

OPINIONS

River Right: Hot air intensity

BY TOM CARSTENS

Oregon kayakers, like most boat operators, pay a small tax to the state to fund the Aquatic Invasive Species Program. Inspectors from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) periodically inspect watercraft to ensure they're free of invasive mussels. These foreign critters can wreak havoc in our waterways and are next to impossible to eradicate. From all appearances, this is a well-run program—with an understandable annual report, accountable finances, and neighborly enforcement. Paddlers cheerfully fund this effort to keep our rivers pristine. It's a good deal for all of us. Keep mussels out of the Applegate River!

When our governor announced last year that he was instructing the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to implement the so-called "Clean Fuels Program," it sounded to me like "Keep carbon out of Oregon air!" But he didn't want us to hear *that* message. He told us that this stealth gas tax would put \$1.6 billion in our pockets *and* create 29,000 jobs. Really?

This is a complicated law that is designed to reduce the "carbon intensity" in our fuels over ten years. "Carbon intensity" is a geeky way of describing the greenhouse gas effect of producing, transporting, storing, and using fossil fuels. This 2009 law is so complex that nobody has yet figured out how to implement it. And it's due to automatically sunset at the end of this year. The governor, calling it one of his top priorities (really?), has asked DEQ to write the rules and the legislature to keep it on the books.

So the bureaucrats at DEQ have hunkered down to find a way to force the petroleum industry to increase the ethanol and biodiesel mixes and, while they're at it, to subsidize the alternative energy industry with things like electric charging stations (and a whole bunch of other stuff). This is a double whammy: more ethanol will

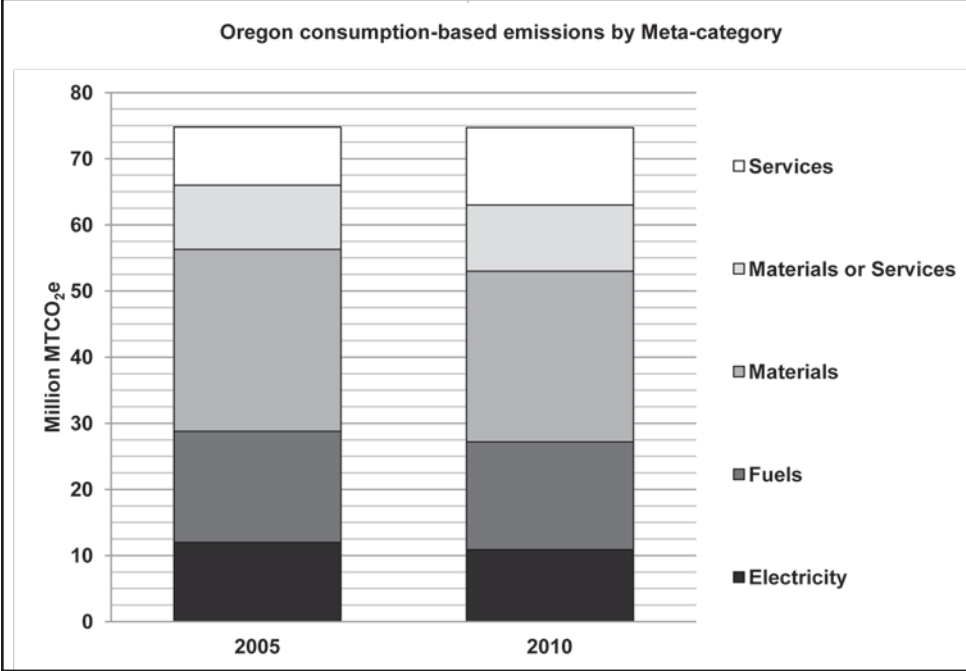
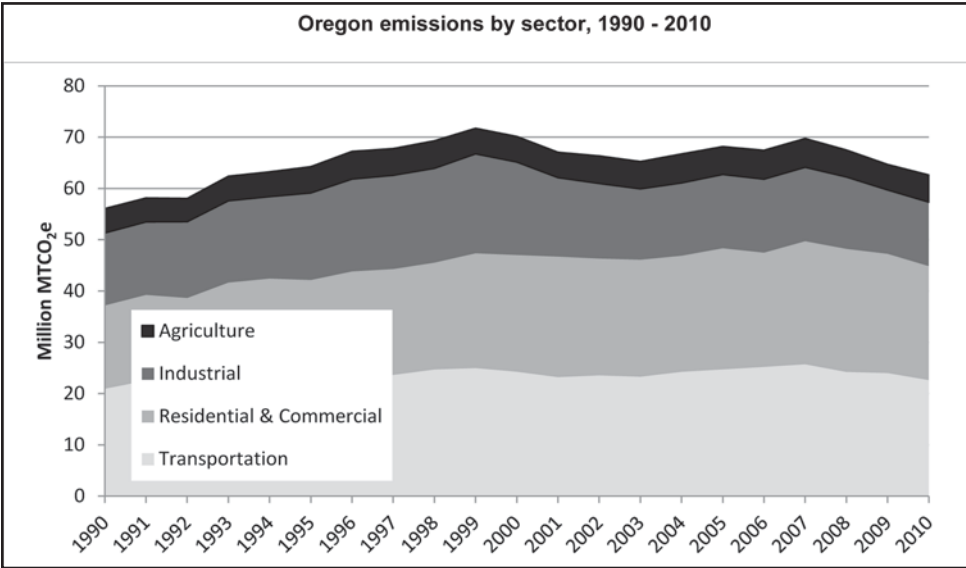
play havoc with our engines *and* the cost of gas is going to skyrocket. As the Portland Business Alliance politely stated, this will put Oregon businesses "at a competitive disadvantage." To say the least.

The editors of *The Oregonian* didn't mince words. They called it a "driving tax blowout" (November 6, 2014), "sucker bait," an "eco-friendly train wreck," and a "bogus global warming tax" (December 13, 2014). Consumers will "pay through the nose" (December 12, 2012). Even DEQ acknowledges that this will cost us big-time. They've put out a 170-page report that tries to explain it. Google up "1/25/2011 Oregon Low Carbon Fuel Standards." Set your snooze alarm.

What's the need for this law? According to DEQ's own report, the transportation sector contributes only about a third of Oregon's total carbon emissions; fossil fuels are responsible for less than a quarter of consumer emissions. Take a look at these two charts from the DEQ website. (If you want to read the whole report, Google up "2013 Oregon Greenhouse Gas Emissions.") Other than a quixotic pinprick at global warming, this tax will get us nowhere. We might be better off reducing the carbon intensity of another greenhouse gas, chemically known as "Salem Hot Air."

Now what we *do* need is a tax to fund repairs to our roads and bridges. Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) says they desperately need \$5.1 billion for this. Right now. The whacky carbon tax doesn't do anything to improve our highways. And Oregon gas pump taxes cover only about 20 percent of ODOT's spending on roads (Google up "Tax Foundation 1/17/2013 Report").

Why not take a look at increasing the tax we pay at the pump? And maybe index it to inflation, so we don't get so far behind again? Now *that's* a tax that's understandable, helpful, and paid for by



Above charts from the 2013 Oregon Greenhouse Gas Emissions report. http://www.oregon.gov/deq/AQ/Documents/OregonGHGInventory07_17_13FINAL.pdf

users. Let's leave global warming taxes to the United Nations. Or Finland. Whatever.

There are three types of taxes: (1) those that try to change your behavior—like tobacco taxes; (2) those that siphon your money to fund government—like property taxes, and (3) those that make no sense whatsoever, but make self-important, out-of-touch politicians feel good about themselves—like this law.

Here in the Applegate Valley we have four politicians representing us in Salem.

The two from Jackson County love the idea of foisting a global warming tax on us; the two from Josephine County are sensibly opposed. The legislature is now in session. Let them know how you feel about this. Let this sham tax sunset.

See you on the river. But don't forget to pay that invasive species tax. It doesn't cost much, and it's one we can all understand!

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Last chance for a stance

BY JESSE NOONE

Until recently, the Applegate Valley's location has left its wine industry in relative obscurity since vines were first planted for production in the early 1970s. Since the valley's approval as an American Viticultural Area (AVA) in 2000, the region is finally gaining recognition on a larger scale. Vineyard acreage has almost tripled, and the amount of small labels that have popped up is too much for the average consumer to keep up with. While this growth and recognition should continue to be supported, with it will come external competition for capitalization on the region's promise. Until recently, most plantings have been pretty contained, providing grapes for wineries that are family-owned and operated. As production continues to grow, there are still no regulations set in place. Without it, locals and those who've appreciated the pure beauty and grassroots mentality of the Applegate will cease to recognize what they've helped establish. Now more than ever, it's time for the community of the Applegate and the southern Oregon wine industry to come together and find resolution on how it wants its valley to be grown. Otherwise, those with interests in

capital gain will prevail.

One needs to look no further than the recent results of the 2014 *San Francisco Chronicle* wine competition for recognition of the quality of southern Oregon wines—the Rogue and Applegate Valley wines received a combined 48 awards. With wonderful festivals such as Uncorked and World of Wine, locals have appreciated wine for years; however, on a national stage, appreciation for the region's quality truly hasn't even begun. As the region's relevance continues to grow, it's important for it to do so in a way that cultivates sustainability and promotes local prosperity, both being mainstays of southern Oregon's identity.

Yet, examples of mass production have already begun. Driving along North Applegate Road in the heart of the valley, one is able to witness the first wave of plantings. Over 300 acres have been planted along the road, the majority of these vines being pinot noir. Although the valley is still somewhat in its experimentation phase as to which varietals grow best where (there are over 30 different varietals planted), it's becoming widely regarded that pinot noir is not best suited for quality in the region. Secondly, and more importantly,

much of what is being harvested is being sold in bulk to the Willamette Valley for production. Not only are these plantings providing little return for the valley outside of the individual investor; they aren't even representing the best of what the Applegate offers, thus lowering revenue for neighboring vineyards and diminishing the overall reputation and standard for quality.

Environmental impact aside, the visual representation of this mass production alone attests to how little relation these vineyards have on the established pulse and character of the valley. It's doubtful that many long-standing residents consider Napa Valley as something envious in terms of landscape. And anyone who has taken a weekend stroll through the outlets of Highway 238 will agree that nothing about the valley needs beautifying. Also, the jobs that these vineyards are supplying probably don't outweigh the impact that growth of this size has on both the environment and the industry. The vineyard simply devalues others around it. What seems to be the premise behind this growth—that of mass production for the purpose of capital gain—does not line up with the ideals ingrained in the region. Yet, without proper litigation sought out by community members to stem this inevitable growth, people with pockets full of money will prevail. There will undoubtedly be many

more investors looking to capitalize on the region's budding reputation.

There is nothing wrong with sustained growth. The wine industry is a healthy and vitalizing part of southern Oregon that should be supported in many ways. Yet, now is the time for the community to take a stance on how it wants its valley to be viewed as it enters into relevancy as a major player in the wine industry. The amount of quality labels popping up is astounding. Vineyards that are entering their prime (8 to 20 years old) are producing these wines for local vintners, vineyards that emphasize quality and sustainability first. These vineyards should be prioritized as representing our valley's identity, and statutes should be put in place to maintain this going forward.

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