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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Klamath Basin aid a small start

Klamath Basin irrigators got a little help last week from Congress — \$10 million tucked into a \$6 billion bill to improve the nation’s ports, dams, harbors and other infrastructure.

It won’t correct the problems facing the basin, but it’s a start.

The Klamath Project provides water to 200,000 acres in the basin. The federal government began building the system in 1906. It is a massive feat of engineering consisting of six dams, 185 miles of canals and 490 miles of lateral ditches. It spans roughly 200,000 acres of farmland, including 18 irrigation districts.

After World War I the government used the project to lure veterans to begin farming in the basin. Agriculture boomed.



George Plaven/Capital Press File
Water flows from Upper Klamath Lake into the A Canal, part of the Klamath Project. Congress has set aside \$10 million to help farmers and ranchers within the project.

But over the last century, the demand for water has increased while the supply of water has not.

Snowpacks have become less reliable. The Endangered Species Act requires more and more

water be dedicated to support endangered salmon in the basin’s rivers and suckers in Klamath Lake.

Farmers have come up short. The provisions of “America’s Water and Infrastructure Act of 2018” won’t relieve farmers from the impacts of the ESA, but it will provide money that can be used to make the system more efficient, such as building more storage and lining canals to prevent water loss. It can also be used to pump more groundwater.

Provisions in the act will make it easier for irrigators to convey that groundwater — and any other water obtained from non-project sources — through the system. That could prove a lifesaver when surface water runs short.

Another provision requires the

Bureau of Reclamation to come up with a plan to reduce electricity costs in the basin.

Affordable power is tied directly to project efficiency. The more electricity costs, the less farmers may use technology designed to conserve water, such as center pivots versus flood irrigation.

We’ve long said that the federal government, which lured farmers to the basin with the promise of cheap land and plentiful water, should be obligated to do whatever it can to help preserve the farmers and ranchers now endangered in no small part by the impacts of environmental policy instituted by that government.

As we said, this is a start. The farmers of the basin look forward to more.

OUR VIEW



Courtesy of Ron Ellick
A calf is torn to shreds by wolves last May in northeastern Washington state. We believe it’s the states’ responsibility to protect livestock from wolves.

Protect ranchers, not wolves

Imagine for a moment that you have a new job. You are to manage an alpha predator, known to be one of the most efficient and voracious hunters in the wild. This predator doesn’t just hunt for food, it teaches its young by practicing how first to isolate an animal, chase and wear it down and then grab it from behind and tear it apart while it’s still alive — altogether a horrific scene.

Now imagine that near your predators are farms and ranches, where families have raised cattle, sheep and other livestock for generations. They were making a living on those ranches long before your predators were allowed back into the region.

Yours is a thankless job. You know that most of your predators will stay away from livestock, but you also know that it is inevitable that some of the predators will hunt cattle, sheep and even llamas. You know that a cow, a calf, a ewe or any other animal has no chance against your predators.

Considering these facts, what is the first step you’d take in your new job? Cross your fingers and hope the predators find enough elk and other wildlife and stay away from livestock? Make excuses for the predators every time they tear a calf or a lamb into shreds? Pretend the attacks were by an “undetermined” animal?

This scenario and these questions have been played out across the West as state and federal wildlife managers try to figure out what they’re doing in managing wolves. In varying degrees, they have succeeded in losing the trust of the people who live in wolf country.

Ranchers are forced to stand by as tens of thousands of dollars of livestock are repeatedly killed, injured and traumatized by wolves. Then the ranchers are blamed for “not doing enough” to stop the attacks. It’s much the same argument as telling a crime victim that you “deserved” to be attacked and it was “your fault” because you were in the “wrong place.”

It got so bad last summer in Washington state that a researcher was treed by wolves — twice — while wildlife managers dawdled after she called for help on her satellite phone. A helicopter crew from another agency rescued her. If it weren’t for that state Department of Natural Resources crew, who knows what would have happened. The researcher probably would have been blamed, though.

Since the mid-1990s when the first 66 wolves were put in Idaho and Yellowstone National Park, wildlife managers and some members of the public have laid all blame on ranchers and others. It continues today, as wolves

from British Columbia arrive in Washington state and wolves from Idaho spread across Oregon and northern California.

In every instance, the onus is put on the ranchers to protect their livestock from the predators. This is backwards. It should be up to the wildlife managers to assure the wellbeing of livestock. The ranchers have done nothing wrong. In some areas they are not even told where wolves are so they can move their cattle. In other areas, the implication is that just by having cattle the ranchers are at fault.

Washington and Oregon are in various stages of rewriting their wolf plans. In Oregon, a group of conservationists and ranchers, working with a mediator, have developed a proposal to have wildlife managers work proactively with ranchers to protect livestock. While this may seem obvious to any neutral bystander, it marks a breakthrough in common sense, if nothing else.

Many ranchers have lost faith in wildlife managers. They don’t even report wolf attacks on their livestock — would you? They don’t trust them. After so many years, it’s time wildlife managers worked to earn that trust.

We’ve said it before: The ranchers and their livestock need protection, not the wolves.

Oregon state agencies are out of control

By TOM MALLAMS
For the Capital Press

Guest
comment
Tom Mallams



No one should be surprised at the continued overreach of some Oregon state agencies. The expanding use of computer modeling to “prove” points that actual, on-the-ground science does not prove, was predictable.

The recent modeling study commissioned by Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, ODEQ, regarding mercury contaminants in Oregon, reeks of future regulations. ODEQ is targeting farm and forest land as the guilty culprits that they can regulate. ODEQ claims that their modeling is the best science available.

Does anyone really believe they would even give any other “science” a serious look?

Here is another case in point: The Oregon Water Resource Department, OWRD, has been regulating off many wells in the Klamath Basin for the last 5 years. Their computer model claims wells interfere with surface water, if the well is within one mile of any waterway.

This year’s shutoffs include 2 wells for the city of Klamath Falls, all of Bly and all of Chiloquin. Also shut off are many wells used for irrigating crops, watering livestock and some homes that use spring water.

Additionally, wells used for major businesses including Jeld-Wen, Running Y Ranch Resort and Harbor Links golf course were issued shutoff notices. Each year, the number of wells being shut off grows.

The one mile automatic interference criterion is especially disturbing. Some irrigators and cities are now drilling new wells that are just beyond the one mile “trigger.” Problem is, OWRD, when pressured, actually admitted that the one mile number could be expanded to 1½ miles or even farther.

They say all it would take is an Administrative Rule, signed by Gov. Kate Brown. Gov. Brown has already signed other Administrative Rules that have been extremely damaging.

A number of these wells have been tested on-site, by very qualified geologists and hydrologists, disproving OWRD’s claims of interference. Modeling experts have also examined OWRD’s modeling.

In both of these modeling scenarios, you are automatically deemed guilty unless you prove your innocence. Not exactly what the Constitution says.

The way OWRD modeling is framed, it is literally impossible to prove your innocence. OWRD even admitted that this is indeed the case.

Another common denominator for both these modeling scenarios is that even with heavy regulations by ODEQ and OWRD, there will be no real difference realized.

But the monumental negative financial impacts and social stressors are staggering. Thousands of Oregon businesses and citizens will be denied their ability to survive in this openly hostile state governmental environment.

The Klamath water issues are not just a local problem. Many of us have testified in Salem numerous times warning of exactly what is happening now with this expansion of power.

The Klamath Basin seems to be a disastrous test case that will certainly keep spreading. These state agencies are definitely expanding their heavy-handed powers and modeling is just a prime example.

They plug the necessary numbers into their model to get the results they desire. Remember the old saying, especially relevant with this computer modeling, “Garbage in equals garbage out.”

Under Gov. Brown’s leadership, these agencies are increasing their assault on the lives of the citizens and a large swath of businesses in Oregon.

Now Gov. Brown is introducing legislation that will adopt federal water and air regulations as Oregon law.

As if we don’t already have enough regulations stifling business survival and individual citizens lives.

Enough is enough! This has to stop! Maybe it is time to do an audit of these agencies and the Governor’s office.

Tom Mallams has been an irrigator in the Klamath Basin for the last 40 years, served as a Klamath County, Ore., commissioner and remains involved in numerous local and regional matters.

Readers’ views

Thanks for printing drought column

Mr. Marble’s comments contained in the column, “Surviving the drought in Western Oregon” were very well received from this subscriber. Mr. Marble’s comments are spot on and

obvious from the experience of a knowledgeable manager. I concur with every point he makes in his article. Good article and thanks to you for printing it.

Kurt Buer
Grants Pass, Ore.