

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

No man’s land

BY CHRIS BRATT

One day, 25 years ago, I said something I thought would be humorous about our family owning more Applegate property than the deed to our land recognized. On that occasion, I was walking on our property with two of my young nephews whose mother is a person of native Latin-American origin. At one point on our walk, we came to an opening in the forest and could easily observe the demarcation line between our young forest trees and the old-growth trees on the public lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). After pointing out the joint property line, I casually stated that I owned all the BLM property, too, since it was public land and I was part of the public. At that time, neither of the young men commented on or questioned my jest, and I forgot the whole event.

A few years later when my nephews were grown men and visiting us again, they reminded me of the previous statements I had made about owning all the surrounding lands. But this time around, they didn’t remain silent and argued that neither I nor the BLM really had any valid rights to the lands we were each claiming.

Their belief was that there is no law of nature giving me or the BLM exclusive authority over these lands that would allow us to disregard any use or claims by all other people in the world. In addition, they reminded me that most of both North and South America’s landmasses were acquired under very questionable circumstances: some by direct expropriation of our first Americans’ lands, and the rest through conquest, wars, treaties or land purchases from other imposing nations. This forced land acquisition and the resulting inhumane

treatment (slavery) of native people by foreign invaders corrupted the more collective land-ownership and social systems already present in the Americas.

I empathize with my nephews’ feelings and agree in large part with their historic view of how other nations gained possession of the lands and resources in both North and South America. The settling of our own country is not a pretty picture either. Much of our past treatment of Native Americans or Africans is appalling. This is especially true regarding the conquest of Native American lands and installing individual land ownership by federal or state government decree along with the enslavement of large numbers of people from Africa. The individual property rights we glorify in America today were not meant for use by the original native peoples or slaves.

Presently, the system of land use and ownership we embrace in America continues to be dominated by a privileged class of wealthy politicians, individuals and corporations (which by law now are considered “persons”) that favor elevated individual property rights over other kinds of public or common land ownership rights. This private ownership of land and other resources is managed through a hodgepodge system of laws, practices, rules and orders. Federal, state

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and local government bodies have exclusive authority to make, interpret and apply the laws that decide who owns the land and who doesn’t. These laws are enforced by local police or the army to make sure they are obeyed.

The more traditional and Native American values that cherish nature, families, communities and a more collective ownership of the earth are rapidly being eroded even

further. We are not only trying to privatize more public land, but wealthy interests are exerting private control over our entire economy as well. Even in the midst of a floundering global economic system our “job creators” can’t imagine supporting any publicly owned enterprises. We seem to have no intention of changing our institutions to better equalize the distribution of our nation’s wealth and natural resources to make a good life for everyone. Our country would rather continue the narrow thinking and poor political, social and economic ideologies that have resulted in a series of tragic events.

Extensive bank failures and foreclosures on homeowners, faltering consumerism, low wages and lost jobs have put us and many other parts of the world into another deep recession. More and more people around the world are feeling the effects of this greedy economic system.

People are also concerned with a host of environmental problems like climate change, clean air and water and private ownership of the genes in our bodies, the seeds we plant for food and the ability to patent all forms of life, to name a few.

Many multinational corporations in our country are now richer and more powerful than other industrialized nations, yet about one half of the people in America are living below the poverty line. Still, our only answer to our nation’s and peoples’ problems is to continue on with the same economic fantasies that got us into this predicament.

Though there are no easy answers to all the problems and dilemmas we are facing, one logical solution is to change the present economic system into one that has more state-owned enterprises, especially on public land and resources. We have many good examples of public enterprise already working in America and they need to be expanded.

The first peoples living in our country had the good sense to recognize that human survival rested on being good stewards of the land and sharing the wealth that nature provided. It’s time for us to take up their philosophy in earnest and use our participatory democracy to make the necessary changes to secure a decent future for our children and country. Let’s create an economic system we can all believe in.

Let me know your ideas.

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Sap tap wrap

BY LAIRD FUNK

“We may know more about teenagers than we do these maple trees!” That quote from a British Columbia parent and bigleaf maple syrup maker may just sum up this season so far for “sapsuckers.” Just as the trees gave up sap like we thought they were supposed to, things changed. Instead of the reliable flows coming with only a freezing/thaw cycle, some trees kept flowing even when they weren’t “supposed” to during a rain. Some gave flow when it was “too cold” for it, and some kept flowing when it got “too warm.” But most importantly, we got enough sap to finish off about three quarts of syrup from the January cycle and, if February cooperates, we will likely double that by the season’s end.

Some Applegater readers may recall that the process here is a bit different from the classic picture we have in our heads of a covered bucket hanging from a spile to catch the sap dripping from it. These days most folks doing bigleaf maple syrup drill a hole as always, going about 2-1/2” into the trunk with a slight upward angle, but then instead of the cast metal spile they insert a molded plastic one shaped to attach a tube leading to a sealed collection jug. Tappers in this part of Oregon find that clean one-gallon milk jugs make handy containers requiring only a hole drilled in the lid to take the tube. Tappers on Vancouver Island need bigger containers because their flows can approach 19 liters per day per spile!

During the first run in the beginning of January, the trees, assisted by nine inches of rain in December and the preferable temperature range of 28 degrees for a low and 48 degrees for a high, gave flows in the range of 17 to 19 gallons per day total from 28 spiles for five days. Fortunately the flow slowed in time so I wasn’t overwhelmed by the required boiling off. This contrasts with last January when we had received much less rain and much less sap, often just a quart per day. The sugar level was nearly the same overall as last year, so we ended up with more syrup.

A tapper in Williams Valley had similar flows from his creekside grove, with many trees filling a gallon jug per day. Those with water at their feet did the best with those on higher ground giving less or none at all. This tapper experienced the other side of a successful harvest. When syrup is approaching the finish sugar levels, it is very easy to misjudge the syrup and suddenly you have charcoal instead of maple syrup! He was horrified to see the results: a charcoal black crust, along with the mineral precipitate from syrup making, covered the entire evaporator surface. It took muriatic acid to clean the stainless steel, but it cleaned up in time for the second short flow. But according to my friend and mentor Gary Backlund on Vancouver Island, you really aren’t a true “sapsucker” until you’ve burned at least one batch.

Last year the work of carrying sap through the forest in buckets got old fast so this year we tried using our tractor loader bucket to carry the collecting buckets, but found it a bit cumbersome in the woods. Then I tried using our lawn tractor with the mowing deck removed to tow a small trailer that I found one day driving back from town. I was driving along thinking I needed a lawn tractor-trailer to haul my collecting gear through the woods when, behold, there was one leaned up against a roadside tree with a “Free” sign on it! A couple inner tubes later and I was equipped! It is almost perfect and makes the hauling work much more pleasant.

I used propane again this year to power the evaporator on my outdoor kitchen range and was happy the price was 20% cheaper than last year. The figures for my first run are 55 gallons of sap into the evaporator and .55 gallons of syrup out using 10 gallons of propane. While there are various methods of estimating syrup production using sap volumes, the ratio here seems to hold at a 1% syrup return by volume of sap going in. That is less than the return from sugar maples, but it does



Sapsucker Laird Funk and his free lawn tractor collect gallon jugs of maple sap for boiling down to delicious homemade syrup.

give you great-tasting homemade syrup for your waffles, pancakes and other cooking uses that you can’t get anywhere else!

If you want to try your hand at tapping, you can get a spile and tube set for about \$1.89 from an outfit called mapleguys.com. I found out they can sell you supplies cheaper than I could so I recommend them. For guidance, I greatly recommend the book that Gary Backlund and his daughter Katherine wrote titled *Bigleaf Sugaring: Tapping the western maple*. It gives a thorough introduction to the craft and you can get one by emailing Gary at Bigleaf Maple (blmaple@telus.net). You can also, of course, call me for advice and encouragement.

Okay, all for now. Back to tapping!
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