

OUR VIEW

Environmentalists stop state from managing wolves

We fully understand the role of the judicial system in society and how it provides all citizens with access to justice. It’s in the U.S. Constitution.

However, we missed the part of the Constitution that allows backbench environmental groups to run to court to meddle in wildlife management. Specifically, we were disappointed that a Thurston County, Wash., judge found it necessary to intervene in how the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife manages wolves. The state agency spent more than \$1 million on a mediator to help the Wolf Advisory Group come up with a way to handle wolves that repeatedly kill livestock. Under the agreed-upon criteria a wolf would be culled after 4 cattle were attacked over 10 months, or 3 cattle were attacked in 30 days. The Togo pack in rural Ferry County has attacked 6 cattle since Nov. 2 and attacked 3 cattle from Aug. 8 to 18.

The Wolf Advisory Group includes representatives of environmental groups in addition to ranchers and other groups on all sides of the wolf issue, and the criteria were developed after prolonged public discussions that were part of a multi-year process. The environmentalist litigants in the latest lawsuit — Cascadia Wildlands and the Center for Biological Diversity — had ample opportunity to participate.

The Wolf Advisory Group’s hard work was apparently for naught, because the environmental groups worked out a side deal with the department to get a one-day notice on plans to cull wolves. Their intent, of course, is to stop the culling by running to court.

Thus the judge stopped state wildlife managers from doing their jobs by issuing a temporary restraining order. A hearing later will discuss the merits of the groups’ arguments.

A few words about wolves in Washington state: There are plenty — at least 120 that have been found, though they turn up many parts of the state. And gray wolves are not a rare species. In fact, there are an estimated 10,000 wolves across the border in British Columbia, and there are 5,500 wolves in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, California, Montana, Wyoming, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan and probably other states.

So the fact that a couple of environmental groups want to short-circuit how Washington state manages wolves is like worrying about stepping on an ant when there is an ant hill with thousands of ants nearby.

We don’t get paid for our advice to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. The department probably wouldn’t pay for it anyway. But managers there would do well to avoid side deals such as that with the two environmental groups. All they want is to stop the department from doing its job, which is managing wolves.

The two environmental groups claim their interests would be damaged if one Togo wolf was killed. But it’s nothing compared to the damage those two groups and their lawsuit have done to the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s years of efforts to reach a consensus on managing wolves.

Because of these two groups, concern over the wolves has been replaced by anger, and the words of many others who doubted that the Wolf Advisory Group could avoid environmental lawsuits will continue to echo across the state: “We told you so.”

OUR VIEW

A year that will live in infamy: It’s time to act on climate



Reed Saxon/Associated Press File
A California jury has awarded \$289 million to a man who says he got non-Hodgkin lymphoma because of glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup. The case is one of many blaming the weed killer for health problems, despite many studies that have found no direct link to illnesses.

Glyphosate put on trial

A California jury earlier this month awarded \$289 million to a groundskeeper who claimed Monsanto’s Roundup gave him non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

The state Superior Court jury agreed that Roundup contributed to Dwayne Johnson’s cancer and Monsanto should have provided a label warning of the potential health hazard.

The jury’s finding is at odds with what the Environmental Protection Agency and other regulatory and research agencies have concluded about glyphosate, the active ingredient in Roundup.

The European Union’s Glyphosate Task Force said evaluations done over the past 40 years consistently confirmed glyphosate “poses no unacceptable risk to humans, animals or the environment.”

The European Food Safety Agency and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization have each said glyphosate probably doesn’t cause cancer. The German Federal Institute of Risk Assessment in 2014 declared glyphosate non-carcinogenic.

Glyphosate has been reviewed by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency many times since its introduction in 1985. In December the EPA released a draft risk assessment that said glyphosate is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans. And lest anyone suggest the EPA is mouthing Trump administration talking points, the agency came to that conclusion in 2016 while Barack Obama was president.

The National Institute of Health has been conducting an ongoing study of farm health since 1993. In May the NIH released an update of previous studies of 54,251 licensed pesticide applicators in North Carolina and Iowa, 82 percent of which used glyphosate.

“In this large, prospective cohort study, no association was apparent between glyphosate and any solid tumors or lymphoid malignancies overall, including non-Hodgkin lymphoma and its subtypes,” it said.

The plaintiff’s lawyers introduced studies that show a link. But the most prominent is the classification of glyphosate as “probably carcinogenic to humans” by the World Health Organization’s International Agency for Research on Cancer in 2015.

IARC classifies substances on a scale of 1 to 4. Glyphosate is classified in Group 2(a), which means “there is limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans and sufficient evidence of carcinogenicity in experimental animals.”

IARC says “limited evidence” means a positive association has been observed, but other explanations have not been ruled out.”

Thousands of lawsuits have been filed against Monsanto since the IARC’s decision. Law firms are eagerly soliciting additional plaintiffs.

In June, U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria allowed hundreds of cases to proceed in federal court after finding a reasonable jury could conclude a connection between glyphosate and cancer.

Chhabria all but conceded the difficulty jurors and judges will have sorting out the claims.

“I have a difficult time understanding how an epidemiologist could conclude ... that glyphosate is in fact causing non-Hodgkin lymphoma in human beings,” he said. “But I also question whether anyone could legitimately conclude that glyphosate is not causing non-Hodgkin lymphoma in human beings.”

We hope jurors will put the facts on trial, not Monsanto. Now a subsidiary of Bayer, Monsanto is not a sympathetic defendant.

Farmers who depend on glyphosate will be following these trials with interest.

Those of us who understand the existential threat posed by climate change have been waiting for the “Pearl Harbor moment” that galvanizes people and politicians alike into taking action to minimize that threat. 2018 is turning out to be a “Pearl Harbor year,” where a majority of Americans support taking action, and we’re ready for Congress to press forward.

We thought the wake-up call on climate change occurred in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina slammed and devastated New Orleans, a disaster that left 1,836 people dead and displaced tens of thousands more. Four years later, when legislation to price carbon made a run in Congress, any sense of urgency to deal with climate change was lost amid partisan squabbling and pushback from special interests.

The next opportunity for action came in 2012 when Superstorm Sandy roared up the East Coast with a storm surge that put much of New York City under water. The cover of Bloomberg Businessweek proclaimed, “It’s Global Warming, Stupid.” But again, nothing happened. Likewise, last year’s back-to-back-to-back storms — Harvey, Irma and Maria — left a swath of destruction from Houston to Puerto Rico totaling some \$300 billion in damage. This, too, was not enough to spur action.

Fortunately, more and more Americans are connecting the dots between extreme weather disasters and climate change. That increasing awareness of the impact climate change exerts on our lives is reflected in the latest polling from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

The Yale study found that 77 percent of U.S. adults support regulating carbon dioxide as a pollutant and that 68 percent support taxing fossil fuel companies while equally reducing other taxes. That support extends to all geographical areas of America, with majorities in all 50 states and all 435 congressional districts saying they favor a revenue-neutral carbon tax.

The Yale poll should come as no surprise, given that 2018 is turning out to be a Pearl Harbor year, not just a moment:

- Triple-digit temperatures in California have created conditions for the worst wildfires the state has ever experienced. In Redding, Calif., those conditions produced a fire tornado with wind speeds up to 165 mph and temperatures that likely exceeded 2,700 degrees.
- Smoke from western wildfires is drifting east, creating hazardous breathing conditions in cities along the way.
- A combination of warmer water and nitrogen runoff from farms has produced the worst “red tide” ever seen in Florida. Manatees, sea turtles and millions of pounds of dead fish have washed up on beaches and affected the tourism industry.
- Hundreds of deaths around the world have been attributed to record-setting heat waves in places like Japan, where 119 people died and thousands were hospitalized.

Of all the trends related to climate change, the most encouraging is the growing movement to depoliticize the issue and get Republicans and Democrats talking to each other about solving the problem. There are now 86 members in the bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus in the U.S. House of Representatives, half Republican and half Democrat. In late July, the co-leader of the caucus, Rep. Carlos Curbelo, R-Fla. — joined by Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., and Rep. Francis Rooney, R-Fla. — introduced the first Republican-sponsored bill to price carbon in nearly a decade. Curbelo’s bill is a major crack in the dam holding back effective climate legislation, and that dam is likely to burst in the months to come.

As Congress returns from August recess and members make their final re-election push, my hope is that climate change becomes a bridge issue rather than the wedge issue it’s been for so many years. Throughout our history, Americans have set aside our differences and come together in times of crisis to turn back a common foe. We can and must do that now with climate change.

The terrifying vortex of fire that swept through Redding, Calif., is the latest Pearl Harbor moment for climate change in a year filled with such moments. Let us hope this year of infamy, together with the growing desire for action, will finally set the wheels in motion for Congress to enact meaningful solutions.

Mark Reynolds is executive director of the Citizens’ Climate Lobby.