

OPINIONS

River Right | Yukon musings

BY TOM CARSTENS

"I love Nature, I just don't want to get any of it on me."
—Woody Allen

Sometimes it's good to get away. It's summer, and I find myself deep in the far north Yukon Territory. My wife and I are on a long camping trip by way of the Alaska-Canada (Alcan) Highway. We're on our way to Alaska to see friends and do some canoeing north of the Arctic Circle.

The Alcan was quite a project. Right after Pearl Harbor, the 1,522-mile road was surveyed, engineered, and constructed through harsh wilderness in a little over eight months. President Roosevelt wanted to ensure that we had a military supply line to Alaska in case it was attacked—which, of course, it was, in 1942. After the army engineers dug out the road, a highway corps was hired to clean up the muck so larger civilian trucks could also make the journey.

Roads are a big deal up here. There seem to be only two professions in the Yukon: road grading and tire repair. I'm not sure if they're related.

**Alcan Highway Project
1942 Recruitment Ad**

This is No Picnic

Working and living conditions on this job are as difficult as those encountered on any construction job ever done in the United States or foreign territory. Men hired for this job will be required to work and live under the most extreme conditions imaginable. Temperatures will range from 90 degrees above zero to 70 degrees below zero. Men will have to fight swamps, rivers, ice, and cold. Mosquitoes, flies, and gnats will not only be annoying but will cause bodily harm. If you are not prepared to work under these and similar conditions,

Do Not Apply.

Our own roads will soon be doing better: the Oregon legislature has at long last passed a transportation bill. Fortunately, our climate is a bit milder than the Yukon's so the work won't be quite as challenging for our road crews. And I'll bet they'll get more than eight months to finish up.

The Alcan is a lonely highway. There just aren't many people here. We picked up a tourist brochure that states: "In the Yukon, you'll find 48,000 square kilometers and

20 communities." Twenty. Wow. The folks we do run into are friendly and relaxed outdoorsy people.

This got me thinking about why the Applegate is such a pleasant community. We also live in a peaceful, outdoorsy, rural setting with light traffic, gorgeous scenery, abundant wildlife, and fresh, fir-scented air. Aside from a few clashes with government, not much jaw-clenching goes on here. It's kind of like the Yukon—without the three-hour drive to the grocery store. How lucky we are.

Recent science research demonstrates how nature quantifiably improves our cognitive function and nourishes our brains. If you'd like to read more about this phenomenon, Florence Williams has written an interesting book, *The Nature Fix*. Evolution, it seems, has yet to take us very far from the savannah. If your brain could use some soothing, here are some easy Applegate options. They're better than a martini!

- Turn right 100 feet past mile marker 4 on Sterling Creek Road and take a stroll along the new East Applegate Ridge Trail. This spring, Applegate volunteers carved



Tom Carstens

this path along the bluff next to Woodrat Mountain. It's a nice level stroll with a lovely view of our valley above Ruch. The trail is 5.6 miles long, but feel free to turn around at any point. I promise you'll feel rejuvenated and inspired!

- For really accessible nature, visit our two community river parks: Cantrall Buckley on Highway 238 near Ruch, and Fish Hatchery at 1980 Weatherbee Drive in Grants Pass. In the fall, you can even watch salmon spawn and bald eagles dine. It's good for the spirit, and you don't need to travel all the way to the Yukon River.

Speaking of the Yukon, I paddled for ten days on this river 16 years ago. It was a nice, brain-massaging trip. This June, I watched several hundred canoeists and kayakers launch from Whitehorse on the "Yukon River Quest," a 420-mile journey to Dawson City. In the land of the midnight sun, they paddle for almost three days and nights. Most are hallucinating toward the end. I'm not sure the brain appreciates this kind of torture.

See you on the river.

Tom Carstens • 541-846-1025

**Douglas fir loss:
Harbinger of an Applegate future?**

BY ALAN JOURNET

The yellow and orange leaves of late summer tell us the seasons are changing. But trees turning these shades in May and June deliver a different message.

Before this summer we already had half a dozen dead Douglas firs in need of removal on our 20-acre patch of forest in the Applegate. But by the time we added this summer's orange firs, the number reached double figures. The upside is that we have plenty of wood for our winter fires. The downside is that these dead and dying trees are a harbinger of worse to come.

As co-facilitator of Southern Oregon Climate Action Now, I spend much of my time informing southern Oregonians about climate science. I urge them to take individual and collective action to reduce our emissions of the pollution causing climate change and to prepare for the changes in our region and our lives that climate change inevitably will bring.

But now, the problem is more direct and personal. Now the climate weirding is killing the trees on our small plot in the paradise of the Applegate Valley.

Since relocating to the Applegate, I have spent time exploring the natural history of the area. Coming from southeast Missouri, I was aware that many North American forests are much younger than many locals think. In southern Missouri, for example, the oak-hickory forests of the Ozarks moved into the region from more southerly Ice Age refuges some 12 to 15 thousand years ago, about the same time as or shortly after the Native Americans arrived. Those forests have never existed without human management, most notably the use of fire to maintain vast expanses of open forest habitat for deer and elk.

I was intrigued, though unsurprised, to learn that a similar history applies to southern Oregon. The evidence suggests

that our forests, particularly the Douglas fir component, are equally recent. Indeed, the Douglas firs probably arrived from southerly west coast Ice Age refuges after the Native Americans arrived and so, like the forests of Missouri, have been subjected to human management since their arrival.

The evidence also suggests that Douglas firs have expanded their range since the immensely successful, yet potentially disastrous, fire suppression campaigns—including Smokey Bear—developed in the last century, which allowed Douglas fir to invade our oak-pine chaparral.

Now, we find that climate changes induced by global warming are redressing the imbalance that fire suppression imposed. Climatic conditions are becoming less favorable to Douglas fir. The result is what we are experiencing on our 20 acres of paradise: premature Douglas fir death.

No doubt we are not alone. Anyone in the Applegate Valley who is experiencing Douglas fir dieback is also experiencing the impact of climate change.

While Douglas fir seems generally the most profoundly affected by this climatic trend, other conifers are also susceptible. Among the *least* susceptible so far are

ponderosa pines since these conifers are adapted to dryer conditions.

But read on.

Before complacency sets in, it is worth noting that studies initiated by Gerald Rehfeld at the Pacific Northwest Forest Research Station in Idaho (available at charcoal.cnre.vt.edu/climate/species) suggest that future climatic conditions will severely compromise many of the forest species that Applegate Valley residents cherish. Even the ponderosa pine and our drought-tolerant chaparral species will not be immune.

If we fail to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions driving these climatic trends, there's no telling what our forests will look like by the end of the century.

Those of us in the Applegate Valley who make our living off local agriculture and forestry, or who simply enjoy the natural environment that surrounds us, would be well advised to learn about the threats that the changing climate promises.

We should also encourage state and federal action to address the root cause lest our livelihood evaporate.

Alan Journet

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BY KATHY CONWAY

We've all made footprints in the sand or snow or mud, and we've seen them quickly washed or blown away. But our carbon (climate pollution) footprint doesn't disappear so quickly. It impacts the climate and our weather. We can no longer claim nobody does anything about the weather. Wittingly or unwittingly, we are now all doing something about it.

Of course, climate and weather aren't the same thing. The day-to-day local temperature and precipitation patterns we know as weather are quite variable. But the long-term pattern in conditions that we call climate is exhibiting an alarming trend that could bring great disruption to our lives—even here in the Applegate. The trend is largely a result of the footprints of climate pollution we are all creating in our day-to-day living.

For area residents interested in learning about their carbon footprint and about global and local climate trends, their causes, and what we can do to address them, Southern Oregon Climate Action Now has developed a Master Climate Protector (MCP) course. This course is similar to the locally popular and successful Master Recycler and Master Gardener programs.

This course was successfully piloted in spring 2017. The first MCP public offering will start on Monday, September 11. It will meet for ten weeks from 6 to 9 pm at the New Community Center at 104 East Main Street (just behind City Hall) in Talent, Oregon. The \$100 registration fee covers the venue, refreshments, course, and reference materials. Scholarships to help defray registration costs are available.

The course will cover such topics as:

- Current climate change issues at the global, national, state, and regional levels
- The influence of our carbon footprint
- The role of population growth and energy use
- The effects of climate trends on weather patterns and storm frequency and severity
- The effect of climate change on human health, our fragile natural systems, our water resources, our agriculture, and our forestry.

Master Climate Protector course participants will learn how to share climate change information clearly with others and receive support for implementing a service project of their choice.

For more information, visit socanmcp.eco or contact Eric Dittmer at eric@socan.eco or 541-941-1572.

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