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Megafires are a warning, even here on the 'wet-side'

Huge fires are a whiff of things to come

Some of the western red cedars on Long Island, Wash., in the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and on neighboring mainland hills are thought to be 800 years old, their longevity thanks in part to a moist climate that hasn't favored wildfires.

The way it's going, our descendants will be exceptionally lucky if the ancient cedars are still around eight centuries from now.

In fact, the way fires are scouring Oregon and Washington this summer, a person doesn't need to be a pessimist to fear a day in our own lifetimes when local forests follow the tragic patterns playing out east of the Cascades.

It wouldn't even be a first: after all, the Tillamook and Clatsop State Forest burns achieved the status of "folk memory" in this region between 1933 and 1951. The first in that series of wildfires burned 311,000 acres.

Such "megafires" — destroying 100,000 or more acres — are becoming almost common.

In an Aug. 9 story (tinyurl.com/Megafires), *National Geographic* makes numerous thought-provoking points about this problem that is exploding in our backyard:

- "These infernos, once rare, are growing to sizes that U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell describes as 'unimaginable' two decades ago. Five alone have consumed more than five million acres in central Alaska since June. Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado also experienced their worst wildfires in the past seven years."

- "The main driver is climate change. Rising temperatures exacerbate drought, spread beetle infestations and melt the snowpack earlier. Early snowmelt alone has lengthened the fire season by 70 days since 1970. 'These stresses are going to become more widespread,' says Craig Allen, a U.S. Geological Service forest ecologist in Los Alamos, New Mexico. 'The drought itself is part of the natural variability here. What's different is it's a hotter drought than anything in the Northern Hemisphere in the

last thousand years.'"

- "Today, wildfires, on average, burn twice as much land every year now as they did 40 years ago."

- "58 million acres of national forests are at risk for severe fire, but there is only enough funding to clean up 11.3 million acres."

The end result of these colossal blazes are landscapes permanently transformed in terms of both plants and animals. They burn so hot and are so extensive that formerly "native" species no longer find themselves at home. One scientist quoted in the story said that if he wants to continue specializing in the same type of forest, he should plan to move a couple hundred miles north.

What does all this mean for the counties of the Lower Columbia River, which haven't witnessed anything resembling a megafire in more than two generations? This very dry summer, at least, the answer is that we should be talking about it and more actively including wildfire planning in a wide variety of civic discussions.

For example, if national forests are poorly maintained in terms of mitigating fire risk, might it be safe to surmise that state forests are even less so? Does the fact that Pacific County's forestland in Washington is predominantly owned by large corporations ensure less build-up of flammable debris on the forest floor? Do federal and state agencies on the "wet-side" give adequate time and money to planning for fire response in places like the previously safe national wildlife refuge?

This year's megafires are a strong whiff of things to come as we in the Pacific Northwest learn to cope with warmer temperatures and without reliable snowpacks to see us through the summer. Intelligent, appropriately funded counter-measures can help make the difference.

Door swings open for 'prisoners of history'

History is never neat and clean. But some watershed moments are especially emblematic of change in the relationship of nations. Last Friday's flag raising at the new U.S. embassy in Havana contained doses of sentiment and realism.

"This was a decision to stop being the prisoners of history," said Secretary of State John Kerry, noting that five decades of a frozen diplomatic relationship would thaw.

"Cuba-American relations," he said, "were suspended in the amber of cold war history."

It is a good thing that President Obama has moved our relationship with Cuba off dead center. While it is true that Fidel Castro is the sort of despot that America claims to despise, that calculus did not hold President Richard Nixon back from opening a relationship with what was then called Red China.

Acknowledging the impediment of Castro's penchant for jailing political prisoners, Secretary Kerry told reporters "There is no way Congress

is going to vote to lift the (trade) embargo if they're not moving with respect to issues of conscience."

Opening a full-fledged embassy in Havana matters for reasons well beyond the borders of that island nation. To all of Latin America, this symbolizes a new attitude in Washington. It is significant that Pope Francis, an Argentinian, was a catalyst in brokering the deal that led to Friday's event.

Over 150 years, America's relationship with Cuba has been as tangled as any two nations manage. For Americans who wonder where Fidel Castro came from, T.J. English's 2008 book *Havana Nocturne: How the Mob Owned Cuba and Then Lost It to the Revolution* offers a historic perspective on a fascinating era.

It is not just U.S.-Cuban relations that can move to a new and more productive place. Breaking this long impasse can liberate elements of the Cuban culture and economy. That will be good for all of the Western Hemisphere.

Introducing Donald Trump, diplomat



Jessica Lehrman/The New York Times

Donald Trump, the business mogul and Republican presidential candidate, with sports memorabilia at his office in New York on Friday. The belt on his shoulder is Mike Tyson's championship belt, the one in his lap bearing his name is from World Wrestling Entertainment, where he has made frequent guest appearances.

By MAUREEN DOWD

New York Times News Service

Donald Trump gives me his Grumpy Cat look.

I'm sitting in his office in Trump Tower high above Fifth Avenue, next to a wall plastered with framed magazine covers giving the effect of an infinity mirror, his face endlessly multiplying — including an old Playboy with the real estate mogul slyly smiling next to a comely bunny.

"I could put up 40 of those walls," he says. "I have covers in warehouses. It's crazy."

I'm trying to tell the freshly minted pol that Megyn Kelly had the right to ask him a question in the debate on how he talks about women, and that she should be tough on the front-runner.

He's not buying it. In fact, in his stubborn "I win, you lose" way, he has an assistant come over to hand me a printout of Gabriel Sherman's *New York* magazine piece headlined "How Roger Ailes Picked Trump, and Fox News' Audience, Over Megyn Kelly."

But the 69-year-old is trying hard not to bare his claws at any women right now. His wife, Melania, and daughter Ivanka have told him they don't want him to come across as a misogynist when they don't see him that way.

"I have many women executives and they are paid at least as much as the men," he said. "I find women to be amazing."

The billionaire braggart known for saying unfiltered things is trying to be diplomatic. Sort of.

It has suddenly hit Trump that he's leading the Republican field in a race where many candidates, including the two joyless presumptive nominees, are sputtering. He's got the party by the tail — still a punch line but not a joke.

The Wall Street Journal huffed that Trump's appeal was "attitude, not substance," and the nascent candidate is still figuring out the pesky little details, like staff and issues, dreaming up his own astringent campaign ads for Instagram on ISIS and China.

The other candidates, he says, "have pollsters; they pay these guys \$200,000 a month to tell them, 'Don't say this, don't say that, you use the wrong word, you shouldn't put a comma here.' I don't want any of that. I have a nice staff, but no one tells me what to say. I go by my heart. The combination of heart and brain. When Hillary gets up there she reads and then goes away for three days."

As he headed off this weekend to see the butter cow in Iowa — "Iowa is very clean. It's not like a lot of places where you and I would go, like New York City" — Trump is puzzling over a conundrum: How does he curb the merciless heckler side of himself, the side that has won over voters who think he's a refreshing truth teller, so

that he can seem refined enough to win over voters who think he's crude and cartoonish?

How does he tone it down when he's proud of his outrageous persona, his fiery wee-hours Twitter arrows and campaign "gusto," and gratified by the way he can survive dissing John McCain and rating Heidi Klum when that would be a death knell for someone like Scott Walker?

"Sometimes I do go a little bit far," he allowed, adding, after a moment: "Heidi Klum. Sadly, she's no longer a 10."

He could act more refined, he muses over spaghetti and meatballs, with a side of pulled pork, in the Trump Tower restaurant, as fans gawk and wait for selfies, but that would make for a boring lunch.

He relishes giving me a play-by-play of the Kelly and Rosie O'Donnell donnybrooks as though he's talking about Pacquiao-Mayweather. He beams with pride when he talks about Rush Limbaugh marveling about how much "incoming" he can take.

"I'm a counter-puncher," he said. "I can't hit people who don't hit me. Maybe that's my weakness. Perry started it. Lindsey Graham started it. This moron Rand Paul just started it because he is mired in 12th place and he's a U.S. senator."

He said Rosie was a bully and the only way to beat bullies is to smack them in the nose.

So he doesn't think of himself as a bully?

He looks hurt. "Oh, no, the opposite," he said. "In fact, I'll go a step further. The way to do best with me is to be really nice to me."

I mention that George Will has written a column demanding that Republican leaders renounce Trump as a cynical opportunist "deranged by egotism."

"So George Will came to Mar-a-Lago 10 years ago and made a speech," Trump said. "I refused to go because he's a boring person." Trump said he stayed on the patio and had dinner and that offended Will. (Will says he has "other and better reasons for thinking it might not be altogether wise to entrust him with the nation's nuclear arsenal.")

I tell Trump that he has transcended the level of narcissism common in a profession full of narcissists. He is, after all, wearing a red tie with a label by "a wonderful guy named Trump," as he wryly puts it, with his Brioni suit. In the latest Time, Jeffrey Kluger, the author of *The Narcissist Next Door*, said "people at ease inside their skin just don't behave the way Trump does."

I ask if he was always like this, boasting that he had the best baby



Maureen Dowd

food and the best high chair?

"Honestly, I don't think people change that much," Trump said. "I'm a solid, stable person." Knocking on the wooden restaurant wall, he added: "I am a man of great achievement. I win, Maureen, I always win. Knock on wood. I win. It's what I do. I beat people. I win."

No insecurities?

"I don't know how you would define insecurity as it pertains to me," he replies.

He does have a germ phobia and carries packs of germicidal disposable wipes. He describes how a man came out of a restaurant bathroom the other night with wet hands wanting to clasp his hand. "So what do I do?" Trump asked. "I don't eat. That's OK."

I note that many people still think his bid is more runaway Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloon than a run on meaningful issues.

He says it's real, noting: "I was with Carl Icahn yesterday and I said, 'Carl, if I get this thing you are going to represent me on China. Maybe I'll even give you China and Japan.' You know, the money they are ripping from us."

He is trying to be a bit more low key. He says he thought it would be "cool" not to put his name on his "Make America Great Again" caps. But it's hard to imagine Trump implementing impulse control.

What if, I ask him, he fires off a nuclear tweet at Vladimir Putin insulting his peccs or Kim Jong Un calling him a "fat little slob"?

"I'll only do it for a purpose," he said. "I have total control. I will get along great with these people. I'm a dealmaker. I'm the best dealmaker there is."

How will he deal with Carly Fiorina, who is being hailed as the one to slay Trump after she excoriated him, interpreting his blood "wherever" remark as being about Kelly's period. (I don't think he meant it that way.)

"Carly has to be a little bit careful," he warned.

What if he bursts into Trumpian analysis of how Carly and Hillary look?

"Oh, I would never talk about their looks," he replied primly. He did, however, imitate how his ears felt ("Eeeeeeeeee") when he hears Carly's "staccato ping, ping, ping" voice and delivery.

How important are women's looks to him?

He said he has found looks can hold you back, that "some of the great-looking men and women, they've never had a problem getting a date, they've never had a problem in life, now they get into a world which is a cruel place and they don't fight as hard."

I ask Trump if he can at least admit that President Barack Obama was born in this country.

The Grumpy Cat face comes back. "No comment," he murmurs.

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