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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Say good-bye to those helpful snowpack maps

The USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service may soon stop producing daily snowpack maps.

We see it as another example of a useful, practical government function that is going by the wayside even as the regulatory reach of the same government grows more robust.

The maps — which measure snow-water equivalent compared to normal in river basins across the western U.S., including Oregon, Washington and Idaho — have become a valuable tool for farmers and ranchers as they anticipate how much water will be available come summer. Snowpack is crucial because it acts as a natural reservoir, feeding streams as it melts away.

The color-coded maps are easy to read and understand, giving producers quick access to real-time, actionable data.

We count the maps as one of the best things the USDA offers. Scott Oviatt, snow survey supervisor in Portland, said the maps are among the most-used products offered by NRCS.

So why give them up?

Rashawn Tama, management and program analyst for the center in Portland, said it's a combination of new technology and conflicting priorities within the NRCS, coupled with staff reductions that have taken place over the last decade.

The maps are created automatically by a computer script that uses data collected from the agency's SNOTEL sensor stations.

NRCS is about to get a software system upgrade, but the scripts used to create the maps won't work with the new system. It doesn't appear the agency has the expertise to recreate the scripts for the new system.

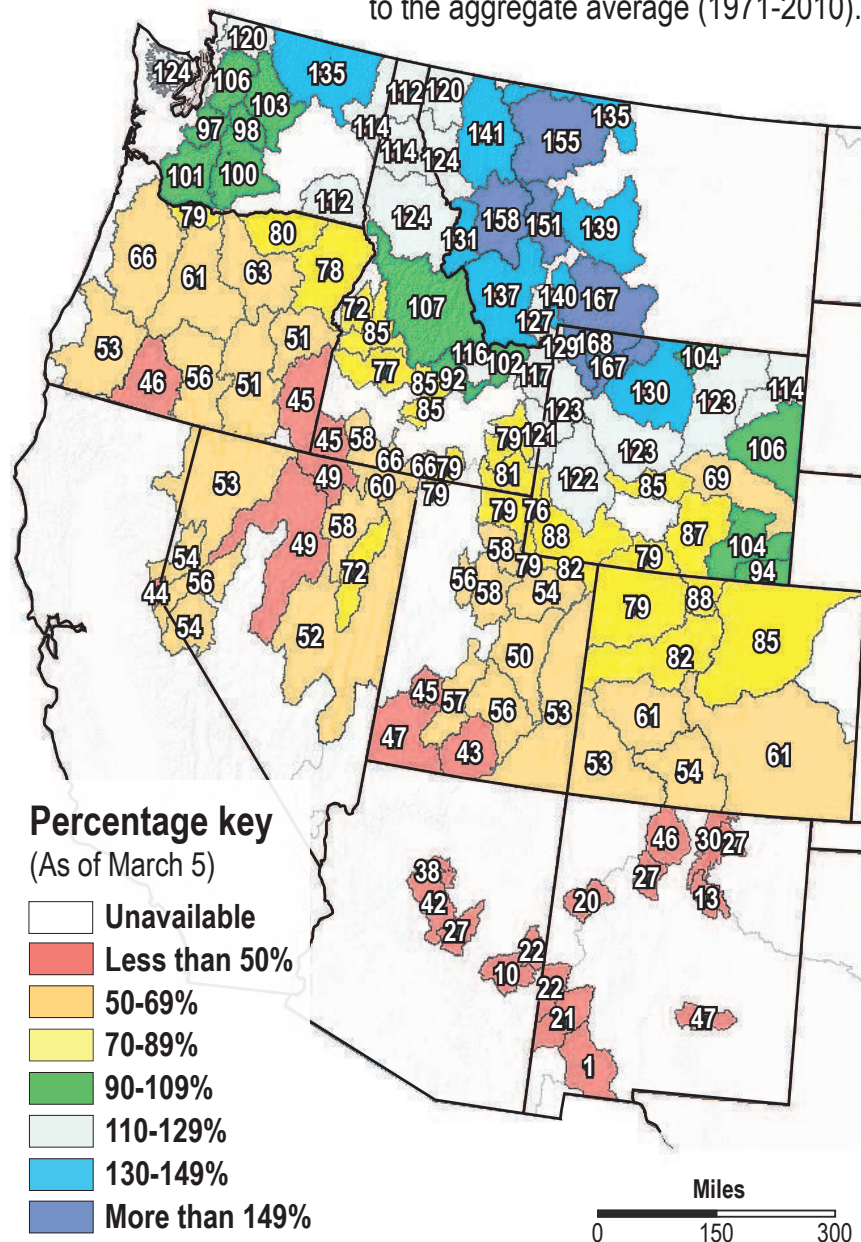
"We used to have some (information technology) contractors that supported us on the technical side," Tama explained. "We no longer have them to rely on. We're relying primarily on in-house expertise, and that's somewhat limited."

The data will still be collected and will be available to farmers and ranchers in its raw form. But those easy to read and digest, color-coded maps will be lost to "progress."

There isn't any business that hasn't

Western U.S. snow water equivalent

Basin-wide percent of February 2018 snowpack compared to the aggregate average (1971-2010).



Source: USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Capital Press graphic

been stymied by technology. And we appreciate the NRCS's issues with conflicting priorities. It can only do so much. Still, we can't help but think this represents a loss of something greater than just a snow map.

The contact farmers once had with government was fairly benign.

You went to the Post Office to pick up your mail, until someone perfected rural free delivery and brought it to the end of the driveway.

The Cooperative Extension Service — county agents and college researchers paid jointly by federal, state and county governments —

brought farmers the most up-to-date techniques and worked hard to solve local pest and production problems.

These institutions exist today, but not to the extent they did even 50 years ago. At the same time, a whole host of regulatory agencies have come to life that are anything but benign.

Bit-by-bit we've allowed our government to become less helpful and more punitive. The sad thing is that this is less the result of a conspiracy by the dreaded "administrative state" than it is the product of our own acquiescence.

Farmers should be at the forefront of trade policies

By CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Cathy McMorris
Rodgers



We've made a lot of progress over the last year, from reducing burdensome regulations to enacting tax reform that allows immediate expensing of equipment, raises the threshold for the estate tax, and lowers overall rates. We continue to make progress restoring our nation's infrastructure, including protecting our dams and the benefits they provide.

I stand by the vision of President Trump's economic agenda, and will continue to work with him and his administration to grow our economy, create jobs, and support our farmers. That being said, it's essential that we do more to prioritize trade agreements and pursue smart trade policies that allow people here in Eastern Washington to access the worldwide marketplace.

Washington is the most trade-dependent state in the country, and especially here in Eastern Washington, we rely on free trade and market access every day to sell our crops all over the world. Nearly 90 percent of our wheat goes overseas, as does 50 percent of our potatoes. In fact, 95 percent of the world's customers live outside the U.S.

Trade concerns

I was concerned when President Trump pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). While the TPP wasn't perfect, I felt that remaining at the negotiating table was the best way to ensure that the United States was writing the rules for global trade, not China. What's more, leaving NAFTA, KORUS, or other trade agreements — as the president at times has signaled — could put considerable strains on Eastern Washington's economy. I am worried that the continued slow pace of negotiating new trade deals will limit opportunities in new markets and will leave farmers in Eastern Washington behind.

All over the world, you see countries negotiating trade deals with each other, leaving the United States in the dust. Europe and Japan, Canada and China, the list goes on and on. We are losing markets that took years to develop, and could take many years to get back.

Every time I meet with farmers here in Eastern Washington, trade is the number one concern I hear. They are worried, and rightfully so. Other countries put up trade barriers that must be ad-

dressed through trade deals or we put our farmers at a disadvantage. Retreat from the international marketplace is not the best direction for our farm economy and I will continue to make my concerns known.

We need to increase opportunities abroad that help decrease our trade deficit. In Congress, we are currently working to reauthorize the Farm Bill. One of my priorities is to adequately fund the Market Access and Foreign Market Development programs, which increases trading opportunities abroad, has returned \$28 for every \$1 spent, and has increased farm income by \$2.1 billion between 2002 and 2014.

Bad actors

I am also urging President Trump to reverse course on the recently announced tariffs on steel and aluminum and instead work towards a targeted approach which would lessen the negative impact on our trade relationships and our economy. Recently, I joined more than 100 of my colleagues here in the House in writing a letter to the president making him aware of our concerns and encouraging him to pursue a more strategic, focused approach.

It's true that there are bad actors in the world, and while I understand the intent behind President Trump's tariffs, to hold China accountable for dumping steel and aluminum into our economy, we must have an approach that doesn't alienate allies and risk a trade war.

The American farmer has been at the forefront of all of our modern trade deals, and I'd like to see us pursue new trade opportunities with India, the Philippines, Malaysia and other Asian nations. I also believe that while we shouldn't be pulling out of NAFTA, there is a need to modernize this agreement to ensure it remains beneficial for us and our farmers and keeps up with the realities of the 21st Century economy.

Farmers and manufacturers in Eastern Washington have, and will continue to have, a champion for fair trade as I urge the administration to walk back tariffs, stop threats, and move more quickly on negotiating trade agreements that are good for all of us.

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

Five things I've learned about farmers and ranchers

By ANNE MARIE MOSS
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Anne Marie Moss



In honor of National Ag Week, March 18 to 24, I'd like to share a few things I've learned while working for Oregon Farm Bureau since 2004:

1. There's room for and a need for all types of farming.

Organic, conventional, biotech, no-tech, small-scale, mid-size, commercial-scale, direct-to-consumer, contract for food processors, international exports — all can be found in Oregon, and all have an important, vital place in agriculture.

The myth that one type of farming is "good" and another is "bad," and therefore should be pitted against each other in an either/or scenario, is untrue.

I know farms in Oregon that grow organic crops on one field, conventional crops on another, and biotech crops, like GMO alfalfa or sugar beets for seed, on a third. Other farms stick to just one farming method.

Farmers decide what to do based on many factors, including their customer base, market potential, the farm's location, the crop's labor requirements, and equipment available.

Whatever means is used, farmers and ranchers are committed to raising the safest, highest-quality products possible. To do anything less would quickly put them out of business.

2. Big doesn't mean bad.

The size of a farm or ranch does not dictate its commitment to a healthy environment, care for animals, treatment of employees or respect for neighbors.

A farmer with 2,000 acres cares as much about these things as does a farmer with 20 acres. Their day-to-day work may be different, but their values and integrity are shared.

Nearly 97 percent of Oregon's farms and ranches — including commercial-scale farms — are family-owned and -operated. Some are "corporate farms" that are incorporated for tax purposes or succession-plan reasons.

These are run by families, people raising kids, often living on the farm, who are involved in their communities and are proud of what they do. They're not in the business of

harming their customers, their neighbors or themselves.

Sometimes, a bad actor who doesn't follow the rules gives all of agriculture a bad name. But the many farmers and ranchers I know work very hard to do the right thing and follow, often exceed, the many requirements governing agriculture set by local, state and federal laws.

3. Part of sustainability is profitability.

Because eating food is such a personal act, there's a tendency for consumers to forget that the people growing their food are also running a business. Unless someone is dabbling in agriculture as a hobby, even the smallest farms must ultimately make a profit to survive.

Few people get into agriculture to get rich quick. It's often a labor of love with slim profit margins at the mercy of many uncontrollable factors, including weather, pests, fluctuating commodity prices, and rising supply costs.

This is compounded by the fact that almost every realm of public policy, from transportation to taxes, water to wildlife, directly impacts agriculture. When regulations bring new fees, compliance costs, and red tape, it's very difficult for most farmers to

pass those new expenditures along to their customers.

The price for most ag products is set by the commodity market, and farmers must take what they get.

4. There's no such thing as a "simple farmer."

Even low-tech farms and ranches do more than raise crops or take care of animals. Ag producers are also business owners, accountants, scientists, meteorologists, mechanics and marketers, among other jobs. Most have college degrees. Many are also eager innovators, always searching for the latest technology to help them produce more with less: less water, less fertilizer, less fuel, fewer pesticides.

5. There's more that unites agriculture than divides it.

No matter the amount of acreage worked, farming method used, or number of animals raised, Oregon farmers and ranchers share core values: a deep love for the land, an incredible work ethic and an immense pride in their work.

During National Ag Week — and every day — we should thank these hard-working families for their invaluable contributions to society.

Anne Marie Moss is the communications director for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Readers' views

Gun control, climate control

More gun control laws would not have prevented the high school shooting. There were numerous red flags to indicate the mental instability of Nikolas Cruz. Yet, law enforcement failed to investigate him. Liberal Democrat controlled cities including Chicago and Baltimore have the most extensive gun control laws, but have the highest murder rates.

Gun control and confiscation are the hallmark of a dictatorship. The United Nations promotes world gun control. Remember, when guns are outlawed, only outlaws in and out of government will have guns.

Did you know that the 97 percent of scientists who favor man-caused global warming is based on only 75 of 77 scientists. Actually, over 31,000 U.S. scientists are against man-caused

warming.

As a plant scientist, it is ludicrous to believe that carbon dioxide is considered a pollutant. Carbon dioxide is utilized by plants to produce the food we eat and the oxygen we breathe. Life on earth dies without carbon dioxide.

In 2009, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) researchers admitted global warming is a fraud. United Nations IPCC co-chairman Ottmar Edenhofer said, "We redistribute the world's wealth by climate policy."

Mankind contributes almost nothing to global warming. Global warming is part of the United Nations' Agenda 21 to control all human activity.

We must get out of the communist-controlled United Nations by passing HR 193.

A concerned citizen,
Adrian Arp, Ph.D.
Filer, Idaho