

A Mountain Meadow

Cowboys ride herd on the Western landscape.

At first glance, Scad Valley looks idyllic. A high mountain meadow of lush green, autumn-yellowing grasses nestled at the base of rough, dry slopes. A narrow, glinting creek snaking through it. But I was pretty sure of what I would find as I looked closer. After all, it's a national forest valley in which a rancher is asking to convert his sheep operation to sheep and cattle. His sheep have been grazing the slopes for decades; his valley bottom-loving cattle only the past four years, on a trial basis.



Last year I had briefly stopped further upstream in this valley, and had taken a few photographs of the impending breakdown of this meadow system if the request to convert to cows is granted. I had found the soil between the meadow grasses bare, pounded and lumpy. The stream banks raw and broken by cow hooves. New channels being cut by cows into the meadow, draining it of its sponge-like dampness.

But this time, a mile further down in the center of the valley, I was amazed. The creek banks were intact, with grasses overhanging the narrow channel. No cow dung. No bare areas. A small, rare cutthroat trout zipping through the creek. I couldn't figure it out.

As I walked back to the road, a Forest Service enforcement officer stopped his ATV, curious as to what I was doing with my camera and clipboard. I told him I was looking at the condition of the meadow. "Oh, that's the Mont Lewis Research Natural Area," he said, pointing out its boundary. That explained it. It's one of the very few, tiny spots designated off-limits to livestock on the forest.

This was turning out to be quite the day. Earlier, just up the road, I had parked near the cow-and-sheep camp to examine aspen. Nineteen-year-old Jess, the cowboy son of the man wanting to get the cow permit, had ridden up on his horse. He was also curious as to what I was doing. We had ended up talking most of an hour. Among Jess' comforting perspectives are that cows don't eat aspen (they do; and aspen, like cutthroat trout, are disappearing from our West); that he's taking care of the land (his cows are destroying one of the last intact streams in the watershed); that humans aren't animals because we are made in the image of God (which makes empathy for cutthroat trout less bothersome); and anyway, our 6,000-year-old Earth may suddenly be destroyed, with Christians lifted up elsewhere.

But Jess didn't just talk. He asked questions, because, as he nervously put it, he had never "talked to an environmentalist" before. He wanted to know if my job is to harass livestock ranchers. Am I a Christian? Do I believe in evolution? Would I shoot a bear if it was about to kill me? Do I think people shouldn't have babies? It was a quiet, calm conversation, and when I left, we shook hands.

The next day I was back, taking measurements of the creek inside the Research Natural Area, and above, where the cows run. Jess rode up on his horse, with his four sheep dogs, wanting to talk some more.

"Do you think the creek looks pretty good?" he asked. I showed him an example of how his cows are breaking down the stream banks. He told me how he manages to keep track of 140 cows and 630 sheep. I explained why I think grazing, like mining, shouldn't happen in all potential places. He told me of his family's difficulties finding winter range for their sheep and summer range for their cows.

He asked if I have power to prevent the addition of cattle to his family's permit. I said that as part of the livestock industry, he has a lot more power with the Forest Service than a person like me. He asked how legal appeals work, what I would do if he did get the cattle permit. We talked about his dogs, his plans that night to see his brother, home from two years at a Christian camp back East.

"It makes me sad that I might not get to make my living here," he said as I packed up my gear.

"Well, Jess," I responded, "I've been looking at habitat for sage grouse most of this summer, and sometimes before going to sleep I cried, realizing how our cattle and mining are making it so hard for the sage grouse to still live at all. So I guess we both have sadness, yes?"

Jess allowed that we do, and we parted gently for the second time. As I left the valley, I looked back. It looked idyllic, as landscapes often do.

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler

beep
beep

You have one
unheard message.

To hear the first
unheard message
continue to listen...

To "listen" press
the phone against
your ear and focus
your attention to
the sounds coming
from the earpiece.

The sounds are words.
The words accumulate
to make sentences.
The sentences
convey meaning.

To understand the
message, concentrate
on the meaning.

For more
instructions please
continue to listen...

When you're done
listening hang-up by the
method best described by
the needs of your
particular phone.

To hear these instructions
again please stay on the line.

FOR INFO ON THE TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN OPERA: WWW.TMCM.COM/OPERA

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CARING FOR THE LAND?

It was inspiring to hear of the volunteer group NEST and their success at finding red tree vole nests — voles being the main food source for the threatened spotted owl — in the Trapper logging sale in the McKenzie River watershed, Eugene's source of drinking water.

Despite having already sold Trapper — to Eugene's own Aaron Jones' Seneca-Jones Lumber — the Forest Service is required to "take a serious look at credible new info." Not only should these substantial findings of nests be taken into account, but the fact that the FS surveys found zero nests where volunteers have found 30 suggests the FS surveys to be grossly inadequate. On these grounds alone, the Trapper sale should be canceled and the entire process of FS surveying should be subjected to intense scrutiny.

So far as logging to "mimic fire to help researchers better understand the role of fire in forests," here's an idea: How about the FS visit any of a number of recent burns throughout Oregon's forests to collect their "data." Seriously, is anybody fooled by the claim to log in our remaining 5 percent of native forests for "research purposes"? Legitimate fire research would include leaving the burned organic matter in the forest for soil enrichment and would *not* have a profit motive.

I don't think I'm alone in saying that it's time the Forest Service start taking its slogan "Caring for the Land and Serving People" seriously.

Johnny VanHerwaarden
Eugene

BREAKING RANKS

Rep. Peter DeFazio told us at his Aug. 21 town meetings that he will continue to vote for Iraq War supplemental funding bills, wasting enormous amounts of our money to support murder.

Several of us were there to tell him that his votes are unacceptable, but DeFazio wasn't listening. He wanted to tell us "how Congress works." Congress clearly is not working, and neither is he. Twenty years in Congress have

made DeFazio as arrogant as Joe Lieberman.

I've never voted for a Republican in my life, but in November I'll be voting for DeFazio's opponent, whoever that is, as the only way to send a message.

Lynn Porter
Eugene

TORREY'S ETHICS

OK, please correct me if I'm wrong, but when Jim Torrey was mayor of Eugene, didn't he and his rich buddies buy a bunch of land out on West 11th Avenue? Then didn't they use their positions in city government to lure Hyundai/Hynix to Eugene with huge corporate subsidies? And then didn't they resell this suddenly valuable land for insane amounts of profit?

Am I the only person who sees this as a total abuse of power? Am I the only one who views this as an incredible violation of ethics?

Or did this just "not happen" the way that G.W. Bush "never lied"?

James Peplinski
Eugene

EDITOR'S NOTE: As we recall, Torrey's apparent conflict of interest was investigated in this case, but technically he was not in violation since he was not the only party to profit from this development. Oregon's ethics rules are among the weakest in the nation.

A-BOMB: LOWER CASUALTIES

Nate Krusi (8/17) fails to appreciate the truth in Jerry Ritter's (8/10) letter. War and atrocities don't take place in a vacuum. Memory is of value to establish why we fight.

In 1945, America was feeling less than charitable toward Japan: Death tallies in Korea and China approached 20 million; rape of Nanking; Bataan death march; inhumane treatment of POWs; prostitution of thousands of women for "comfort." If you invade, abduct and kill your neighbor, you can expect a disproportionate response.

A disproportionate response could have been all-out invasion of Japan. Based on what occurred in Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the result would be huge casualties.

A disproportionate response could have