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Opinion

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Our View

Oregon OSHA's 'temporary' permanent rulemaking

Oregon OSHA is working to make permanent — “temporarily” — the emergency COVID workplace rules that it first put in place Nov. 16.

This rulemaking seems necessary because of requirements in state law, to continue pandemic safeguards that were set to expire next month.

However, we are wary — as many are — of “temporary” permanent rules that are implemented without an expiration date.

In the beginning of the pandemic it was clear that something needed to be done to protect people in the workplace and the public at large. The job fell to state agencies, including Oregon OSHA, that felt their way through a situation about which little was known but immediate action was required.



Michael Wood

The danger from COVID-19 is real. Wearing masks, maintaining social distancing and taking steps to keep surfaces clean are simple, commonsense precautions. The rules that farms and businesses must follow are anything but simple, and in many cases defy commonsense.

In November Oregon OSHA set out a comprehensive temporary rule that governed behavior and safeguards in all Oregon workplaces.

Oregon farms, already reeling from earlier emergency orders, raced to comply with state-imposed guidelines aimed at curbing workplace outbreaks of COVID-19. Complying with the requirements has been a massive undertaking for small,

family-owned farms that may only have a few full-time employees. Ninety-seven percent of Oregon's 37,200 farms are family-owned and -operated.

Those temporary rules are set to expire May 4. Under Oregon law, an emergency rule can't be extended longer than 180 days. And, a permanent rule is temporary if it has a built-in expiration date.

OSHA says it can't anticipate how long the temporary permanent rules will need to be in place, but it will amend or abolish them as conditions warrant and health officials give consent.

Michael Wood, administrator of the state's Department of Occupational Safety and Health, told the Associated Press that the workplace rule is “driven by the pandemic, and it will be repealed.”

We are sure that it will be repealed. Probably.

But when? What objective standard will the Oregon Health Authority or OSHA use to judge that it's time to amend or repeal the rule?

Throughout the pandemic, the state has refused to set transparent mileposts and goals for pandemic improvement that the public can monitor. These decisions are made behind closed doors and without explanation.

Our long experience in reporting on rules and rulemaking has shown that once a permanent rule is in place, it sticks like glue. But we look forward to these rules being the exception.

Until that time, all interested parties should press Wood and other bureaucrats to reveal what improvements need to take place for the rule to be repealed.

Our View

Santiam salvage logging a good plan for Oregon

The state of Oregon's plan to salvage the timber in a small part of the Santiam State Forest is a win-win both for the people who live and work there and for the people who own it — the taxpayers.

The state Department of Forestry wants to salvage the timber off 3,000 acres of the forest. That's about 19% of the portion of the forest that was burned during the Beachie Creek, Lionshead and Riverside fires last September and about 6% of the forest as a whole.

Many who live in the area remember those fires. Wind-driven blazes became blow torches ripping through the canyons and over the ridges. Before the fires were extinguished, hundreds of houses had been destroyed and thousands of people had been left homeless. Many are still living in temporary quarters as they pick up the charred remnants of their lives and livelihoods.

Comes now seven environmental groups that want to stop any salvage logging in the state forest. They went to court in Multnomah County — Portland — hoping to find a judge who will shut down the operation.

Upon reading their complaint, the groups acknowledge that “the vast majority of the burning occurred on tree plantations within the Santiam State Forest....”

Presumably, that means those trees were intended to be harvested sooner or later. Now that they have burned, the Department of Forestry only wants to get some value out of them for the

taxpayers before they rot or otherwise become worthless. It should also be noted that allowing those trees to rot would release greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide.

It's OK not like the timber industry. But to try to impose that opinion on everyone all of the time seems a bit, well, unrealistic.

As a society, we need timber. Nearly all houses and apartments are built using at least some lumber. Innovative building materials such as mass plywood and cross laminated timber are just a couple of new ways to construct houses and buildings using this plentiful resource.

Better yet, trees are a renewable resource and climate friendly. They absorb mass quantities of carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas — while they grow, and then sequester it forever when they are used to build houses and other structures.

No one is saying every square foot of Oregon — or anywhere else, for that matter — should be clear cut. Far from it.

All many people are saying is state and national forests represent a perfect opportunity for multiple use. Yes, recreation is one of those uses. So is habitat. But so is timber production.

The state Department of Forestry got this one right. The highest and best use of that burned state forest is to salvage those trees, maintaining their value, providing jobs for Oregonians and homes for everyone, including environmentalists.

We want to hear from Idaho women in agriculture

Growing up on a ranch filled me with wonderful memories and a serious work ethic. But, I was probably in elementary school when my dad's sister pulled me aside and told me to work extra hard at school because the ranch would go to my brother. She was telling me this because it was her experience of the world and she wanted to prepare me. It's probably not surprising that I worked hard at school and when I decide to pursue a graduate degree, I wanted to study women in agriculture.

For the last decade, I have spent the research portion of my job at the University of Idaho trying to understand how to support women in agriculture in this state. Much of that work has involved interviewing women to understand both their triumphs and challenges as they start farms, grow farms, or inherit farms. But interviews can only answer some kinds of questions. That's why the research team I lead is working to hear from as many women involved in Idaho agriculture as we can through our survey for Idaho farm and ranch women: tinyurl.com/id-women-in-ag

I admired the women around me as a child: Jeanie, who would travel the state following farm work in a tiny camper with only a dog for a companion. She was a jack-of-all-trades who seemed to always show up when you needed her most. My aunt came back for the roundup. Her favorite story is me as a tiny girl riding with her and egging her on, “faster Aunt Shay, FASTER!”

And then there was my mom, she cooked three meals a day for the hired men and also did all the vet work. There didn't seem to be an animal she couldn't save and one of my favorite pictures of her is her performing a c-section on a cow in our barnyard. Both the cow and the calf lived.

With the support of a USDA/NIFA grant our “Women Farmers and Ranchers on the Rise in Idaho” team is working hard to collect and analyze data so we can create a fuller, and likely more complex, picture of women's experiences on that land. We started this process by analyzing the USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture. That exploration is already yielding interesting results. For example,

we know women's overall earnings through farming and ranching are far lower than men's. This in part because they are typically farming far fewer acres — somewhere between one-half to two-thirds fewer.

However, when we look at men and women growing the same crops, women are often making the same income per acre as their male counterparts. This means that even with a smaller production scale, which should decrease earnings per acre, women are on par per acre with men. You can see more here: <https://www.cultivatingsuccess.org/idaho-women-in-ag>

Our team followed up the analysis of the census with focus groups with women farmers and ranchers across the state of Idaho, asking them to help us contextualize our finds and discuss how they might apply to Idaho. We were so grateful to the women who shared their time, experience, and stories with us.

Today, we are in our final phase of data collection for the project, bringing together the question that remains from our analysis of the census and combining it with the context provided by Idaho farm and ranch women during our focus group. Our team has taken these elements and used them to create a survey that examines the project's remaining questions. That's where you or the women you know who farm and ranch come in.

We are hoping our survey reaches as many women farmers and ranchers in Idaho as we possibly can. Our ability to accurately describe the experiences of women in agriculture in Idaho depends on hearing from as many women as possible. We need your help to ensure the results are as precise as possible. Please consider taking our survey and sending it along to the farm and ranch women in your life: tinyurl.com/id-women-in-ag

Ryanne Pilgeram, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Idaho. Her research focuses on issues of inequality in the rural West and works to imagine how we can create thriving rural communities.



GUEST VIEW

Ryanne Pilgeram

Dam breaching proposal is a terrible idea

Make no mistake about it, a proposal by Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, that would result in the removal of the four lower Snake River dams would dramatically and negatively impact Idaho agriculture and the entire state.

It would also result in higher power costs for everyone in the Pacific Northwest and forever alter, in a bad way, the region's way of life.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation members — virtually everyone involved in agriculture in the state for that matter — were disheartened to hear that a member of the state's congressional delegation had created a proposal that would result in those dams being breached.

Many people, including myself, were dismayed when they first heard about Simpson's \$33.5 billion proposal, which seeks to improve populations of endangered salmon by removing the four hydroelectric dams.

Let me be very clear: Our opposition is not directed toward Representative Simpson, who has accomplished some good things for Idaho during his time in office.

Our opposition is squarely placed on the congressman's proposal, which we believe would be bad for agriculture, bad for the environment and bad for power rates, while holding no guarantee that it would improve populations of endangered salmon.

Let me also be clear on this: Farm Bureau supports improving salmon populations.

IFBF policy, which was developed by the organization's members at the grassroots level, supports several salmon-recovery alternatives, including privatizing salmon fisheries for stronger fish; controlling predators of salmon, regulating harvest of off-shore and in-stream fish, and using new hydroelectric turbine technologies to reduce fish hazards.

But removal of the dams is a non-starter for our organization, which represents more than 80,000 member-families in Idaho, including at least 11,000 people who are actively engaged in agriculture.

IFBF policy, which was developed by Farm Bureau members at the grassroots level, supports “the continued existence and current usage of all dams on the Columbia and Snake Rivers” and opposes “any efforts to destroy or decrease production of those dams.”

The lower four dams on the Snake River supply a significant amount of cheap and environmentally friendly hydroelectric power to the region.

They are also a critical part of a system on the Columbia and Snake rivers that allows wheat farmers, as well as producers of many other commodities, to export their product to the world.

The river, combined with its system of dams and locks, provides for the environmentally friendly ability to transport wheat, pulse and other crops to Portland by barge so they can be shipped across the world.

Removing the dams would make the Columbia-Snake River system unnavigable for barges that move wheat, barley and other products to Portland for export.

Removing the dams would have a devastating impact on Idaho's wheat farmers, who grow that crop in 42 of the state's 44 counties. Idaho wheat growers brought in \$525 million in farm-gate receipts in 2020 and wheat is the state's No. 2 crop in that category.

Almost half of the wheat grown in Idaho is moved by barge down the Columbia-Snake River system to Portland.

Barging is the most cost-effective and environmentally friendly way of getting wheat from Idaho to market and the Columbia-Snake system is the third largest grain export gateway in the world.

According to a study commissioned by the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, a nonprofit group that represents a diverse coalition of 135 groups in Idaho, Washington and

Oregon, removing the dams would significantly increase diesel fuel consumption because barges would be replaced by less efficient truck and rail shipment.

The study found that shifting transportation of commodities from barges to truck and rail would increase carbon and other emissions by more than 1.3 million tons per year. That's the same as adding 181,889 passenger cars or 90,365 homes.

According to the PNWA study, it would take about 35,000 rail cars or 135,000 semi-trucks to move all the cargo that is barged on the Snake River.

People in Idaho and the PNW enjoy some of the very cheapest power rates in the nation because of the electricity produced by those four dams and others on the Columbia-Snake system.

Removing those hydroelectric dams would result in power rates in the region increasing dramatically.

So, removing the dams would not only be bad for agriculture and bad for power rates, it would also be bad for the environment.

Simpson's proposal would create a \$33.5 billion “Columbia Basin Fund” to help transition economies and sectors negatively impacted by dam removal.

The plan attempts to place a price tag on our way of life in Idaho and the Pacific Northwest and it also attempts to compensate sectors, such as agriculture, that will be impacted by dam removal.

We believe attempting to place a price tag on our way of life is not possible, nor proper, and besides, farmers would rather make their living from the market and not be “compensated” by the government.

IFBF members believe that the congressman's proposal would have a major negative impact on the region's economy and way of life, while making no assurances that salmon populations would improve.

We're not the only ones. The list of people and groups opposed to the plan is growing seemingly by the day. Every other member of Idaho's congressional delegation, as well as our governor, is on record since the proposal came out as opposing dam breaching.

In addition, groups representing agriculture and other industries in Idaho have come out in opposition to the plan, as have lots of county commissioners and other elected officials. A Senate Joint Memorial opposing dam breaching is sailing through the Idaho Legislature.

We sincerely hope Congressman Simpson hears Idahoans' collective thinking on his proposal and reconsiders and scraps it, for the benefit of the entire state.

Bryan Searle is president of the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

GUEST VIEW

Bryan Searle

