

Refuge

Part I: Where Land and Water Meet

When we went to Malheur Wildlife Refuge in southeastern Oregon for spring break this year, it was the first time in 20 years. The times before, our two boys were with us; now they have migrated elsewhere. Twenty years ago, a marsh hosted a deafening predawn chorus of birds three minutes from the field station trailers. This year the marsh was eerily dry and silent.



Some things were the same. Sage grouse males strutted and made popping sounds with their chest sacs in the cold, predawn dark at the very same spot in sagebrush. Sandhill cranes, those tall, 2.5 million-year-old birds with 7-foot wing spans, uttered their ancient-sounding call as they strode in slow motion across fields. Trumpeter swans were gliding on narrow streams, and jackrabbits still bounded on long legs. The ducks and geese were still sufficiently big and brightly-colored for even new or rusty birders like us to identify. Refuge staff were still fiddling with the water machinery and dikes. Cattle were still grazing the lands around the refuge.

And the small refuge visitor center was still there, offering maps and advice to visitors. But this year a newish book was on display: *Where Land and Water Meet: a Western Landscape Transformed* by Nancy Langston. I recognized the historian's name — years ago I had read with fascination her book *Forest Dreams, Forest Nightmares*, about the manner in which early settlers, loggers, herders and the Forest Service perceived, used and tried to control the Blue Mountains in northeastern Oregon. *Where Land and Water Meet* is an equally astonishing history, this time about the manner in which early Paiute, trappers, ranchers, homesteaders, Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service perceived, used and tried to control the streams, floods, lakes and wetlands that are now Malheur Wildlife Refuge.

As Langston records, Paiute adapted to the marshes and flooding of fields. Hudson's Bay Company trappers removed the dam-building beavers to ruin the land so Americans wouldn't come in. Ranchers built canals to flood their fields for cattle food. Homesteaders drained marshes to live on, farm and grow food for cattle. The ranchers and homesteaders killed the Paiute to take their land. The Bureau of Reclamation drained marshes and dug channels to allow more homesteaders to move in. Drought and floods came, and one particular birder campaigned to get the disaster area declared a wildlife refuge. Then the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (and CCC) dug channels and built dikes to get water back out on the land to produce ducks. They killed the beaver and sprayed the willows with herbicide because beaver and willows interfered with their engineering for ducks. They (unsuccessfully) poisoned exotic carp that escaped from Lake Malheur and drained some of Lake Malheur to let ranchers graze cattle. Then they reduced the grazing because it was destroying the streams. And now they are trying to get flooding, willows and beavers back and are trying to pay attention to more than just duck production. And now they'll have to manage in the face of global warming.

And why is that marsh now dry which 20 years ago hosted the predawn chorus? The 1980s (when I last was there) were extraordinarily wet years, never to be seen since (or maybe again).

As with all well-researched and clearly-written environmental history books, *Where Land and Water Meet* leaves the reader sadder (for what has been removed from the world); more informed (about how nature works and about the stories humans tell themselves about how nature works); grateful (for some people who notice and respect how nature really works); and, hopefully, wiser (about social processes that encourage humans to be more careful of the world).

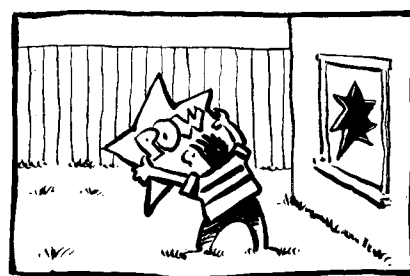
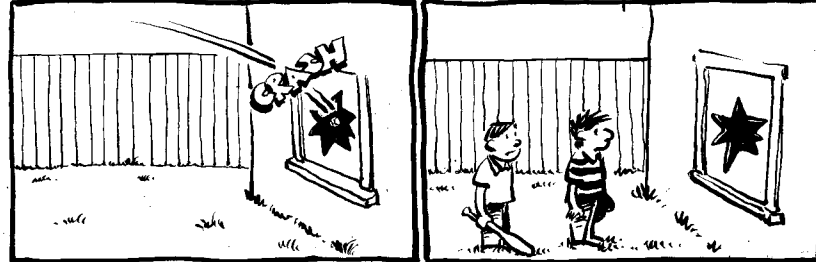
Every spot on Earth has a history like this. We're quite the fateful species.

Next month, Part II: Where Land and Water Meet in West Eugene

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How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SPREAD THE WORD

I went to hear Ohio congressman and Democratic presidential hopeful Dennis Kucinich speak April 2, and I believe that supporting this remarkable man in his bid for the presidency during the coming year and a half is one of the best things we can do to try to realize our vision of a better world.

Kucinich wants to pull troops out of Iraq within two to three months and replace them with a U.N. force that diplomats from other countries have assured him could be assembled that quickly, never "using force as an instrument of policy" again; realizes that we're part of the natural world, not the bosses of it, and need to get serious about protecting our environment by changing our lifestyles; and advocates a single payer national health care system — getting insurance companies out of the process and using what would have been their profits to help pay for it. He even said last night that one of his first acts as president would be to cancel NAFTA and other similar trade agreements, eliminating the power of the WTO to override workers' rights and the environment.

Quoting/paraphrasing from Kucinich: The essence of who we are as human beings is unity/connection; we can create the America we want from our deepest intentions, not our fears, starting at home; it's our responsibility to dedicate our lives to changing our society; officials responsible for the deaths of a million Iraqis must be brought to justice not because of who they are, but because of who we are; a deep transformation of American politics is possible....

Since it would be hard to fantasize a better candidate, I believe that if we don't do all we can to support this man and get him elected, we don't really want what we say we want... Visit www.kucinich.us to see what you can do, and spread the word — it's an opportunity not to be missed.

Maggie Springer
Eugene

THOSE BUTTS

I work at a garden in this city / Most days it's lovely but sometimes it's a pity / While every morning I make my rounds / The litter I collect makes me frown.

So one day I started counting / To show the world it's mounting / Maybe with one month's stats / You'll throw them in the nearby trash.

In one month they do accrue / To a grand total of 1,122 / If you were to pile them all in one place / It would be a half pound of nasty waste.

It takes 12 years for one to decompose / They're plastic not cotton, don't you know? / It takes 2 seconds to do it smart / So please please, respect this place, do your part.

Ellyn Toneys
Eugene

PLOTTING WITH NATURE

Do not go toxic into that good night. The Earth is a precious place with dwindling native forests that are becoming increasingly expensive to preserve, and the human species, with its very expensive death rituals and need for more cemetery plot real estate every smog-choked day, has sadly become the antithesis of nature. What if trees didn't have to be cut to bury each of us but instead preserved?

Imagine that you could choose from a dazzling array of natural burial traditions; that an old growth forest to be logged was instead snapped up by a Natural Burial Park Alliance; that the money paid for your funeral (only about \$700-\$800) was used to buy a plot with breathing room of hitherto unprotected forest (whatever you can afford) with a natural hiking trail, llama, horse, bike trail or wheelchair nature trail going right by your plot.

A minimum of grave goods could be buried with you for the same reason, unless they are of nature, but I would think a minimalist approach is the core. A Friends of the

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