

OPINIONS

River Right: Pinball rapids

BY TOM CARSTENS

Kayaking on the Umpqua River near Steamboat can be challenging. The North Umpqua has a lot of fast-moving water smattered with big rocky obstacles that can ruin your day. This combination really gets the adrenalin going. There's one Class 4 rapid that's especially challenging. It's called "Pinball." With a name like that, you can imagine the number of big boulders that kayakers have to maneuver around in that swift current. Game-face time. Every time I see those rapids, I wish I had on full football pads.

Chuckling to myself, I couldn't help but think of Pinball Rapids when I saw Representative DeFazio at a recent news conference in Cave Junction. He was trying to explain a forestry bill that he and Representative Walden had just introduced in Congress. He was surrounded by a jostling mob of unhappy "trees." He looked like he could use a helmet and pads, too.

Trying to craft forestry legislation in these parts is not a game for sissies. It's got a lot of moving parts: timber production, industry jobs, wildlife habitat, soil and water quality, county timber receipts, and environmental law, to name just a few. The special interests that jostle legislators make Pinball look like a cakewalk.

I was on a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) field trip not too long ago with a bunch of industry reps, foresters, environmentalists, scientists, feds, and neighbors. We were looking over a BLM forest plot in the hills behind Cantrall-Buckley Park. The idea was to try a new thinning approach devised by a couple of forest ecologists, Drs. Franklin and Johnson of University of Washington and Oregon State University, respectively. They are testing an idea that might permit profitable logging without completely destroying the forest. (You've read about Pilots Joe and Thompson in recent issues of the *Applegater*.) Because the approach seemed to be okay with most of those special interests, many of us thought it might work.

A Southern Oregon University professor was eavesdropping on the discussions. I told him that each of us had a separate agenda. He asked me, "What's yours?" "Fire," I told him. I wanted those hills thinned. If we could do it in a way that met some of the other folks' objectives,

that was fine by me. But I want that fuel load reduced. We all live out here. We're not just getting tired of all that stinging, rasping summer smoke; we fear for our homes and property.

For the life of me, I can't figure out what good all this squabbling is doing. It sure isn't solving my fire problem! While we argue, our beautiful forests burn, valuable timber goes up in smoke, tax dollars are wasted fighting fires, the tourist industry stalls out in smoke, wildlife habitat is destroyed, the topsoil erodes, the streams silt up, our homes are threatened, our health suffers, and county timber payments zero out. Nobody wins. Hikers, bikers, kayakers, rafters, equestrians, anglers, hunters, campers and navel-gazers all take a hit. Some folks tell us that the "wilderness" is still there. But, boy, that smelly blackened mess just isn't the same, is it?

There's hope. Even though the refs have sent Walden and DeFazio to the lockers, Ron Wyden has been called in. As Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, he wields some political clout and is respected by just about everybody. He's trying to tie all this together and come up with a bill that's palatable. No doubt he, too, is getting banged on by the special interests lobbying for "management" of our public forests. But what does "manage" mean? Clear-cuts? Stewardship? Wilderness? Mechanical thinning? Industrial plantations? Understory clearing? Fire treatments? Old growth protection? Whatever it is, you can bet it's going to be a compromise or it'll never wash.

I'm hoping that Wyden will support the Franklin-Johnson approach to timber harvest. A couple of recent public timber sales have been successful when their ideas have been applied. So far, there have been no lawsuits. Imagine: industry makes a profit *and* that pesky owl has a home! Whatever. Let's at least reduce the wildfire risk and pull out some of those sticks.

It's complicated as hell—a lot like Pinball Rapids. We can make it through, even if it's not always clear how. I say we ditch the pads and try compromise for a change.

See you on the river.
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Wake up, southern Oregon!
The wolf is among us in the form of proposed public lands legislation

BY JACK SHIPLEY

The Oregon and California (O&C) Act of 1937 set aside approximately 2.4 million acres of federally owned lands in 18 western Oregon counties for their economic benefit. This act helped satisfy a post-war demand for wood fiber and helped build the American dream. At the same time, O&C receipts from timber harvests paid to the 18 O&C counties formed an essential part of county budgets, helping pay for many services. Declines in timber harvesting and federal payments have brought Oregon timber counties to the brink of insolvency and prompted several congressional proposals aimed at increasing harvests on O&C lands to bolster depressed county economies.

Some counties such as Jackson County were responsible and prepared for such an event by setting aside "Rainy Day Reserves." Josephine County, on the other hand, couldn't spend receipts fast enough! In the early 1970s Josephine County Commissioners were admonished to use O&C receipts *only* for capital improvements or "Rainy Day Reserves" because one day O&C revenues might dry up. When it was announced that O&C receipts would be decoupled from timber harvests, O&C receipts plummeted and commissioners were scrambling to cut expenses.

The O&C Act was both a blessing and a curse for many of these O&C counties. Josephine County had become reliant on federal support and they poorly managed those "easy come, easy go" timber receipts. Josephine County voters also became shortsighted and chose to rely solely on O&C receipts rather than diversify with much-needed alternative support. Josephine County currently has a \$0.57 per \$1,000 true cash value (TCV) in property tax support. The state's average property tax support for county government is \$3.15 per \$1,000 TCV.

I find it odd that many Josephine County residents have an independent "State of Jefferson" reputation for disliking government of any sort, but at the same time can't live without the much-coveted O&C bonanza.

We often hear how poverty stricken Josephine County is while our leaders are crying to "get the cut out" to reinvigorate county revenues. Why should we support Josephine County or any other O&C county with federal resources when the residents of these counties are not willing to support themselves for a reasonable portion of the expense?

In 2011, Jackson County ranked sixth, Douglas County eighth, and Josephine County ninth, which places them in the top 25% in total bank deposits statewide. But *residents* of Jackson County were ranked 12th, Douglas County ninth and Josephine County seventh in *per capita* bank deposits statewide. I find it unconscionable that our federal forest resources are being used to support my county when the majority of Josephine County voters have been consistently unwilling to support these necessary

county services by developing alternative revenues for a reasonable share of the pie.

I am concerned that our legislative leaders are willing to develop simplistic political solutions for very complex social and economic problems that are nested within complex forest ecosystems. The proposed division of O&C Lands into "sacrifice" and "save" categories overlaid with exemption from federal environmental protection is not an acceptable alternative for increasing county revenue or for supporting our local timber industry. I don't support any legislative fix that establishes a trust to hold and manage our publicly owned federal O&C forestlands.

We have successfully worked with the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to eliminate clear-cuts as their primary harvest practice on the unique dry forest within the Applegate watershed. I believe that our political leaders have the unrealistic expectation that our publicly owned O&C forest lands can be the "silver bullet" solution for all our county economic problems. I am not willing to sacrifice a portion of our public forest ecosystem because some of our counties are unwilling to diversify their revenue base. Our forests are dynamic, fire-adapted ecosystems that should be actively managed to keep them resilient and reasonably fire safe. We should be managing our forest resources in a way that both provides wood to our mills and also sustains the functioning biological systems.

I propose that, before any form of legislative fix is established to support our counties with O&C receipts from increased timber harvests, the proposal require a minimum base level of local taxpayer support to qualify for federal O&C timber receipts. I also propose that we recognize and monetize the ecosystem values such as clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat and recreation resources that are provided from our federal lands.

The Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council has requested, in our testimony to the current BLM Resource Management Plan, that the Applegate watershed be retained as an Adaptive Management Area as designated in the Northwest Forest Plan and used as a demonstration site for ecosystem-values accounting.

I would also encourage our legislators to take time to extend the "stewardship authority" to include BLM lands along with the USFS lands. This simple action would provide the agencies with a much-needed management tool and provide financial incentive to the O&C counties to support such work.

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