

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door

Worlds apart in protecting the environment

BY CHRIS BRATT



Chris Bratt

For me, 2017 was filled with heartache because of the rollbacks of many environmental programs and safeguards throughout our community and our country. The ongoing debate over how we continue to use the environment has become very polarized. Some people favor increasing environmental protections while others favor rampant development of our natural resources. Many groundless executive orders and policies (some unprecedented) are now being implemented by Trump administration appointees. These new rules block, delay, or weaken many federal laws and agency responsibilities that have been in place for years to protect America's priceless and irreplaceable resources.

Our present Congress and administration are refusing to acknowledge and deal with a whole host of local and worldwide environmental concerns. Instead, federal agency heads are determined to lease and develop every public acre of land they can. Here are some examples of high-handed positions and attacks being made on our environment by Trump administrators Scott Pruitt, from the Environmental Protection Agency, and Ryan Zinke, Secretary of the Interior.

Pruitt has proposed eliminating 50 programs to protect watersheds like the Applegate, pushed to repeal America's Clean Power Plan, proposed steep budget cuts to programs that promote clean air and water and fund toxic waste cleanup, and encouraged the withdrawal of the US from the Paris climate accords (the only country to reject this global agreement). He has shown no interest in protecting the environment while pushing along a series of actions that side with industry over public health.

Zinke has eagerly stated, "For too long America has been held back by burdensome regulations on our energy industry." He has overturned a moratorium on new leases for coal mines on public land and signed a land-trade agreement that could lead to construction of a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. He has called for shrinking our local Cascade Siskiyou National Monument while proposing more grazing, motorized vehicle use, and timber cutting in the monument.

Zinke also stated that 30 percent of the 70,000 Department of the Interior employees were not "loyal to the flag." Zinke's contempt for public employees

has left local Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials in a position where they can't commit to collaboration with Applegate community members or groups as they have done in the past.

Personally, I find all of the above actions extremely shortsighted and offensive. They represent a total disregard for the health and welfare of our local and global communities, future generations of mankind and other species, and the planet's ecological and environmental functions. It seems that the top guns in the present administration are focused on exploiting our natural resources strictly for their dollar value for the purpose of further enriching wealthy individuals and corporations.

It's pretty obvious where I stand on the issue of continuing unsustainable logging and its threat to our Applegate community, ecosystem, and natural heritage. But I'm not alone. There are millions of people in our country who disagree with stripping away our environmental protections. Like me, they want our politicians and federal agencies to do the right thing by stopping the damage to our last untarnished regions. They want our public resources managed in the public interest rather than in the private interest.

It's heartwarming to see large numbers of scientists showing some leadership on these local and global environmental issues. In November 2017, 15,364 scientists from 184 countries endorsed a document that concluded that urgent measures are required to avert worldwide environmental disaster. They called on the scientific community, media, and ordinary citizens (that's us) to pressure their government to "take immediate action as a moral imperative to current and future generations of human and other life."

Lead author, William J. Ripple, a distinguished professor of ecology at Oregon State University, and seven co-authors wrote the manuscript titled, "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity: A Second Notice," which declared that "A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required." Given that 66 percent of our Applegate watershed is public land (323,677 acres), it goes without saying that our community needs to take a big part in that required "great change in our stewardship."

If you want to join forces to take immediate action to protect our local environment, let me know.

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When government talks

BY TOM CARSTENS

They say you can't go back. My wife and I tried to do this in January when we revisited Panama, a country we lived in in the early 1990s. Of course, some things have changed: Noriega is long gone, Panama City is taller (even boasting a Trump Tower!), the middle class has expanded (traffic jams), many of our old jungle hikes have turned into tourist meccas, the military bases in the canal zone have been repurposed for commerce, and the canal itself has been straightened, widened, deepened, and expanded to permit larger ships (crossings now cost between \$400,000 and \$800,000!).

But these are superficial changes, really. The Panamanians are still the friendly, lovely people we remembered, the "pana-second" is still a useful measure of time (that's the time between when a light changes to green and when the honking

begins), the wildlife is still amazing, and sea bass ("corvina") is still prepared in a delectable Panamanian way.

One thing *has* changed fundamentally, and it shocked us. Driving through the central highlands, we noticed that many of the upper reaches of the mountains were absolutely barren. In a country that receives as much rainfall as Panama, this is just not natural. Cloud forests are the lifeblood of Central America: they check water runoff, freshen the air, are home to some of the most spectacular birds on earth, and serve economies through ecotourism. What had happened?

It turns out that the government had sold off much of these forestlands to ranchers and farmers. They did it without consulting the locals—who are miffed. There's no recourse, and they are still ignored by their government. Fortunately,



Photo, above: Panamanian mountaintop that's been cleared for ranching. Note the erosion.

Photo, right: A Panamanian cloud forest as it is supposed to look. Photos: Tom Carstens.

after seeing the disaster unfold, the government has finally stopped the sales.

It's an old tale: governments never have enough money and the sale of public lands offers a quick and easy revenue source, however fleeting. Here in Oregon, we had our own close call with Elliot State Forest. And some in the federal government are now clamoring to sell off Applegate Valley tracts managed by the US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

But we do have a distinction—our government *does* attempt to have a conversation with us. At all levels, officials meet with us to learn our concerns. All major actions must first be reviewed through a public comment process. We might not agree on the outcomes, but we

are given the chance to be heard. That's why I was heartened by the visit of the secretary of the interior to talk with us about the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. And it was especially encouraging to see the recent efforts by our local BLM field office to understand Applegaters' perspectives, as divergent as they seem to be. (See BLM manager Kristi Mastrofini's article on page 6.)

So, it ain't perfect, but our public officials do us all a favor by continuing to dialogue with the lowly citizenry. It shows in our public lands, believe it or not.

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