Opinion

Our View

Urban legislator needs rural perspective

Rep. Sherry Appleton, a Democrat who represents Bainbridge Island across Puget Sound from Seattle, has introduced a bill to bar the state Department of Fish and Wildlife from killing wolves in the eastern one-third of the state.

Federal law already prohibits lethal control of wolves in the western two-thirds of Washington. Appleton wants to put a statewide ban on killing wolves.

Ranchers in northcentral and northeastern Washington have been hard hit by wolf depredation. This despite having employed range riders, fladry and other protective measures.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife concedes that lethal taking is sometimes necessary to manage wolves.

But Appleton isn't buying it.

Rep. Joel Kretz, a Republican in wolf-populated northeast Washington, doesn't understand why Appleton doesn't understand the plight of ranchers in his district.

"That's the biggest problem we have in the state — the disconnect," Kretz said. "How could anybody be so tone deaf to the real-world problems people are having with wolves?"

Easy. There are no wolves on Bainbridge Island and it's unlikely there ever will be wolves on Bainbridge Island.

The owners of whatever livestock might be on the island won't have to worry about depredation. College students working in the Gazzam Lake Nature Preserve will never be chased up a tree by wolves, as happened earlier this year to a 25-year-old grad student working for the Forest Service in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

Wolves aren't a work-a-day problem for islanders, they are majestic, wild animals. Now, Appleton's wolf bill would allow Fish and Wildlife to relocate wolves that are attacking livestock. But not to Bainbridge Island.

Kretz in 2013 proposed a bill that would relocate problem wolves to Whidbey Island, also in Puget Sound, after a lawmaker there opposed killing problem wolves. But that was really no more than a stunt.

But Kretz hit the nail on the head in citing the disconnect between rural and urban Washingtonians.

If Kretz were to sponsor legislation to end state subsidies of the ferry system and raise fares to cover costs, he would be criticized by westside residents and legislators as being out of touch with the issues that impact them. And they would be right, though the transportation budget is perhaps more of a statewide issue than wolf management.

While they've not always been happy about it, Washington ranchers have tried to accommodate the growing wolf population. Their fellow Washingtonians around Puget Sound need to appreciate both that effort and the real economic hardship wolves present to the state's livestock producers.

WDFW

A wolf in the Togo pack in Ferry County in northeast Washington. A state legislator from Western Washington wants to ban the state Department of Fish and Wildlife from culling wolf packs even after they repeatedly kill livestock.

Our View

NRCS

Woody Wolfe, of Wolfe Ranch in Wallowa County, Ore., holds up a pair of cotton underwear buried in a pasture as part of the "Soil Your Undies" challenge through NRCS Oregon. Wolfe Ranch uses cover crops, crop rotation, no-till and livestock integration to maximize soil health.

'Undies' demonstrate a fun way to learn science

Who says soil science can't be fun?

That appears to be at least part of the thinking behind an exercise the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service organized earlier this year. In the "Soil Your Undies" Challenge, six Eastern Oregon farmers and ranchers "planted" in their fields cotton underwear, which they left in place about four months.

When they dug up the underwear, not much remained. In fact, nearly everything was gone except the elastic bands.

That's exactly what they wanted to see.

The point of the challenge was simple, if not highly entertaining. The reason the cotton deteriorated into almost nothing was that tiny microbes had dined on it. The more active microbes there were, the less cotton remained.

Massive numbers of microbes live in healthy soil — billions of them per teaspoon. They thrive on carbon — which can be found in organic matter such as cotton underwear. If adequate amounts of organic matter are not available, the microbes go dormant. In no-till soil, microbes tend to be more active than when the soil is tilled.

NRCS

Alan Klages, of Klages Ranch in Walowa County, Ore., planted his undies on April 1, 2018, and harvested them 122 days later. The "Soil Your Undies" challenge tests for microbes in healthy soil, which deteriorate 100 percent cotton underwear.

Because microbial activity is an indicator of healthy soil, the challenge highlighted the fact that the microbes are doing their jobs.

Though it certainly won't replace soil tests as a way to monitor soil health, the challenge opens the door to an in-depth discussion about how farmers and ranchers can put microbes to work for them. Now that Joe McElligott and Corey Miller of Morrow County and Woody Wolfe, Joe Dawson, Alan Klages and Mark Butterfield of Wallowa County have taken the challenge, NRCS Oregon soil scientist Corey Owens hopes other farmers around the state will plant their underwear, too.

"... It's a fun way to start thinking about what's going on in the soil," Owens said.

He is "challenging" farmers and ranchers to plant their own underwear for at least 60 days, taking "before" and "after" photos. The photos and information about the farm and growing practices should then be sent via email to orinfo@nrcs.usda.gov or taken in person to any NRCS office.

But participants should be aware of a stumbling block one of the previous participants encountered. When he went back to retrieve the underwear, Butterfield couldn't find where he had planted it. The reason: one of his cows had made off with the marker.

Giving revenue to people can calm carbon pricing angst seen in France

GUEST VIEW

Mark Reynolds

In their well-intentioned effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change, the French government announced it would increase fuel taxes to discourage driving and encourage low-carbon transportation. It did not go over well.

Violent demonstrations erupted in the streets of Paris and other French cities, forcing the government to delay for at least six months the tax hike. The protests raise concerns about public backlash against fuel taxes specifically and carbon pricing in general, and that's a huge concern. Putting an effective price on carbon is perhaps the most important tool for reducing the heat-trapping emissions that will inevitably cook our goose in a business-as-usual scenario. If nations feel they need to set that tool aside, the world has little to no chance of meeting the emissions reduction targets necessary to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. Fortunately, there is a solution that can calm people's fears about the financial repercussions surrounding carbon pricing policies: Give the revenue to people.

Late last month, a bipartisan group of lawmakers in the U.S. House of Representatives introduced legislation to place a fee on carbon and allocate all revenue to households in the form of a monthly dividend. Under the policy outlined in their bill, known as the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act (H.R. 7173), a majority of families, particularly low- and middle-income, will receive more money from the "carbon dividend" than they would pay in increased costs associated with the fee.

The bill is sponsored by Reps. Ted Deutch, D-Fla.; Francis Rooney, R-Fla.; John Delaney, D-Md.; Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa.; Charlie Crist, D-Fla.; Dave Trott, R-Mich.; and Anna Eshoo, D-Calif. The sponsors who are returning in the 116th Congress say they intend to reintroduce their bill. As bipartisan support continues to grow, their legislation stands a good chance of moving forward. Starting at $15 per ton of carbon dioxide and increasing $10 per ton each year, the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act will push the price of carbon to $100 per ton within a decade. Such an ambitious price will achieve at least 40 percent emissions reductions within 12 years. The bill targets 90 percent reductions by mid-century.

The steep rate of increase sends a strong signal to the market that will accelerate the transition, already underway, to a clean energy economy. Such an ambitious price would not be possible without returning revenue to households. In fact, a study of this policy from Regional Economic Models, Inc., found this approach would actually add 2.1 million jobs to the economy in the first 10 years.

Climate scientists are clear that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change — coastal cities under water, food shortages, more extreme weather and flooding, mass migrations, unbearable heat waves — society must dramatically reduce its carbon dioxide emissions. That message was delivered most recently in the fourth installment of the National Climate Assessment, as well as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's report earlier this fall. The IPCC report specifically mentioned carbon pricing as a way forward to effectively reduce emissions and stabilize our climate.

Oregon state Sen. Cliff Bentz said cap and trade is coming (Capital Press, 12/7/18, p. 1), "This will not resolve climate issues," and that lawmakers should 'focus on policies that resonate globally.' H.R. 7173 meets this global need and also provides an exemption for our ranchers and farmers: on-farm use of fuel for agricultural purposes and non-fossil emissions from livestock are exempt.

The IPCC has warned that time is running out for the world to take the unprecedented steps to ward off climate catastrophe. If the rioting in France keeps nations from implementing a price on carbon, catastrophe is assured. But with the Energy Innovation and Carbon Dividend Act, American lawmakers have provided a model that can calm anxious citizens. By returning revenue to households, nations can implement carbon pricing in a way that is good for their people and good for their economies.

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