

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

More to worry about

BY CHRIS BRATT

Many people say there is a first time for everything. For me, this is the first time that I'm finally in tune with the majority of Americans on at least on one issue. A recent *New York Times*/CBS News poll found that most of us are unhappy with our country's direction. More than 81 percent of the people surveyed said they believe that "things have seriously gotten off on the wrong track." It seems to most of us that the promises of the past eight years have gone unfulfilled. This record-high public dissatisfaction has crossed all issues, and we now face serious repercussions, especially regarding the overall condition of our environment and, in particular, our natural resources.

In addition to the many crises our country is enmeshed in at home and abroad, we have plenty of bad news to be outraged about right here in the Applegate and throughout the northwest. Hopefully, there will be some relief to the present assaults on the environment and to public gloom when we elect a new administration later this year.

Perhaps issues like the multi-billion-dollar buyout of greedy Wall Street bankers, spending \$12 billion a month on the Iraq war, and a faltering economy will be sorted out by electing a less reckless group of congressional representatives.

A host of equally distressing problems associated with the environment probably will require a total reorganization of our federal land management agencies and their adoption of a more reassuring conservation ethic. It's surely time for these agencies to develop a new positive path with a solid recovery plan for our nation's and Mother Nature's resources.

Beyond these larger national challenges, many states and local communities still will be facing the aftermath of the more subtle limitations on their ability to protect our environment. New rules and regulations being put into force by the outgoing administration are reducing environmental protections, enforcement of our environmental laws and public participation opportunities. With little-noticed procedural and policy moves over several years, this administration has made it much more difficult for the public to influence decisions that would protect species, reduce unrealistic logging levels, restrict off-road vehicle use and affect a multitude of issues that impact communities.

During the past eight years the budgets of the U.S. Forest Service, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have been slashed. Drastically lower budgets have reduced each of these agencies' ability to do their jobs as custodians and caretakers of our public lands. The agencies also

have been under the political control and influence of people whose sole aim has been to shift policy priorities and exploit our public resources for the benefit of large corporate interests. Reduced budgets and political pressure to eliminate long-standing protections for fish and wildlife habitats have led these agencies to do less analysis of their actions and thereby raise the potential for causing harm to the environment. In many cases these policies have violated the law and built resentment and conflict in affected communities across the country.

A perfect example of the current administration's excessive influence over these agencies is BLM's recent ramped-up logging proposal for their Western Oregon Forest Plan Revision (WOPR).

New rules and regulations being put into force by the out-going administration are reducing environmental protections, enforcement of our environmental laws and public participation opportunities.

Thousands of people, including a coalition of hunting and fishing groups, environmental groups, newspaper editors, congressional representatives and other state and federal agencies, have criticized the WOPR for attempting to roll back the protections of BLM's existing forest plan.

More Worries

Recently a team of federal scientists created to advise the BLM concluded that the WOPR probably overestimates the habitat that will be left for fish and wildlife and underestimates the environmental impacts. The BLM and the Bush administration have exhibited no credibility on environmental issues, especially given that their flawed WOPR began as a result of an out-of-court "sweetheart deal" settlement with the timber industry.

Isn't it time our elected representatives, public land management agencies and the public find a way to foster a new conservation ethic—one that does not propose plan revisions or timber sales that are politically motivated and unrealistic in their environmental impacts? The science has become undeniable: environmental problems are having serious impacts on our public lands and communities. Let's hope we can elect a new administration that is not so willing to exploit our natural resources or disobey our environmental laws. That will give us a lot less to worry about.

If you think you have more to worry about than I do, let me know.

Chris Bratt • 541-846-6988

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