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Opinion

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Our View

Without any details, HB 1117 is a nonstarter

A bill proposed in the Washington House by Democrats is long on promise but so short on specifics as to be dangerous.

Current Washington law requires that public works projects do no ecological harm. House Bill 1117 goes at least a step further, requiring public works projects to actually benefit salmon and have a “net ecological gain.”

The bill doesn’t define net ecological gain, besides requiring road, sewer and other projects to aid salmon recovery. Fish and Wildlife, other state agencies and tribes would write the rules.

The bill’s prime sponsor, Skagit County Rep. Debra Lekanoff, said the “very essence of net ecological gain” incorporates “a standard of leaving it



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington lawmakers are considering a bill that would require public works projects to have a “net ecological gain.”

better than how we found it.”

“Shifting from (a) no-net loss standard to one of net ecological gain will start us on the road to improving our environment rather than keeping the

status quo,” Lekanoff said.

Building our way to a better environment sounds promising. In reality, the bill will likely make many projects too expensive or impractical to complete.

HB 1117 is like too many measures conceived and passed by state legislatures and Congress. It proposes a big idea without any indication how that would really work.

But the devil is always in the details, which are left entirely up to the Department of Fish and Wildlife and other state agencies and Indian tribes to fill in later. Fish and Wildlife is chomping at the bit to have this authority, which should be enough to give pause.

HB 1117 exempts projects on private land, but that doesn’t mean that it

wouldn’t impact agriculture.

How could a project go from not causing any harm to improving the environment? One way to benefit salmon would be to earmark project dollars to buy up private farm and grazing land and retire the attached water rights for salmon restoration. Just how much would need to be bought up would depend on how “net ecological gain” is defined.

Criticism of HB 1117 is perhaps unfair because we don’t know how its goals would be achieved. But that’s the very reason why bills like this should never be considered. With the guts left to the bureaucrats, it’s impossible to judge the costs and impacts of HB 1117 before it is passed.

Our View



Opponents of a trail across farmland in Oregon’s Yamhill County hold up signs protesting bridge work authorized by the county government. The county commissioners have now dropped the trail project.

Rail-to-trail project is rightfully withdrawn

Commissioners in Oregon’s Yamhill County have finally decided to pull the plug on a controversial rail-to-trail project opposed by neighboring farmers.

They have made the right decision.

In 2017, Yamhill County paid \$1.4 million for the “quit claim” deed to a 12.5-mile stretch of unused rail corridor that it intended to turn into the Yamhelas-Westsider trail for walkers and cyclists. The following year the county’s board of commissioners approved immediately developing nearly 3 miles of the trail between the towns of Yamhill and Carlton.

The rail right-of-way passes through active farming operations. Farmers adjoining the trail argue that a recreational trail will complicate pesticide applications due to required “set-backs” from such sensitive areas. They are also worried that their farms would become targets for activists who oppose pesticide application.

Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals blocked the project’s approval three times, most recently finding that Yamhill County didn’t sufficiently analyze the trail’s impacts on agricultural practices.

Despite the ongoing controversy, early last

year the county approved a construction contract to start work on a trail bridge over Stag Hollow Creek.

Although abandoning the project will likely mean repaying a \$1 million state grant for the nearly completed bridge and other project components, commissioners Mary Starrett and Lindsay Berschauer said they didn’t want to continue spending money on litigation over the project.

No doubt the trail would have been a boon for Yamhill County’s tourism industry. A 12-mile trail through the heart of Oregon’s wine country would have been popular and of benefit to the wineries, restaurants, hotels and shops in the communities it would have connected.

But it would negatively impact producers adjacent to the trail. And despite their ongoing efforts to show these impacts would be minimal and easily mitigated, the county and trail supporters have not been able to sway LUBA.

It’s unfortunate that Yamhill County could be on the hook for repaying state money. But there’s no use throwing more money into a losing legal proposition.

Beef Checkoff, what have you done for me lately?

When it comes to relationships, people can be fickle.

On the one hand, it’s often easier to remember a decades-old answer to “Does this shirt make me look fat?” than the kindness from the day before.

On the other hand, trust grown over years can quickly be forgotten due to society’s what-have-you-done-for-me-lately mentality.

Even within the beef industry, it’s tempting to view the 35-year-old Checkoff with skepticism. But if you look at the many value-added ways it serves producers’ interests, you may come away with a different perspective.

Here are just a few of the things that Beef Checkoff contractors have delivered over the past few months:

Consumer trust

- The “United We Steak” campaign reached more than 283 million consumers through paid advertising, social media, earned media and influencer outreach.

- A video series featured feedyard manager Tom Fanning showing Chef Kathryn Mathis how cattle are cared for at feedyards.

- Two livestream events educated more than 1,000 educators on how beef production provides an excellent context for middle school and high school science.

- Webinars hosted by nutritionist Marianne Smith Edge provided insights to Northeast dietitians about consumers during the pandemic and sustainable food systems.

- Six new blogs were posted on VealFarm.com, including one by meat scientist Janeal Yancy, Ph.D./the University of Arkansas addressing veal and meat safety.

- Meat Demand Monitor research revealed what post-COVID vaccine consumer behavior may look like, helping the Checkoff determine the best future use of producer dollars.

Export growth

- Tracking efforts revealed November beef exports were up 6% from a year ago (largest since July 19) and export values climbed 8% year over year.

- Market development programs paid dividends in November as U.S. beef exports to China were up 700% from a year ago.

- Beef export value averaged \$338.43 per head of fed slaughter (Nov. 20); 14.8% of total beef produced in the U.S. during this time was exported, much of which was underutilized cuts not popular in the U.S.

Innovation

- The holiday “drool log” commercial ran more than 50 times on the Hallmark Channel last month.

GUEST VIEW

Greg Hanes



- The #WienerWednesday campaign on TikTok received more than 27 million views.

Investor relations

- “The Drive” print and e-newsletter now reaches nearly 100,000 producers with details about how the Checkoff dollar drives beef demand.

Nutrition and health

- Registered dietitians, nutritionists and nurses are advocating beef’s role in a healthy diet and affirming prepared beef’s role as a balanced protein source.

- The “Guide to Meat Processing for the Nutrition Community” helped health and nutrition experts advise about dietary needs and provided valuable details about meat consumption and processing.

- A new study showed that beef consumption is positively associated with better mental health; the companion article has been downloaded more than 50,000 times by health and nutrition experts.

Research

- The Meat Demand Monitor issued its first-ever multi-month report providing insight into consumer purchasing behaviors, demand and consumption during the pandemic.

- The Sustainability Research and Scientific Affairs program completed an update to its beef environmental lifecycle assessment in 2020; findings will be published in 2021.

Safety

- More than 75 Beef Quality Assurance educators attended a virtual event to learn about meat quality, biosecurity, foreign material avoidance and international trade from industry experts.

- The Veal Quality Assurance program provided U.S. veal farms with a clipboard outlining best management practices for calf health, nutrition and handling.

- At the annual Antibiotic Symposium, beef producers collaborated with veterinarians, animal health professionals and animal ag leaders on how to become better stewards of antibiotics while combating antimicrobial resistance.

- So, what has the Checkoff dollar done lately? As you can see, quite a bit. And the best part? 2021 is just getting started!

Greg Hanes is CEO of the Cattleman’s Beef Board. To learn more about Checkoff programs, projects, and resources, visit DrivingDemandForBeef.com.

READERS’ VIEW

Editorial was right on

Your call to end the hate and violence and come together (Jan. 15 editorial “We must stop this now”) spoke to me. I wholeheartedly agree. We would do well to remember our common values of love of country, acceptance and compassion, tolerance and trust, freedom and justice for all. They are fundamental to who we are.

Power and corruption, discrimination and hate, and meanness of spirit, take our focus away from our identity.

Your editorial reminded me of John McCain, who walked the walk of American values. In his farewell address he emphasized unity:

“We weaken our greatness when we confuse our patriotism with tribal rivalries that have sown resentment and hatred and violence in all the corners of the globe. We weaken it when we hide behind walls, rather than tear them down, when we doubt the power of our ideals, rather than trust them to be the great force for change they have always been.

“We are 325 million opinionated, vociferous individuals. We argue and compete and sometimes

even vilify each other in our raucous public debates. But we have always had so much more in common with each other than in disagreement. If only we remember that, and give each other the benefit of the presumption that we all love our country we will get through these challenging times. We will come through them stronger than before. We always do.”

Amen to that. I agree with these American values and the values expressed in your editorial. Thanks for keeping us focused on the heart of America.

*Joe Fioretti
Auburn, Wash.*