

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door: BLM flies the coop!

BY CHRIS BRATT

This past April, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) cut loose its formal ties with our greater Applegate community and the US Forest Service (USFS). The actual notice of this divorce came to us in the form of BLM's newly "revised" forest Resource Management Plan (RMP). This new RMP is no simple revision of BLM's existing plan. It is a huge departure from their present RMP and the forest management protections, directions, and purposes mandated for both the USFS and the BLM in the region-wide Northwest Forest Plan. BLM's new RMP consists of four large telephone-book size volumes with a total of 2,008 pages weighing 14.6 pounds (see photo). It has generated approximately 4,500 comments from government agencies, organizations, tribes, and members of the public.

Despite its giant size and overwhelming, mind-boggling contents, these four volumes contain virtually nothing about BLM's rationale for going it alone in managing its public forestlands in the Applegate or northwest-wide. As partners for the past 20 years in sharing a set of specific goals developed collaboratively for managing these forests in the designated 500,000-acre Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA), BLM has left us with only this curt explanation: "BLM does not believe that a separate land use allocation is needed to support such collaborative processes. Nothing in the proposed



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RMP would preclude the continued collaborative process that has been developed associated with the Applegate Valley Adaptive Management Area."

I believe that without any specific formalized direction from the BLM in its new plan, our community will end up with no long-term AMA plan for the Applegate. Nor will there be a real public/interagency/collaborative process if BLM's participation in community planning is left solely to the discretion of BLM field area managers. In that case, the Applegate will no longer be the "intended prototype of how forest communities might be sustained" per the Northwest Forest Plan. Is this the end of working together to develop and test innovative forest management "approaches to integrate and achieve ecological and economic health and other social objectives"? I hope not.

Many residents considered that our active Applegate community and both federal agencies (BLM and USFS),

by working together, were capable of restoring forest health and protecting species while cutting a fair amount of timber. Good work was being accomplished through collaboration rather than the need for extensive revisions or litigation. In fact, many of our joint accomplishments were recognized nationally as the way to maintain and improve forest health and rural communities. The idea was to adapt and revise our forest management plans jointly as we gathered information about which actions worked for achieving a "desired future condition" for the land and community in the Applegate.

Even more disturbing in these new plans is the major shift back to cutting and selling a higher volume of timber (75 million board feet more). Virtual clear-cutting on thousands of acres is being proposed. The BLM is returning to its earlier interpretation of the Oregon and California Railroad Revested Lands Act of 1937 (O&C Act), the main law that

governs the BLM's management actions.

Throughout the RMP, the BLM claims that it "must provide a sustained yield of timber annually." The agency further asserts that "timber production is the primary or dominant use of O&C lands in western Oregon." This means that all other forest resources—unless protected by another law like the Endangered Species Act—could be harmed during logging operations. It appears that real multiple use and prudent forest management are fine with the agency, unless they interfere with cutting timber. These are unwarranted and specious mandates being proposed once again.

I believe the demands of the timber industry, Oregon's rural forested counties, and many conservative politicians have influenced and intimidated the BLM for too long. Even BLM's boss, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, calls for a "major course correction...because healthy intact ecosystems are fundamental to the health of our nation." It's the O&C Act that falls short and needs revision. And the BLM should stick to its self-proclaimed ongoing mission "to sustain the health and productivity of these public lands for everyone's use and enjoyment now and into the future."

How can you not agree? Please let me know.

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Science and truth—Part One

BY TOM ATZET, PHD

The opinion section of the *Applegater* has sometimes included several conflicting pieces relative to scientific research. In this two-part article, I would like to offer some ways for readers to sort out science and truth.

For about 30 years I provided federal agency managers in southern Oregon and the Applegate Watershed information for operational application and decision-making. This required digestion and critical reviews of numerous scientific publications to corroborate and validate various claims and conclusions. Information related to habitat, connectivity, macro and micro climate, timber productivity, growth and yield, fire frequency and effects, and successional processes was frequently requested. Conflicting and contradictory data and results were common.

Honesty in scientific publications is deteriorating (note the J.R. Duren article mentioned later in this article). Yet, we too often believe the written word, particularly in scientific publications, without applying vigorous critical thinking. It takes less effort to mindlessly accept and absorb what is presented. After all, the requisite formal reviews should have eliminated any bias or agenda. But that is not the case.

It is increasingly imperative that each of us be able to recognize when we are being presented with garbage.

The scientific method is an intellectual and systematic approach for testing what we think we know. It was designed and refined over the years as a process to uncover the truth and avoid unfounded reasoning. The scientific method can be generalized using five universal steps: (1) doing background research, (2) developing a hypothesis, (3) gathering data, (4) analyzing, and (5) presenting conclusions.

Published science is often touted as providing validity and truth, but does it really? Depending on the discipline, recent studies estimate that from 40 to 60 percent of published, peer-reviewed research is flawed; often reported conclusions are neither valid nor useful. The likelihood that every research publication provides truth and validity is not high.

In *Science News* in August 2015, award-winning journalist J.R. Duren reported on the "Reproducibility Project" that found "most published psychology research to be unreliable." Social and biological research, compared to physical and chemical research, i.e., "hard science," can be difficult to nail down. Definitions, behavior, and temporal and spatial variability are difficult to measure, define, and control. For example, how do you measure happiness? There is no consistent or commonly accepted protocol. Measuring

acidity or hardness, on the other hand, uses standard methodology. Repeated results are commonly expected. But keep in mind that significant co-occurrence or correlation does not necessarily imply causation. The number of storks nesting in Europe, for example, was often significantly correlated with the human birth rate. Although much has been written about the role of storks in delivering babies, even storks do not support such unreliable conclusions.

Regardless of the discipline, the best way to evaluate what you read, hear, or see is with a high degree of skepticism. Mark Twain often said, "There are lies, damn lies, and statistics." Yet statistics in science are expected to provide the basis for understanding our world.

Although experimental design, reporting results, analysis, and science are more complex, there are a few basic tools that can provide a strategy for skeptical evaluation. Five basic tools or concepts—(1) definition, (2) measurability, (3) population stratification, (4) dispersion, and (5) disclosure—can be used to sort out spurious conclusions. These tools will be discussed in the Fall 2016 issue of the *Applegater*.

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