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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Puget plan discussions must include farmers

The Army Corps of Engineers and environmental groups have a \$451.6 million plan to improve fish habitat around Puget Sound.

While we won't pass judgment on the plan's goals, we don't like the language used to describe some of the plan's consequences.

The corps and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife propose to inundate 2,100 acres in Whatcom, Skagit and Jefferson counties, including by removing dikes protecting farms. The flooded land would include about 800 acres of Whatcom County farmland and about 250 acres of Skagit County farmland.

In a study supporting the project, the corps called the loss of prime farmland in

Whatcom County "insignificant."

The project is environmentally justified and "socially acceptable," it said.

That's not how Scott Bedlington sees it. Bedlington, who grows seed potatoes, estimates the plan would inundate 700 to 800 acres he owns or rents. Some of his best ground is behind a dike.

Far from insignificant, it's his family's livelihood.

"I have to farm," the third-generation producer told the



Excavators breach a dike earlier this year in Skagit County, Wash., to expose 131 acres of former farmland to Puget Sound salt water for fish habitat. A much larger effort is contemplated in a plan to flood thousands of acres of farmland bordering Puget Sound.

Capital Press. "That's what we live off."

Bedlington's farm isn't for sale. To their credit, WDFW officials told us that the state

won't use eminent domain to acquire land.

"We haven't had detailed conversations," Theresa Mitchell, WDFW's project manager, said. "We'll work with willing landowners, and if landowners aren't willing to sell, the project will need to be redesigned or abandoned."

That's good news, and we'll take WDFW at its word for now.

Beyond the loss of farmland, Washington ag organizations are upset that none of the plan's advocates have had any discussions with

farmers about the possibility of flooding their land. Mitchell says that's because Congress has not yet approved funding for the plan.

That's not the point. Ag groups say project proponents are out of touch with farmers, and don't understand that farmland can't be replaced.

We agree. Whether funded or not, courtesy dictates that those impacted be included in the discussions from the beginning.

The corps' language demonstrates a disregard for the people whose lives would be turned upside down if the plan were to be pushed through. Sacrificing a farmer's livelihood is neither acceptable, nor insignificant.

OUR VIEW

Idaho sets example for rest of nation — again

Idaho voters next month will decide on a straightforward amendment to the state constitution.

The amendment guarantees the right of the legislature to review rules and regulations written by the executive branch to make sure they adhere to the spirit and letter of the law.

The full text is: "The legislature may review any administrative rule to ensure it is consistent with the legislative intent of the statute that the rule was written to interpret, prescribe, implement or enforce. After that review, the legislature may approve or reject, in whole or in part, any rule as provided by law. Legislative approval or rejection of a rule is not subject to gubernatorial veto under section 10, article IV, of the constitution of the state of Idaho."

This is not some wild-eyed infringement on the executive branch's "rights," as some argue. Rather, it is an assurance that Idaho's laws are carried out through regulations that accurately reflect a law's intent and substance.

It is a concept that has long been at work in the Gem State. The amendment would simply include that common sense practice in the constitution and prevent those who oppose it from challenging it in court. The legislature

forwarded HJR 5 to the voters by a near-unanimous vote.

Some lawyers, including the Idaho Attorney General Lawrence G. Wasden, insist that they ought to be the sole arbiters of whether regulations follow the law. That argument ignores the fact that the legislature is not merely an interested party. It wrote the law; as such, it ought to have the unfettered ability to make sure its intentions are fully and accurately carried out.

We think HJR 5 deserves the support of Idaho voters. As importantly, we would like see every other state — and Congress — pursue this fundamental and rightful function.

Too often Congress will pass legislation that includes concepts. The details are left to the executive branch, which consists of unelected bureaucrats who pick up the concept and flesh it out in regulations.

The problems arise when

they get carried away. Regulations implementing the Food Safety Modernization Act and the Waters of the United States are examples of runaway bureaucrats. Instead of allowing the administration to jam those over-the-top rules down the throats of citizens, Congress should be able to review them to determine if they follow the intent and substance of the laws.

If Congress were to routinely review new regulations and assure itself — and citizens — that they reflect what was intended, we'd all be better off.

In other states, legislatures would also do well to have such reviews. It is a common sense practice that would allow legislators to make sure their intent was not overridden by bureaucrats.

In Idaho, the legislature has reviewed regulations under statutory authority. By adding it to the constitution, Idahoans will be assured that their elected representatives will never be denied the right to review regulations.

It is an example of common sense. Idaho has long been known as the Gem State. HJR 5 is an example of why it should consider adopting another nickname: The Common Sense State.



Wikimedia Commons

More government overreach ahead

By TOM MALLAMS
For the Capital Press

Guest comment
Tom Mallams



Once again, our federal government is "proposing" yet another attempt to lock up more "public" land — this time, by expanding the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument in Southern Oregon and Northern California.

As a citizen and as a Klamath County commissioner, I have consistently opposed locking up more and more public land and not having the ability to use natural resources in a responsible way. These efforts seem to have no end in sight.

Yes, at this point this is still "only a proposal." But just look at the recent attempts such as the 2.1 million-acre Owyhee Canyon Lands, and the 500,000-acre Crater Lake wilderness area. If this recent attempt moves ahead, it will have devastating effects on the local communities. Also keep in mind that over 50,000 of these acres are O&C timber lands. The loss of timber harvests will also have a major effect on all 18 of the O&C counties. With no timber sales, there will also be little if any meaningful timber management that will decrease the amount of major wildfires.

The supporters claim there is "strong backing from elected officials, citizens and chambers of commerce." That actually equates to the

cities of Ashland and Talent along with their chambers of commerce.

Not exactly a mandate.

In reality, very few in opposition even knew about the recent public meeting in Ashland. Local Bureau of Land Management offices in Klamath Falls and Redding hadn't even been notified. If the expansion is approved the talk is that the Klamath office would likely be closed — a loss of 60 jobs. The supporters' sea of blue T-shirts and professional campaign signs that were present show they had plenty of advance knowledge. Well-rehearsed, scripted comments by the supporters often mentioned moving forward on the Owyhee effort as well. The unfolding scenario certainly has the smell of "the fix is in."

I have requested an additional public comment meeting/hearing be held in Klamath Falls.

These lands belong to the public. The government is supposed to manage them, not lock them up.

These proposals need to die, and the quicker the better.

Tom Mallams is a Klamath County commissioner and a rancher. He lives near Beatty, Ore.

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.

Readers' views

Thompson deserves vote for state House

I am an organic gardener of 50 years who is supporting Jim Thompson for state representative in District 23.

Jim is a champion for both home gardeners and small farmers. He is deeply concerned with the loss of pollinators and will work with other legislators already working on a pollinator plan for Oregon. In the interim gardeners, fruit and nut orchards and other crops can benefit by growing native flowers in strips beside their plants. And remember that monarchs and bats are pollinators. When the last pollinator dies, so do we.

We are running out of water.

Homeowners can help by planting Xeric, ornamental grasses which, once established, need neither watering nor fertilizing and are attractive year-round. Farmers will eventually be forced to underground their irrigation because of diminishing aquifers.

As someone who was recently exposed to herbicides on a windy day — I would like to see buffer zones established for residents. I know that is a prickly issue, but it needs to be addressed. If returned to the legislature, Jim with his six years of experience on the Agricultural and Resources Committee can perhaps bring compromise to this issue.

*Jean Astrinsky
Buena Vista, Ore.*

How agriculture can tell its story

I enjoyed your article of Sept. 30 describing farmers' concerns about losing control of their fate and clout to the rapidly urbanizing area surrounding Boise.

This happened to California farmers as the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas started dominating state politics in the 1970s and 1980s. A similar unfortunate fate fell on our farm neighbors in Oregon who saw their influence overwhelmed by Portland. In Washington, the Seattle urban area dominates the state's politics.

In these states it is frequently to the detriment of our agricultural industry's future. As farmers, we take pride

in producing abundant high quality food and fiber but unfortunately have tunnel vision when it comes to getting involved in issues important to all four states' agricultural enterprises.

Where we drop the ball is that we don't invest the same time and effort in educating our urban neighbors who are now two, three or four generations removed from direct involvement in production agriculture.

That being said, we need to be pro-active within our various commodity organizations and ag organizations such as our local Farm Bureaus to continually present a unified, accurate, and positive picture of the benefits of modern agriculture to our urban neighbors.

To be successful in these efforts

all commodity groups and farm organizations should form a statewide umbrella organization with dedicated leaders that would leave biases, egos and self interests at home and pool their resources to get our message economically and effectively to our urban neighbors. Such an effort would demonstrate to urban voters we want to partner with them as we share the same values and concerns about our environment, our children's future, and the sustainability of our industry.

Agriculture has a great story to tell so we need to tell it from our prospective instead of our critics telling the story.

*Ed McLaughlin
Durham, Calif.*