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Public lands are a shared legacy

Another scam promises to make counties rich

Unlike many areas of the West, the Lower Columbia River region isn't overwhelmingly comprised of federal lands.

The premium timberlands here were so valuable they were either snapped up by homesteaders or essentially stolen by a gang of 19th century railroad owners, lumber magnates and corrupt officials. In Clatsop County, much of this went into state ownership after the economic and fire catastrophes of the 1930s and '40s.

Elsewhere in Oregon and Washington, however, there are vast tracts of federally owned land — assets that have sparked something reminiscent of the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s. As pointed out by *High Country News*, the recent upsurge in effort to wrest control of lands from the federal government has less to do with average citizens than with the Utah-based American Lands Council, or ALC, which is largely kept alive by membership fees paid by local county governments and, ultimately, by local taxpayers in those counties.

In Oregon, Klamath and Willowa counties help pay for ALC, while in Washington state, Ferry, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Skagit and Stevens counties support the cause.

The earlier iteration of this movement generated plenty of debate during the Reagan administration. But despite the sympathy of leading officials including Interior Secretary James Watt, land ownership wasn't transferred. It can be argued the "rebellion" cowed agencies into permitting laissez-faire decisions, such as unsustainable levels of logging, which ultimately led to a backlash that brought severe cutbacks from which some rural counties still suffer.

Music speaks to Cubans

Minnesota Orchestra plays first Havana concert since 1930

Establishing diplomatic relations with Cuba is one of the smartest things President Barack Obama has done. It was high time.

The best second-guessers can do is to point out that the Castros are dictators. Of course. And so are China's Communist heads of state, and we've done business with them, ever since President Richard Nixon breached that diplomatic freeze.

As part of the U.S.-Cuba rapprochement, the State Department invited American orchestras to propose a concert in Havana. Last Friday, the Minnesota Orchestra gave an all-Beethoven concert in Havana. The musical program repeated what the orchestra's predecessors had done in its 1930 Havana appearance.

The Minneapolis *Star Tribune* reported that following the orchestra's concerts, the American musicians found their way to a club, where they jammed with Cuban musicians. Even the orchestra's Finnish music director, Osmo Vanska, joined in with his clarinet. If you want to speak to the broad

mass of Cubans, music is probably the way to do it. Music seemingly is everywhere in Havana, especially at night.

The orchestra's bassist Kate Nettleman told the *Star Tribune*: "There was such a sense of demystifying people on this trip."

As gifts for Cuban musicians, Minnesota string players brought rosin. Brass players brought mouthpieces.

The Minnesota Orchestra won the coveted concert engagement because of its plan to include Cuban musicians. A Cuban pianist and chorus were elements in one of the Beethoven pieces.

Another masterstroke was playing the Cuban and American national anthems at the concert's start. The newspaper reported: "Most Cuban people think Americans don't have an emotional side," said Ernesto Alejandro Alvarez, a young composer who had met the musicians at his university on Thursday. "To play the anthem was a great show of respect — symbolic for this visit. It has been a beautiful experience."

The PERS quake: A damage assessment

By ADAM DAVIS
 For Oregon Capital Insider and
 EO Media Group

Banner headlines, above the fold: Supreme Court overturns PERS changes.

Since the announcement a couple of weeks ago, the chattering class in Oregon has been focused on assessing the damage from the political earthquake.

What do the billions of unfunded PERS costs mean for the state moving forward?

Many wonder if the earthquake has shaken the taxpayers enough that they are now willing to tax themselves to prevent cuts to important public services including schools and public safety.

DHM Research did some earthquake damage assessment of our own to determine where Oregon voters are on PERS and the question of higher taxes to prevent cuts to services.

Despite all the hoopla surrounding the Supreme Court's decision, not all voters have heard about it. About a third of Oregon's voters told us last weekend that they had not heard or read anything related to PERS within the last two weeks. When asked to identify the most important issue they want their state government officials to do something about, only 3 percent mentioned PERS.

Voters registered significant concerns about the state's ability to pay for an adequate level of public services such as education and public safety. Good news if you think that the climate may be changing for tax reform. The magnitude of concern, however, remains moderate: Less than one half of Oregon's voters are "very" concerned (45 percent Democrats; 37 percent Republicans; 22 percent Independents). Yes, despite the PERS decision.

Furthermore, voters listed high taxes among the top issues that they want their officials to address. School fund-

ing remains a top concern, but is mentioned by less than a majority and split between those who feel the schools already have enough money (and just need to spend it more wisely) and those who feel schools need more money.

Two more data points from this past weekend suggest it may take some earthquake aftershocks and a prolonged economic recovery before the political landscape shifts enough in Oregon to safely support building a request of the voters to increase their taxes.

'Voters listed high taxes among the top issues that they want their officials to address.'

The state remains very divided on the need for more state revenue, even after the PERS decision.

In the 2013 Oregon Values and Beliefs Survey, 43 percent agree that our current tax system with just income tax and property tax is too unstable to pay for public services. A similar 42 percent disagreed.

Recently, we asked voters to consider the state's quality of life and low ranking compared to other states in many areas. When asked if now with the PERS decision there was a need to raise taxes, 43 percent agreed and 47 percent disagreed.

You want a party divide? While 72 percent of Democrats agreed that it is time to raise taxes, only 16 percent of Republicans and 34 percent of Independents felt so. That's not good calculus for tax advocates.

Wonder if people view the situation differently when framed in terms of "my local schools?" That should tug at the heart strings, right?

Given four statements, only 24 percent felt the statement that comes closest to how they feel is "my local public schools just don't have enough money, and now with the recent Supreme Court ruling overturning PERS reform, the problem is worse. I'm prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools."

Slightly more, 28 percent, felt even



Adam Davis

with the PERS reforms being overturned, "I'm not prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools until education reforms have been put in place to ensure that any additional money will increase student academic growth."

The most common viewpoint, chosen by 31 percent, was that "I'm not prepared to pay more in taxes for my local schools.

Even with the PERS reforms being overturned, I feel the schools have enough money; they just need to spend it more wisely."

A smaller number, 10 percent, said "I just can't afford it. Even though I feel my local school don't have enough money, I can't pay more in taxes for my local schools."

At this point, it doesn't look like the Supreme Court's PERS earthquake has shaken things enough to mobilize Oregonians in support of increased taxes to maintain funding for public services. How many aftershocks would it take, and for how long would they need to happen, to change things? Hard to tell.

Also, consider that we're only talking about the need for additional revenue to prevent cuts in services. How about the money needed to address new expenses such as our deteriorating water, sewer, and transportation systems?

We do know that any future earthquakes would have to be of seismic magnitude to penetrate the voters' consciousness, significantly affect their attitudes about government and politics, and alter the political landscape. It will likely take more than one. Perhaps it may take a real earthquake.

Not likely to happen? OK then, let's just go after the wealthy and big business. What a novel idea.

No wonder only about a third of Oregon voters feel that over the next 10 years we'll find common ground and work together to make progress addressing the critical issues we face as a state.

Adam Davis, who has been conducting opinion research in Oregon for more than 35 years, is a founding principal in DHM Research, an independent, non-partisan firm. Visit www.dhmresearch.com.

What Strayed's Wild has wrought

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
 New York Times News Service

ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL, Calif. — This is arguably America's greatest hiking trail, a 2,650-mile serpentine path running through desert and wilderness from the Mexican border to the Canadian border.

The Pacific Crest Trail meanders through cactus and redwoods, challenging humans with rivers and snowfields, rattlesnakes and bears.

It's a trail of extremes. Hiking it with my daughter near the Mexican border this month, we sweltered on our first day in soaring temperatures and a 20-mile dry section through the desert. Six days and a bit more than 150 miles later, near the town of Idyllwild, we shivered in 30-degree temperatures as the heavens dumped snow on us.

The trail is a triumph of serenity and solitude. Except that, these days, the solitude is getting crowded.

Apparently, in part because of the book and movie versions of *Wild*, about Cheryl Strayed's journey of discovery and self-repair on her hike, some areas of the trail feel as busy as a scout jamboree.

I've been backpacking the Pacific Crest Trail since I was a kid, inspired by the first person to complete a thru-hike from Canada to Mexico, Eric Ryback, who wrote a book published in 1971 about his feat. My 17-year-old daughter and I aim to eventually hike the full trail, section by section, in this narrow window in which she is strong enough and I'm not yet decrepit. Last year, we completed Oregon and Washington, and this month's section took us through the south-

ernmost part of California desert.

Fewer people have hiked the full Pacific Crest Trail than have reached the summit of Mount Everest. Yet, this year, so many want to hike it that a limit has been placed on permits so that no more than 50 thru-hikers can begin at the Mexican border each day.

Another memoir may add to the mystique. In *Girl in the Woods*, scheduled for publication in September, with a possible television spinoff, Aspen Matis recounts how she was raped on the second day of college and then fled campus to seek healing on a Pacific Crest Trail thru-hike. She starved and suffered on the trail but also found redemption — and, yes, her future husband by the 2,000 mile mark.

(I wonder if women don't have the edge in trail memoirs. Male hikers project toughness, female hikers vulnerability. Ask a man resting on a trailside log how he's doing, and he'll boast of how many miles he has walked. Ask a woman, and she'll confide about her blisters, mosquito bites and insecurities. That's not universally true, as Bill Bryson can attest, but women seem more comfortable opening up about the woes that are inevitably much more interesting than the miles.)

Most would-be thru-hikers will probably drop out — one woman gave up this year on the first day, after 13 miles — but hundreds are expected to walk every step of the way to Canada.

Old hands fret that these neophytes don't know what they're doing (*The Wall Street Journal* quoted one woman this month who had never spent a night outdoors until she began her *Wild*-inspired hike) and could endanger themselves. The trail begins at the Mexican border



Nicholas Kristof

with a 20-mile dry stretch, and my daughter and I ran across five inexperienced men who had all separately run out of water on that stretch and become dehydrated.

Drought has also forced hikers to carry more water: The first eight creeks that we crossed were dry.

We encountered another hazard in the form of a rattlesnake that my daughter almost stepped on. Yet, in the end, most hikers do just fine, apart from blisters and a few lost toenails, and it's hard to begrudge anyone the chance for a bit of nature therapy in the Cathedral of Wilderness.

It's striking that hikers come to the trail for solitary reflection, yet often end up coalescing into groups — because we are social animals, and solitude is so much more fun when you have somebody to share it with.

There's a hobo spirit on the trail, with no social distinctions and everybody helping everyone else. One example of this generosity is the work of "trail angels" who lug water, soda, hamburgers, cookies or other treats to places where a road intersects a trail, to delight exhausted backpackers. This is controversial, partly because animals also dine on treats that are left out, and it's also not exactly wilderness when you come across a cooler with soda.

Still, all this generosity and mutual assistance is truly heartwarming. At about the 140-mile mark, my daughter and I came across a trail angel "library" — a glass-protected bookshelf of paperbacks for any hikers needing to weather out a snowstorm.

Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard may be right that an unfortunate fragmentation of society has left us Americans "bowling alone." But, on the brighter side, we're "hiking together!"

Where to write

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