

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door | Community face-off

BY CHRIS BRATT

Near the end of 2016, I attended two very long public hearings about the proposed expansion of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument east of Ashland, Oregon (Applegate's backyard). Both meetings attracted hundreds of people who listened to many speakers taking turns arguing for or against the proposed monument expansion.

Of course, I spoke in support of the monument's expansion (only two minutes were allowed for each person because so many people wanted to speak) along with many other monument supporters. We advocates for expansion believe that "The Cascade Siskiyou National Monument is an ecological wonder, with biological diversity unmatched in the Cascade Range...a biological crossroads...the interface of the Cascade, Klamath and Siskiyou Ecoregions in an area of unique geology, biology, climate and topography" (taken from the first words of the June 2000 proclamation establishing the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument by President Clinton).

The opposition, in voicing some of its main objections, cited a lack of public disclosure, findings, or implications of expanding the monument. In addition,

some opponents claimed that the president lacks authority under the 1906 Antiquities Act to include Oregon and California Lands Act (1937) forestlands in any monument designation. All three Jackson County commissioners, who, prior to the hearings, had already gone on record opposing the expansion, suggested that Jackson County was not included in the planning process. As anyone can imagine, these were large, controversial hearings where many strong, diverse opinions were expressed from both sides of the expansion issue.

Ordinarily, I welcome differences of opinion on how our public lands and monuments should be managed. But these two public hearings had a different tenor. I was struck by how many of the opponents had such outspoken fear, anger, and distrust of the expansion supporters and processes. These voices of resentment were aimed at stopping a legal planning process and the president's power to expand our local landmark national monument.

Many speakers in opposition of the expansion called it a backroom deal to "lock up" these public lands. There were strong innuendos expressed that portrayed supporters as land-grabbing

special-interest groups that are not well represented by the people living in southern Oregon.

Nor were there any kind words for the Bureau of Land Management (which is managing the monument), the two US senators from Oregon, or the City Councils of Ashland and Talent because of their support of the monument expansion. Ironically, I heard only one person use unfriendly words about the outstanding ecological and other non-commodity values present in the monument. Though the monument area does have unmatched biodiversity and wildlife habitat worth protecting, the opposition couldn't find one redeeming factor in all its allegations.

Well, despite all the accusations and deceptive railing against the expansion by opponents, a larger monument has become a reality. In January 2017, President Obama used his power under the federal Antiquities Act to approve a more limited expansion—47,624 acres rather than 66,500 acres. (See expansion map on page 20.)

But my guess is that all of the opposition's misleading language that was expressed at these hearings will continue in other public land debates across

the West and the nation. Also, the deceptive rationale being used by opponents that contends that we who support protecting public lands and monument-worthy areas are "locking up" these lands is just plain nonsense. How can an area be locked up if all visitors are free to enter and enjoy the conservation and recreational designations? How can an area be locked up if locals can continue to use the area for grazing their cattle or other granted entitlements? In reality, it has been the timber, mining, and ranching industries that have kept much of our public land locked up for decades.

Many local environmentalists will always be working to promote protection for ecologically integrated lands like this monument. Perhaps better choices could be made if we could bring multiple perspectives to find solutions to the expanding cultural challenges. It's not too soon for our dissident communities to talk about cooperation and common cause on issues instead of continued resistance to seeking new opportunities for agreement.

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Industrial cannabis production is not good for the Applegate

BY TAYLOR STARR

I have called the Applegate Valley home for the past 15 years. In that time, I have come to love its clean water, dark night skies, bountiful farmlands, and rural charm. I love its people and the spirit of care and community that makes it a safe and supportive place to live, work, and raise a family. And yet many of the things that many of us love about this unique place are at risk.

It would be difficult not to notice the changes that are currently impacting our valley. With the legalization of commercial cannabis production in 2014 and the influx of industrial grows, there have been many accompanying negative impacts. These grows are largely bankrolled by out-of-state corporations and implemented with little regard for neighbors, streams, or wildlife. The construction of giant greenhouses on gravel pads degrades our best agricultural land while raising its price astronomically due to the influx of corporate cash. If we turn our best farmland into fields of gravel unaffordable to most inhabitants, how will we provide for our community's food security and maintain our agricultural way of life?

The impacts don't stop there, however. These giant greenhouses are heated, lighted, and cooled with massive amounts of electricity, mimicking the sun and wind while producing bright lights, constant noise, and pollution. At a recent Williams Town Council meeting, neighbors of an industrial grow with 14 greenhouses eloquently

described the obliteration of peace and quiet that they had enjoyed for decades in their rural residential neighborhood. Their description of industrial fans just feet from their property line emitting deafening noise 24 hours a day for months on end was heartrending. Industrial or poorly managed outdoor grows can also be extremely detrimental to adjacent rivers and streams through runoff and erosion. Growers also use an array of harmful chemicals to combat molds, mites, and pests, leading to chemical contamination of both the environment and the final product. At the same time, the traffic created by large crews of workers contributes to the growing level of unsafe conditions on our small rural roads.

The irony is that folks have been organically growing cannabis here for decades on a small scale with minimal impact to neighbors or the environment. Indoor, energy-intensive, noise-and-light creating industrial activity is not appropriate for the Applegate. It does not rely on our climate or soils for its success. In fact, it would be more appropriate for an industrial-zoned site in Medford or White City, close to distribution channels, labor, and power.

Cannabis is a naturally resilient and productive plant that thrives in our climate; why not grow it outdoors on family-scale farms with organic practices and minimal impacts? The Applegate could be a model of sustainable cannabis production with a profitable, marketable,

and community-friendly industry, or we could become an overcrowded, greed-driven, and polluted place that barely resembles the home we love.

These industrial grows will continue to proliferate if citizens don't take a stand and reject them. We are not powerless to watch our valley's rural character be irrevocably changed. County government is working on regulations for cannabis that address light, noise, pollution, traffic, and other impacts. If you are concerned by the developments in your neighborhood, come to a town or county meeting and express your support for sensible standards. Write a letter to the editor, and organize with your neighbors to express your concerns. If you are a landowner, consider a conservation easement or restrictive covenant on your property to protect

it from future degradation. If you are a consumer, educate your friends and dispensary about the benefits of outdoor organic cannabis for the environment and your health. And if you are a grower, inform yourself about best practices for cannabis production that mitigate impacts, and then act in good faith to grow conscientiously.

The Applegate has experienced many changes over the years, and yet its rural character has persevered. It has remained a place defined not just by its beauty, peace, and quiet, but also by its caring community of folks looking out for each other in times good and bad. Unless we come together now as a community to define how we want to protect this character, it may be lost.

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