MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Money doesn't grow on trees

BY CHRIS BRATT

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It's always a pleasant thing to receive a promise of money. But, many times promises of money don't materialize—as in the case of not cutting enough trees off public forestlands to help pay the bills for 18 of Oregon's counties. As most of us know, these 18 counties (including Jackson and Josephine) are suffering an ongoing budget shortfall in these difficult economic times nationwide.

These particular counties historically have received a large portion of their general operating revenues by sharing receipts from the sale of trees cut from public forestlands. The U.S. Forest Service contributes 25 percent of all monies generated from timber sales to these counties. These shared federal funds are dedicated to be used specifically for the benefit of public schools and roads in the counties where the national forests are located. In addition, by using a funding formula established in 1937, the counties have always received half the revenues from the sale of trees cut from Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands as well.

Due to unsustainable overcutting practices and other arguable reasons over the past four decades, timber volumes on public lands have declined dramatically. With fewer trees being sold and cut, counties are receiving less money from federal timber sales. This situation caused Congress to intervene in 1994 and the government began funding guarantees to make up for the lost money needed to pay the counties' bills. This level of federal funding made it possible to continue county services, including libraries, sheriff's office and human services.

This year a very serious funding problem has emerged. A fiscally conservative congress is no longer willing to appropriate funds to fill the gap in these counties' budgets. The lack of federal-guaranteed financial support has put the fate of both our counties and public forests at risk. Many of these folks in Congress think of this kind of guaranteed funding as just another "subsidy," an unnecessary item to drop from the federal budget.

Their plan is to legislate the privatization of our public forests, bringing back clear-cutting and other unsustainable practices of the past.

These politicians—along with the state, affected counties, and private timber interests—continue to believe that the only long-term solution to our counties' financing problems is to cut a lot more trees. They are recommending a radical change in federal forest-management policies. Their plan is to legislate the privatization of our public forests, bringing back clear-cutting and other unsustainable practices of the past.

In fact, there is a congressional committee considering a bill that would divide the BLM forestlands in western Oregon into a trust: half for logging (tree farms and clear-cutting), and half for preservation (with logging as well). This breakup (the BLM will be out of business) and division of our public forestlands will lead right back to the boom-and-bust economy Oregon experienced prior to funding guarantees. There is no assurance under this scenario that the counties can survive simply by cutting more trees. Neither is there any assurance that our public forests won't be severely degraded by the industry tree farm mentality. Cutting too many trees got us into this financial hole in the first place. Trying to cut, cut, cut again is the perfect definition of insanity.

My proposal for solving this problem: continue funding counties with a fair long-term (20 to 30 years) guaranteed funding formula, detached from cutting trees.

Here are a few good reasons for taking this approach:

- An often depressed and forever changing lumber market that relies on cutting trees is not stable or reliable enough to provide counties with a steady income source for financial planning and dependability.
- No property taxes are being paid to counties for the millions of acres of public forestland under federal management. Timber revenue sharing with the federal government was supposed to provide enough money to offset the loss of those taxes. It hasn't, and that promise has definitely been broken.

We have come too far in protecting our public forest environment to turn back the clock and give up the safeguards needed for clean air, pure water, healthy forests, vital public recreation, endangered species and a stable climate.

The future of our public forestlands is uncertain, but most people know money doesn't grow on trees. Let your elected representatives know in case they don't.

Chris Bratt • 541-846-6988

Applegate Valley Community Grange is almost a year old

BY JANIS MOHR-TIPTON

In June 2012, our first meeting produced a wonderfully diverse group of 37 community members committed to reopening the doors of the Upper Applegate Grange #839 and re-establishing it as a community organization. Now, in June 2013, at 41 members strong and growing, the group's accomplishments include electing officers, changing the name to Applegate Valley Community Grange (AVCG), getting involved in several community service projects, and hosting a very successful first Harvest Community Brunch and fund-raiser.

After looking at the repairs needed to make this 1950s-built Grange a vibrant hub for educating, serving, and supporting the community, we began focusing first on a major repair of the roof. It has provided shelter since it was built and been repaired by lots of volunteer Grange members in the past, but now needs reroofing to last for another few generations of community members.

To kick off our fund-raising efforts, members of the Grange are offering to the community a street fair in the country: "Raising the Roof…Almost Summer Faire" will be held from 11 am to 5 pm on Sunday, June 2, at 3901 Upper Applegate Road, almost four miles from Ruch. Parking will be provided across the road from the Grange building.

Come for great outdoor fun… meeting community friends…great local organic food…wonderful artisan wares… organic garden vegetable transplants, ready to plant…perennials, ready to plant…chair massage…face painting and children's activities…meeting local farmers, vintners, artisans, and local organizations…meeting AVCG members….and MORE!

Consider joining us at a Grange meeting and see the Grange at work. We meet the second Sunday of each month at 6 pm for potluck and lively conversation, followed by a business meeting at 7 pm. For more information, contact Paul Tipton or Janis Mohr-Tipton at 541-846-7501.

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