

People & Places

Environmental researcher: It's time to think small

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

CLE ELUM, Wash. — Todd Myers of the Washington Policy Center has written a book on the conservation-minded doing “cool, positive things that are collaborative, rather than combative.”

It's due for release in November, and he wonders if anyone will read it.

“Like once a week when I was writing the book, I thought, ‘Does anybody care about this but me?’”

Myers argues that individual actions, though not flashy, are what's needed now to improve the environment. He acknowledges that landmark laws such as the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act cut pollution from smokestacks and wastewater outfalls, but maintains that the source of environmental problems are more diffuse now and that politicians, addicted to the grand gesture and overreaching, are ill-suited to solve them.

His book is called, “Time to Think Small: How Nimble Environmental Technologies Can Solve the Planet's Biggest Problems.” On the cover, a bee straddles a cell phone.

The book's premise is that, like bees, people can work together to be productive. Connected by technology, people can prevent blackouts, conserve water, track endangered species, foil poachers and otherwise improve the environment one nongovernmental innovation at a time.

Myers, the environmental director for the Seattle-based free-market think tank, calls them “small personal solutions ... more flexible ... more dynamic” and in contrast to government environment policies that are “unbelievably expensive, unbelievably ineffective.”

“What I want to do is



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Policy Center environmental director Todd Myers, with his bees in the Cascade foothills, has stinging criticism of how government approaches environmental issues.

give people more power,” he said. “I make the point in the book that the more concerned you are about greenhouse gases, the less you should put the future of the planet in the hands of politicians and the whims of voters.”

A decade ago, Myers, 52, wrote, “Eco-Fads,” excoriating what he saw as the vanity and hubris of environmental policymaking.

He wrote that science and economics were yielding to the social value of being perceived as “green” and that “follow the science” meant pushing a predetermined position rather than committing to disinterested inquiry.

Myers said he is as frustrated as ever about how government approaches environmental problems.

“Environmental policies and decisions that we make are not connected to good environmental outcomes,” he said. “We make it based on what feels good and what makes politicians look good.

“They think being big and being bold reflects on them,” he said. “They get an ego boost from saying, ‘I’m

literally going to save the planet.’”

They would be more humble and careful if they had to patch leaky pipes, he said.

“If they failed to fix the plumbing, they would feel the cost. But if they fail at environmental policy, they don’t feel the cost of messing up people’s lives.”

Myers has analyzed and commented on environmental policies for two decades, choosing whatever subject strikes him. “Generally, what sucks me in is where there is a gigantic gap between the rhetoric and reality,” he said.

His favorite topics include the Snake River dams, Washington’s snowpack, wolves and the “science” of round numbers.

He recently noted that spring chinook salmon runs, as counted at the farthest upriver dam on the Snake River, have increased in the past three years.

The counts contradict the claim that the dam and three others must be breached to save the run from extinction, according to Myers, who sits

on the Puget Sound Recovery Council, a state advisory body.

He called dam breaching a “good example of how environmental fads take hold,” leading politicians to ignore data and make wildly inaccurate claims.

In that vein, Myers likes to point out that Washington’s snowpack has so far held up, even though the state law that requires carbon emissions to be cut by 95% by 2050 lists “lack of snowpack” as evidence of a climate emergency.

A newspaper columnist mocked Myers’ observation on the “continued existence of snow” as a “zingy rejoinder to the irrefutable evidence of a warming planet.”

To which Myers replied that it was environmentalist activists, not he, who made claims about the snowpack.

On wolves, Myers says Washington’s recovery plan was based on the flawed assumption that wolves would spread across the state.

They have not, he wrote in a recent blog. Wolves are bunched mostly in northeast

Western Innovator

TODD MYERS

Occupation: Washington Policy Center director of the Center for the Environment

Age: 52

Resident: Lives in Cle Elum with his wife, Maria

Education: Master's degree in Russian-international studies, University of Washington; bachelor's degree in politics, Whitman College

Hobby: Beekeeper

Previous jobs: Public affairs director of the Seattle Mariners; public affairs director of the Seattle SuperSonics; communications director of the Washington Department of Natural Resources

Washington, making a small group of people bear the costs, “so we can all enjoy the recovery of a magnificent animal.”

It's Myers' turn to mock when he observes that policies that purport to be scientific are always divisible by five.

He calls the state's cap-and-trade law to reduce greenhouse gases from manufacturers by 50% by 2030 an example of a purportedly science-based policy landing on round numbers and of government getting in over its head.

Consider, he said, the response to COVID. “How is affecting the entire energy system of Washington easier? It's not. It's harder.”

Saving Butte Falls: Town creates community forest as wildfire buffer

By JAN JACKSON
For the Capital Press

BUTTE FALLS, Ore. — Local members of the timber industry and fire crews worked around the clock to keep the Obenchain and Almeda fires from wiping out the town of Butte Falls, Ore., in September 2020.

Now the 450 townspeople are working to prevent a repeat of those disastrous fires by creating a community forest as a buffer surrounding the town.

Longtime Butte Falls resident and logger Don Hamann describes the location of the town as the hole in a forest “doughnut.” He has been working on plans for the community forest from the beginning.

“No one talks about if there is going to be the next fire but when it will be, and we realized we were going to be way better off investing ahead of time versus just waiting for it to happen,” Hamann said.



Nick Rodgers/For the Capital Press

This aerial photograph by Nick Rodgers, a fourth-generation logger from Butte Falls, Ore., shows the vulnerability of the forest-encircled town. A new community forest will serve as a buffer to protect the town should a wildfire break out.

During the 2020 fires the town was evacuated for 10 days.

“Those ten days seemed like a long time to wait when you we didn’t know if you would have anything to come back to,” Mayor Linda Spencer said. “Our goal now is to make the circle of timberland around us

as fire retardant as possible and at the same time make it be something we can share with other folks in terms of recreation and things like that.”

The 460-acre circle of timber around the town will be developed as a community forest. The plan is to manage the forest so its trees

are spaced farther apart with higher ladder fuels that can be “broadcast burned” without damaging the trees, Hamann said. “So, we’re not only about being proactive in the world of increasing danger of catastrophic fires, but we are creating and adding opportunities for forest health and recreation.”

According to Hamann, the main person who was convinced something could be done was Spencer, who is retired from the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C.

Spencer first connected with the statewide mayors’ group, which connected her with Oregon Solutions, Regional Solutions and the Trust for Public Lands. Between the three of them, they got the first grant for the community forest. The organizations specialize in collaboration among government agencies, individuals and organizations.

“The Oregon Department of Forestry has been incred-

ible, we became an Oregon Solutions project, and (Gov. Kate Brown) came down and gave us her stamp of approval,” Spencer said.

The town received a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. Forest Service for the community forest, a \$700,000 grant from the Oregon Legislature “and more money from places like the Medford Water Commission and Gordon Elwood and others,” Spencer said. The Elwood charitable foundation is based in nearby Medford.

As contracts for the work are now being issued to many of those who worked to save the town two years ago, Hamann said he is encouraged by the project.

“We just took possession of the 460 acres in January,” he said. “We awarded the first contract in May, and now we’ve started to move forward to the harvest. It will probably take at least five years to get there, but at least we have started.”

CALENDAR WEDNESDAY JUNE 15

SUNDAY JUNE 12

Savor Idaho: 11:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Idaho Botanical Garden, 2355 N. Old Penitentiary Road, Boise. Idaho Wine Commission event features wineries, other exhibitors. Features wine tasting, activities, food trucks. Attendance periods from 11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. and 3-5:30 p.m. Website: <https://idahowines.org/event/savor-idaho/>

TUESDAY-FRIDAY JUNE 14-17

Agriculture Transportation Coalition Annual Meeting: Greater Tacoma Convention Center, 1500 Commerce St., Tacoma, Wash. The largest annual gathering of ag shippers sourcing and delivering to foreign markets. Sponsored by the Agriculture Transportation Coalition, the principal voice of agriculture in U.S. transportation policy. Website: <https://agtrans.org/events/>

FRIDAY-SATURDAY JUNE 17-18

PNWCTA Summer Meeting and Farm Tour: Chehalis and Mosyrock, Wash. The Summer Meeting and Farm Tour offers attendees the chance to meet and visit the farm operations of fellow growers. On

Friday of this two-day event attendees will have the opportunity to participate in educational sessions and enjoy dinner at Mistletoe Tree Farm. On Saturday growers will tour Skookum View Nobles, Bear Canyon Tree Farm and Hunter Christmas Trees. Field demonstrations and a catered lunch will be offered. Contact: 503-364-2942 Website: <https://bit.ly/3N57gGT>

FRIDAY-SUNDAY JUNE 17-19

Wenatchee River Bluegrass Festival: Chelan County Expo Center, 5700 Wescott Drive, Cashmere, Wash. The Annual Wenatchee River Bluegrass Festival features national award winners, Appalachian Roadshow; Po’ Ramblin’ Boys; Dave Adkins; Fast Track, and NW favorites Thunder Ridge and Rusty Hinges Bluegrass. Events also include Taylor’s Camp for Kids, Band Scramble and Slow Jam. Camping opens

Monday June 13. Call: 509 421-0494. Website: www.WenatcheeRiverBluegrass.com

SATURDAY-SUNDAY JUNE 18-19

Huckleberry Mountain Invitational Dog Trial: 11684 Huckleberry Loop, Baker City, Ore. One of the highest paying stand alone cow dog trials in the nation is happening near Sumpter, Ore. Handlers from all over the western U.S. will gather to show their dogs’ skills and compete for big money. Last year first place paid just under \$8,000. With \$6,000 added for 2022 and entry fees of \$500 per dog the competition will be steep. The abilities these dogs and handlers have will impress. Admission is free. Concessions will be on site. Bring a lawn chair as the trial is held on a real working ranch out in the pasture. No pets, please. Website: www.huckleberrymtn.com

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We want to publish corrections to set the record straight.

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com.

FRIDAY-SATURDAY JUNE 10-11

Lind Combine Demolition Derby: Starts at 6 p.m. Friday and 10:45 a.m. Saturday at the Lind, Wash., Arena. Join the fun for this year’s Combine Demolition Derby and truck races. Website: www.lind-combinederby.com

SATURDAY JUNE 11

Forest and Range Owners Field Day: 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Casa Becca del Norte Tree Farm, 2716 Moser Road, Chewelah, Wash. Washington State University Extension field day offers information specific to landowners’ needs. Cost: \$30-50. Contact: Sean Alexander, 509-680-0358, sean.alexander@wsu.edu