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Opinion

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Our View

Poaching wolves only makes matters worse

If anyone wanted to help out the animal rights crowd in its efforts to reinstate federal Endangered Species Act protection to all wolves, all he would have to do is randomly kill the predators.

Since wolves were reintroduced into parts of the West, the activists have been hollering that, unless wolves are fully protected under the ESA, they could be indiscriminately killed.

In a few parts of Eastern Oregon, that appears to be happening. In the past two years, eight wolves were poisoned and seven were shot and killed.

This was not someone protecting himself or his livestock. This was someone poaching and breaking the law.

Animal rights and environmental groups are pushing right now trying to convince the federal govern-



Oregon State Police
A wolf that was found dead Jan. 8 south of Wallowa, Ore.

ment to reinstate ESA protections for wolves in the Northern Rockies. Just last week, we published a column by two members of the U.S. Senate making the case for state management of wolves in Idaho and Montana.

The senators are correct. Idaho, Montana and other states where wolves have been imposed on ranchers and others have done their best. Reinstating federal protections would

take management decisions out of the states' hands.

If you think there are problems with wolves now, wait until management decisions are returned to the hands of federal bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.

No one has been more vociferous than the Capital Press in criticizing how the reintroduction of wolves has been managed. Time and again, we have stood up and pointed out the shortcomings of federal wildlife managers and the unfairness their actions have inflicted on ranchers, whose livelihoods depend on their ability to raise cattle and sheep.

The basis of those criticisms was that wolves have been allowed to run roughshod through portions of the rural West, attacking cattle, sheep, wildlife and other animals such as working dogs. We argued that ranchers also were the victims but were

willing to follow the law.

Ranchers have worked hard to use non-lethal means of separating wolves from cattle and sheep.

But all of that is for naught when irresponsible parties take the law into their own hands. It accomplishes nothing — except to put law-abiding ranchers on the defensive.

We'll say it again. We are unimpressed by how federal wildlife managers have done their jobs managing wolves. From the beginning, they needed to do more to keep wolves away from livestock.

But we are 100% opposed to illegally poaching wolves.

Doing that only gives the animal rights and environmental crowd more ammunition in the court of law — and the court of public opinion — to criticize ranchers.

Stop the poaching. It only makes matters worse.

Our View



EO Media Group File

A proposed lithium mine near the Nevada-Oregon border is at the center of a controversy that has environmentalists on both sides.

When environmental priorities collide, part 2

Political leaders who want to wean Americans from fossil fuels envision a day when everyone drives electric cars, has solar panels on their roofs and wind generators are providing the bulk of their power.

Often times, environmental groups find themselves on opposite sides in disputes over the siting of “green” energy facilities and the infrastructure necessary to support them.

Late last year, a 2,390-acre solar farm was supported by environmentalists who want more such facilities, but was opposed by environmentalists advocating for the Greater sage grouse.

Conflicting environmental priorities are colliding in southeast Oregon and northeast Nevada, where what's being billed as one of the world's largest lithium deposits is located.

Effective storage is necessary to ensure a power supply when the sun isn't shining and the wind isn't blowing. All of that will require a lot of raw materials that need to be dug out of the ground and processed.

Lithium is the key component in lithium-ion batteries used in electric cars and to store the electricity generated by solar panels.

An Australian mining company has plans for an 18,000-acre open-pit lithium mine in an area controlled by the Bureau of Land Management known as Thacker Pass. Those supporting increased domestic battery production and “green” energy are hailing the development as an important step in lessening the country's dependence on fossil fuels.

Other environmental interests, however,

say the mine will despoil the land, poison the water and degrade wildlife habitat. Additionally, bands of the Paiute and Shoshone tribes say the project will encroach on historic and cultural sites important to native peoples.

Green energy environmentalists find themselves on opposite sides from other environmentalists who have filed a lawsuit to stop the project.

It's quite the conundrum.

Farmers and ranchers who rarely have environmentalists as partners to litigation might not know who to root for in this particular dispute. But anyone who supports the responsible harvesting of vital natural resources has to side with the mine.

At present, many of the materials needed to make batteries and solar cells are in the hands of either unfriendly or unstable nations. Labor and environmental protections in those countries are either lax or non-existent. The despots who run those countries are more than happy to despoil their lands and gouge others for the necessary minerals.

The United States has deposits of these minerals, and plenty of laws, rules and regulation to mitigate the potential environmental impacts and protect miners.

An 18,000-acre pit and the ensuing tailings will be a mess and an eyesore. We wouldn't want it in our backyard, that's for sure. But if the country is determined to pursue “green” energy policies, it shouldn't be willing to push the negative impacts off on the third world.

What's a committed environmentalist and enthusiastic alternative energy advocate to do? We can't wait to see how this plays out.

Inflation and war threaten global food security

The combination of Russian aggression and rising inflation has the potential to lead the world into a food crisis.

The USDA should shift into high gear. The U.S. should be as keen to supply future food relief as it is to supply Ukraine with military supplies. The USDA should be taking a lesson from the COVID crisis by implementing aggressive purchase orders, designed to scale up production of shelf-stable food products in anticipation of the need for foreign aid. Is Mars ready to produce 500 million nut bars?

The USDA is working off the old play book of fostering exports and responding to extreme weather events. We need to be filling our own strategic food reserves, perhaps funded with sales from the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. We cannot let foreign powers dictate geopolitics through food, having done so with oil. Acting aggressively now gives us a chance to boost farm productivity and mitigate a potential food crisis.

Russia has chosen to wage war with the West, and China is standing at its side. This is not a time for half measures when it comes to ensuring food security for us and our allies.

I am a blueberry and hazelnut grower in Oregon. Budgets created four months ago are becoming obsolete as costs spike in every category — fertilizer, labor, fuel, shipping and equipment repair. Inflation begets more inflation and it ultimately works its way through different layers of the economy. I know when I send my crop on to a food processor they are facing the same increases in energy and labor costs, as will the grocery store.

If prices do increase in the nut or berry market, that increase is split three ways, and farmers are the designated price taker. Most crops are not seeing “wheat like” price increases, and as of now, those spikes are just volatility, not money in the bank for farmers.

So, in this environment, any rational actor is going to look to cut expenses in every category possible. If a farmer cuts fertilizer, yields decline. If weeds are not addressed, yields decline. If equipment is not maintained, yields decline. If workers are not paid a fair wage, the crop is not harvested.

Cutting expenses will usually lead to lower farm productivity. I think an iteration of these decisions is working

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across every farm, dairy and ranch in America. As harvest progresses, and crop prices do not justify the cost to bring it to market, we will see disturbing pictures of produce left in the field and milk or apples dumped into ditches.

The current inflationary environment seems set up to reduce production at a time the world needs it to increase, to feed the world and to combat inflation. With reduced supplies, food inflation may spiral out of control and in some less prosperous parts of the world, potentially causing political instability. Have we ever not been drawn into such a crisis?

What might a forward-thinking administration do in this scenario? There is no magic wand to eliminate inflation; it will come in waves as a payback for an unconstrained monetary policy that enabled multiple administrations' deficit spending.

The only question is how to mitigate the damage. Ironically, the answer is probably higher prices in the near term. The great danger is food scarcity. The USDA should want farmers operating at maximum capacity and achieve this by securing available food, trying to establish price signals to spur maximum planting and harvest, direct the private sector to pull forward demand with contracts for shelf-stable foods. It may be that every calorie will count.

There is still time to organize increased storage facilities, finesse immigration, manage transportation bottlenecks, redirect water — but only if the government operates with war time urgency. These are constructive measures that mitigate inflation.

The Biden administration also has to start the process of sensitizing Americans to the age-old concept of conservation; it is the best return on investment in times of scarcity.

Jim Hoffmann is the owner of Hopville Farms in Independence, Ore. He transitioned into food in 2012 following a long career in investment management. He attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison with degrees in economics and real estate investment analysis. He is a resident of Monterey County, Calif.