

# Muting Goal One Goal

CITIZENS FIGHT AERIAL SPRAYS

**O**ne goal of Oregon's statewide land use program is "citizen involvement," providing opportunities for public participation in all phases of the regulatory system. Public awareness and engagement are essential to a functional democracy.

When statewide goals and the regulations meant to support them have been corrupted, and when, as a consequence, the health, safety and welfare of the public and the environment are endangered, it is incumbent upon injured parties to seek redress through formal judicial procedures and/or by initiative petition.

Aerial spraying of herbicides on federal forests ceased decades ago. But so tight is the timber industry's grip on state and county legislators that for more than 40 years poisons have continued to rain from the skies over Oregon's private timber lands despite incontrovertible evidence of their deadly impacts from trespassing drift and runoff.

In a letter published in the Sept. 26, 2016 *The New Yorker*, Carol Van Strum of Tidewater, Oregon, observed that the federal government has responded rapidly "to spread of the Zika virus and the microcephaly associated with it," but studies 36 years ago showing "a strong correlation" between aerial spraying of herbicides used by the logging industry and "a substantial increase" of birth defects "in which a baby is born with little or no brain" have been discounted or ignored by state and federal authorities.

Regardless of efforts by individuals and communities to end the collateral damage — sick neighbors with aerial poisons in their urine, dead pets, fish passing atrazine and 2,4-D through their gills with the water they take in — state legislatures, Democratic governors and environmental regulators have refused to change the pro-spray "Right to Farm and Forest Act."

With no other choice, a coalition of organizations and individuals has come together to ban aerial spraying in Lane County through the local initiative process. Freedom from Aerial Herbicides Alliance volunteers are gathering signatures for a charter amendment to be placed on the ballot in May 2017.

Facing seemingly insurmountable political and legislative roadblocks against their efforts to ban GMOs and to oppose other state, county and federal laws deleterious to their well-being, several years ago a number of people organized as Community Rights Lane County and have been gathering signatures for a charter amendment that would establish the right to local self-government. They're gathering signatures for the initiative to ban aerial spraying, as well.

Though both initiatives have been approved by Lane County for signature gathering, last year four of the five Lane County commissioners proposed an ordinance allowing them to veto any measure they deemed too costly and "not of county concern." Instigated by two representatives of the timber industry, the proposal is a shameless attempt to preempt the initiative process.

Community Rights attorney Ann Kneeland has countered, and the county's own attorney concurs, that procedurally "matters of county concern can only be addressed after an initiative has been voted in by the people." Moreover, as a home rule state, Oregon allows counties to adopt charter amendments.

At stake here, Kneeland has said, are "our rights to direct democracy and free speech, including our right to circulate petitions, engage in political discourse and vote on proposed law." Facing a firestorm of opposition, the commissioners agreed to a cease-fire for six months.

Waving the Constitution in one hand and the Bible in the other, elected officials who profess global warming a liberal hoax and the earth's natural resources there for the taking are gnawing at the roots of our democracy. Registered county voters can provide an antidote by signing the petition to ban aerial spraying of herbicides in Lane County and the petition that would allow local self-governance.

Go to [freedomfromaerialherbicides.org](http://freedomfromaerialherbicides.org) for the petition and more information.

Robert Emmons of Fall Creek is president of LandWatch Lane County, a group that has worked for 20 years to help neighbors protect Lane County's farmland, forestland, natural areas and open space. See [landwatch.net](http://landwatch.net).

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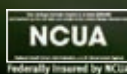
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