programs offer vastly different levels of support, sometimes even to neighboring farmers.

Make no mistake, we are going through challenging times in farm country right now and many farm families are dipping into reserves as they face prices at break-even levels or below.

The good news is that productivity over the last couple years has topped the charts, but in many cases, that has not been sufficient to offset prices that have taken a historic tumble. The risk-management function of crop insurance and the basic economic safety net offered by farm programs are more important than ever.

Function and form

Farm bills are written for times like these — the challenging years. Our farm bill

is like an insurance policy. Benefits are paid when the situation warrants.

In the case of the farm economy in 2016, the barn has caught on fire. According to USDA estimates, net farm income for 2016 is at \$54.8 billion, compared to \$123.3 billion in 2013.

Anyone who criticizes the amount of risk management funds going to farm families at this critical time should remember that’s what the farm bill is designed to do.

To make sure the farm bill continues to work as intended, those of us in agriculture are beginning to design the next one. AFBF has appointed an advisory group of state Farm Bureau farm bill specialists to discuss what’s working in the current farm bill and what isn’t.

A group of agricultural economists from farm and commodity groups soon will get together to determine what factors might come into play and what the budget for this construction project might look like.

Grassroots input

At county and state Farm Bureau annual meetings across the land, farmers and ranchers are gathering to add their voices to the policy development process we will follow in advocating for the 2018 Farm Bill. We need this grassroots input.

Using this blueprint, we will encourage Congress to craft the 2018 Farm Bill within the economic projections and budget parameters.

We will focus on securing the best possible shelter from the storm. To do that, we must have input from inside agriculture.

Only then will we be able to best help America’s farm and ranch families manage their many risks, make sure we are investing in research for a brighter tomorrow, provide programs aimed at conserving our most important resource — America’s farmland — and help feed Americans who need a helping hand to benefit from the bounty we produce from the land.

While the 2018 Farm Bill is still on the horizon, it really is time to sound the bell for preparation for this great American barn raising.

*Zippy Duvall is president of the American Farm Bureau Federation.*

Consumers must be educated about the science of modern agriculture

When it comes to food, there are two main types of consumers.

The first type of consumer just wants to fill a cavity. He follows the “See Food Diet” — he sees food and eats it and asks few questions beyond, “How much does it cost?”

The second type is the foodie. He wants to know everything there is to know about the food he eats. The television show “Portlandia” did a good job of portraying the foodie during an episode when a waiter presented two restaurant patrons with a portfolio about the chicken they ordered, complete with photos and its name.

Most consumers fall somewhere between those two extremes. They are busy with jobs and families, face budget concerns and want to make sure the food they buy is affordable and wholesome.

The job of farmers and ranchers is to feed them all, including the foodies and the “See-Fooders.” Some farmers cater to one end of the spectrum or the other, but most cater to the vast majority of consumers in the middle.

One of the challenges facing farmers is explaining how food is grown. Most consumers figure that food grows from the ground. They understand that livestock is raised to provide meat, milk and fiber. But beyond that, their knowledge is thin.

For example, the science behind genetically modified plants appears to have escaped many consumers. Farmers understand it, because it

benefits them by saving money and reducing inputs and labor costs.

But consumers were left with a void of knowledge that has been filled by internet-fueled theories and politically motivated claptrap.

When it comes to even the most basic scientific knowledge, that void is massive. A couple of years ago, the Oklahoma State University Department of Agricultural Economics took a survey. In it, 80 percent of the respondents said they “support mandatory labels for food containing DNA.”

DNA, also known as deoxyribonucleic acid, is in everything living thing, even people, so it’s clear 80 percent of the survey respondents didn’t know what they were talking about.

But they didn’t know it, they didn’t understand it, and they were against it and , whatever it is, they wanted to label it.

Much the same can be said of genetically modified organisms, also known as GMOs. Many consumers don’t know what they are, don’t understand them, and are against them and want to label them, whatever they are.

Into this void come scientific advances such as cloning. Cloning has been around for years. It’s been used in horticulture and in livestock. Dolly the sheep made headlines 20 years ago as the first cloned animal. Since then other animals have been cloned, too, including pet dogs and cats.

At West Texas A&M University, an

experiment is underway using cloning to produce superior meat quality. Cloning was used to produce a bull and heifers from animals that graded high for meat quality.

The experiment is not over, but the results are promising. Researchers also believe the clones may be resistant to some cattle diseases.

We recently asked several ranchers and others for their thoughts on cloning for meat quality. Their responses were enlightening. They were primarily worried about how consumers might react.

Here we go again. If cloning can produce a higher-quality steak, but consumers don’t understand the process, with they eat it? Will they want it labeled because they don’t understand it?

Here’s where a little public education can go a long way. Agriculture as a whole needs to get out in front of such issues. Instead of allowing a void to develop and letting the debate be dominated by ignorance, as has occurred with GMOs, information about cloning needs to come first.

Then a public conversation, based on facts, can follow.

Farmers and ranchers cannot sit idly by with their fingers crossed and hope consumers will eventually figure out and accept scientific advances.

Consumers must get accurate information so they can understand what the science is and how it benefits them.

No matter how good the science is, unless consumers understand it, they may not buy it.