

OUR VIEW

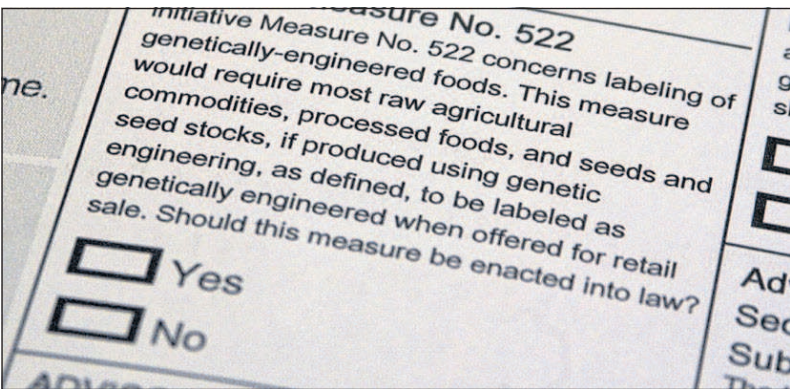
GMO campaign fines out of line

It's difficult to understand what a couple of county judges in Washington state were thinking last month when they meted out punishments that were off the scale of justice.

It would be laughable, if it weren't so serious.

The crime busters at the state attorney general's office had dragged two organizations into court for not filling out enough paperwork. The organizations — the Grocery Manufacturers Association and Food Democracy Action — were on opposing sides in the 2013 campaign over Initiative 522. It would have required labels on some foods that have genetically modified ingredients.

We have commented at length on the wisdom of such labeling laws — they don't serve a purpose because most non-GMO foods are already labeled and they make food



Washington voters defeated Initiative 522 in 2013 in the most expensive political campaign in state history. Both sides spent a total of \$42.5 million. Two groups that campaigned have been fined a total of \$18.3 million. One is by far the largest such fine in history.

cost more — but since Congress has passed a national label law the issue is moot.

What isn't moot is the shabby, outrageous and bizarre manner in which the attorney general attacked the GMA and Food Democracy Action. Now and extracted \$18.3 million in fines from them.

The GMA was fined \$18

million — \$7 million more than it spent on its anti-label campaign. Food Democracy Action was fined \$319,281. That's what it spent on the campaign, plus a \$23,620 hit for not handing in its paperwork on time.

The GMA fine is by far the largest in the history of Washington state — and the entire nation. The

next highest fine on record is \$3.8 million in a case handled by the Federal Election Commission in 2006 against the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp.

But there's more: The attorney general had originally sought a fine of \$43 million against GMA.

In our opinion, such astounding fines are just further evidence that marijuana smoking is legal in Washington state. No one in his right mind could do such a thing.

That two county judges went along with the state-sponsored shakedown shows that when it comes to sticking it to organizations, Washington state is the leader.

The organizations' "crime," as it were, was participating in the democratic process by raising money to campaign over the GMO label ballot measure. Both groups failed to file adequate paperwork on who contributed to their cause.

We're just taking a wild guess here, but we would suspect that businesses and individuals contributed the money based on whether they support GMO labeling.

We'll stipulate to the fact that the groups didn't shuffle an adequate amount of paper so the Public Disclosure Commission could make sure they knew the sources of the money.

We'll also stipulate that political campaigns should follow the law.

But for the judges to issue such grossly disproportionate penalties to the groups is unfair, unjust and plain wrong.

Our hope is that both groups appeal the penalties before a judge who possesses a degree of common sense.

Justice would be much better served with fines that fit the infraction.



A What's Upstream billboard shows cows in a stream, implying that Washington farmers were polluting public waters. The photo was not taken in Washington, but that wasn't the biggest problem the sponsors created for themselves.

Stand by for What's Upstream 2.0

The controversial What's Upstream campaign in Washington, now suspended, could be reinstated, it's organizers say. We'd be happy if they just kept it in the box.

The Swinomish Indian tribe and other affiliates used an EPA grant — \$655,000 over five years — to contract with Strategies 360 to survey voter attitudes and "create media pieces" for the What's Upstream advocacy campaign. The campaign's goal was to convince Washingtonians to press the Legislature for increased regulation to protect their water.

The EPA had hoped organizers would take a broad approach to water quality, and not single out farmers as the culprit. Organizers disregarded EPA's advice, and chose farmers as the fall guys.

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

It turned out the photos used in the campaign didn't depict Washington cows standing in Washington streams. But that wasn't the biggest problem.

After farmers began to grumble, the campaign got the attention of Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., chairman of the Senate Ag Committee. Shortly thereafter EPA decided the campaign violated a prohibition of using government money for lobbying.

The EPA wasn't quick to admit the extent of its involvement in the development of the campaign, or its knowledge of the particulars. In the end — or what seemed like the end — it said the campaign violated the agency's rules against using grant

money for lobbying purposes.

Now organizers say the campaign is being "re-scoped," and will likely be resumed.

The Environmental Protection Agency has awarded area tribes another \$25 million for Puget Sound projects. The new grant to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission extends for five years a federal program that financed What's Upstream — albeit with stipulations that projects be peer reviewed and more inclusive. Projects will also be subject to a 30-day review by the agency to ensure they meet specifications.

We can't wait to see what comes from What's Upstream 2.0. We can be sure that wary Washington farmers, and one pretty well-placed Kansas senator, will also be closely watching.

Readers' views

Snake River dams remain vital

With the renewed interest in the Columbia River Operating System, this is a great opportunity to remind the public the dams on the Snake River are state-of-the-art facilities allowing salmon, clean energy and cargo transportation to co-exist.

The Columbia Riv-

er is one of the largest export gateways in the U.S., largely thanks to the Snake.

Ten million tons of commercial cargo and nearly 67 million bushels of wheat are transported on the Columbia/Snake River annually, alleviating the burden on our road and rail infrastructure.

The river barge system provides the most cost-efficient mode of transporta-

tion, allowing us to compete in overseas markets.

The dams also produce enough clean hydropower energy to power nearly 2 million homes. And contrary to popular belief, record-breaking salmon return numbers have been documented past all 8 dams on the Columbia/Snake River system.

The Snake River dams deliver clean energy, recreational, transportation,

and fish and wildlife conservation benefits to our region. Visit www.snake-riverdams.com to learn more about the dams' tremendous contributions to our regional economy and ecosystem.

The Snake River dams are a vital part of the Washington economy and must remain intact.

Nicole Berg
Wheat Grower
Paterson, Wash.

Our dams support us; it's time to support them

By CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Cathy McMorris
Rodgers



Following Judge Michael Simon's recent decision to require a full review of the Columbia and Snake River systems, there has been a movement to re-evaluate what our dams mean to Eastern Washington.

Here in our region, the four lower Snake River dams provide renewable, reliable, affordable energy and act as a superhighway for barges to transport goods. As a community, we need to let our federal partners know that we want to continue to invest in and improve our dams.

Currently, the Army Corps of Engineers is undertaking a public "scoping" period through Jan. 17 providing an opportunity for Eastern Washington residents to voice their support for dams and the benefits they offer to the region.

I have long been a champion of our dams and the power they produce. I am the co-chair of the Northwest Energy Caucus and the founder of the Hydropower Caucus, which provide a platform for me to educate my colleagues in the House and Senate about the importance of dams and advocate for them.

This year, I authored bipartisan legislation to streamline the dam relicensing process, which, if enacted, would lower electricity costs in Washington state. Currently, the four lower Snake River dams generate enough energy to power 1.87 million homes with clean, renewable hydropower. Nearly 70 percent of Washington's energy comes from hydropower, and dams are the reason our energy bills are so low.

There are some who believe the Snake River dams are not allowing for adequate salmon recovery. However, thanks to collaboration between states, tribes, federal agencies and private property owners, our salmon are returning at record levels. Since 2014, more than 2.5 million adult salmon and steelhead passed Bonneville Dam, the highest returns since they began counting in 1938. The sockeye, fall chinook and

coho were also among record and near-record runs as well.

In fact, one of the biggest threats to fish is not the dams, but invasive predators. Many coalitions in support of our dams and fish have made serious efforts to remove invasive predators. To assist in their efforts, I support Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler's legislation, the Endangered Salmon and Fisheries Predation Prevention Act. This legislation removes non-native California seals, which eat salmon as they enter the ocean or when they return to our rivers to spawn.

The Snake River dams also allow for the efficient, cost-effective, low-carbon transport of goods. Nearly 10 percent of all U.S. wheat exports are shipped through the four lower Snake River dams. It would have taken more than 43,000 rail cars, or more than 160,000 semi-trucks, to move the goods that went by barge in 2014.

The shipping of goods throughout our system of locks and dams translates into jobs, and an estimated 40,000 port-related jobs exist in the Northwest thanks to our dams. That number is much higher when you take into account the jobs created and sustained by the entire Columbia and Snake River systems.

I am proud to be a champion of our dams and the role they play in energy production, transportation, and trade. Everyone benefits from our dams, and I encourage everyone in Eastern Washington to voice your support. If you were unable to attend one of the scoping meetings held this fall, there is still time to submit written comments to the Army Corps of Engineers before the Jan. 17 deadline. Learn more about how to voice your support at <http://www.crso.info/>.

Everyone benefits from our dams, and I will continue to do my part in Congress to make sure they are supported.

Cathy McMorris Rodgers represents Eastern Washington state in the U.S. House.

Letters policy

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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.