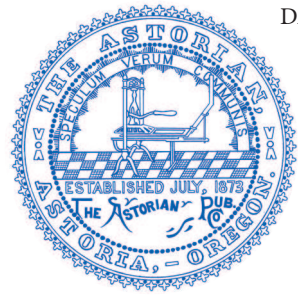


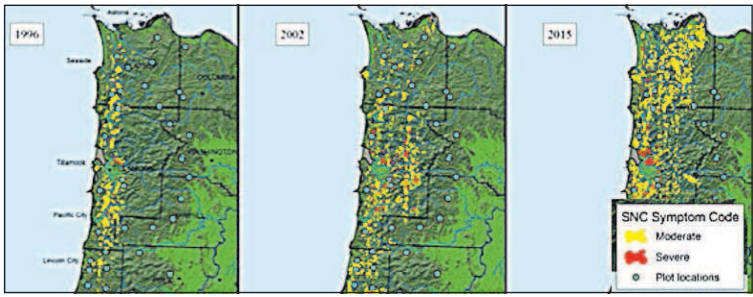
THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



DAVID F. PERO, *Publisher & Editor*
 LAURA SELLERS, *Managing Editor*
 BETTY SMITH, *Advertising Manager*
 CARL EARL, *Systems Manager*
 JOHN D. BRUIJN, *Production Manager*
 DEBRA BLOOM, *Business Manager*
 HEATHER RAMSDELL, *Circulation Manager*

OUR VIEW



A series of maps shows the spread of Swiss needle cast disease (in yellow and red) on the North Coast between 1996 and last year.

Costly fir disease threatens our coastal economy

Surveys are vital while ramping up research

New forestry research is an invaluable reminder that our changing climate has local consequences that demand action, even if everyone isn't yet convinced human action is to blame.

A time-progression map of the Oregon Coast Range is the most immediately eye-catching aspect of a study by Oregon State University, the Oregon Department of Forestry and Weyerhaeuser Corp. It shows an explosion in Swiss needle cast, a disease in Douglas fir, between 2015 and the start of aerial surveys in 1996. Swiss needle cast is believed to have first gained a foothold in our region in the 1970s in Christmas tree farms, from which it spread to major commercial tree plantations and state forests.

The map shows a troubling expansion throughout the Coast Range, with a moderate infection level now widespread in Clatsop County and severe outbreaks here and there, especially in Tillamook County. Overall, the amount of acreage impacted grew by 4 1/2 times between 1996 and last year. In far-western Oregon's 5,800 square miles of coastal forest,

The map shows a troubling expansion throughout the Coast Range, with a moderate infection level now widespread in Clatsop County and severe outbreaks here and there, especially in Tillamook County.

922 square miles were infected by last year — getting close to the size of the entirety of Clatsop County. (Swiss needle cast also is a significant issue in the Willapa Hills of southwest Washington, though it hasn't been so thoroughly studied there.)

Here in Clatsop County, the important Hampton Mill in Warrenton relies on a mix of 60 percent Douglas fir and 40 percent hemlock. Anything that harms the viability of Douglas fir is going to impact local forestry, which remains a vital part of our economic mix.

Swiss needle cast doesn't kill Douglas fir but saps their productivity, reducing it by 23 percent in the epidemic area at a yearly economic cost currently estimated at \$128 million.

The scientists cautiously say a complex combination of factors related to local climate change — such as spring moisture and warm winter temperatures — may be creating conditions favorable for Swiss needle cast. Another significant factor, they say, is the extent to which forest managers have deliberately increased the prevalence and density of valuable Douglas fir, providing large swathes of genetically similar forest. Starting in the 1960s, forests that were once comprised of mixed western hemlock, Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, red alder and western red cedar were converted to monocultures of young Douglas fir.

The researchers conclude that fungicides and other chemical treatments are either ineffective or impractical, and urge an integrated pest management approach. These options include restoring greater diversity to forests by planting more cedar, hemlock, spruce and alder. Unfortunately, depending on market conditions, switching to less Douglas fir can have big economic downsides. Thinning trees before they reach full commercial-harvest maturity is another option, also with financial costs.

Guided by this latest study, it's vital we work out optimal ways to adjust to changing conditions in order to preserve forests and the coastal economy that depends on them. Agencies can help by continuing to fund aerial surveys and science devoted to helping forest adapt to changing conditions.

The SNC study can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/2bqr495>.



This land is my land (and it's yours, too!)

By NICHOLAS KRISTOF
New York Times News Service

Not to boast, but that image is me enjoying a pristine alpine lake I own in the California Sierras. It's property so valuable that Bill Gates could never buy it. Yet it's mine.

But wait! Don't stalk off — it's also yours! It's part of America's extraordinary, but now threatened, heritage of public lands. These lands are being starved of funds to sustain them and are the target of an ideological battle, with the new Republican Party platform arguing that certain federal lands should be handed over to the states. Which lands aren't specified.



This objective is sad, because America was the first country in the world to take its most stunning scenic places and turn them into a shared space belonging to all — an element of what Wallace Stegner called America's "best idea." It was 100 years ago, in August 1916, that the United States established the National Park Service, after earlier moving to protect lands like Yellowstone and Yosemite. As a result, our nation's most valuable assets are owned not by private equity tycoons but by you and me.

I backpacked 220 miles through the Sierras this summer with my 18-year-old daughter on the John Muir Trail, perhaps the most beautiful footpath in the world, coursing from 14,500-foot Mount Whitney (the highest point in the contiguous United States) through lush valleys and over snow-clad mountain passes to end at Yosemite National Park.

The John Muir Trail is part of the Pacific Crest Trail, which my daughter and I are hiking in its entirety, from Mexico to Canada, in the handful of years in which she's strong enough and I'm not yet decrepit.

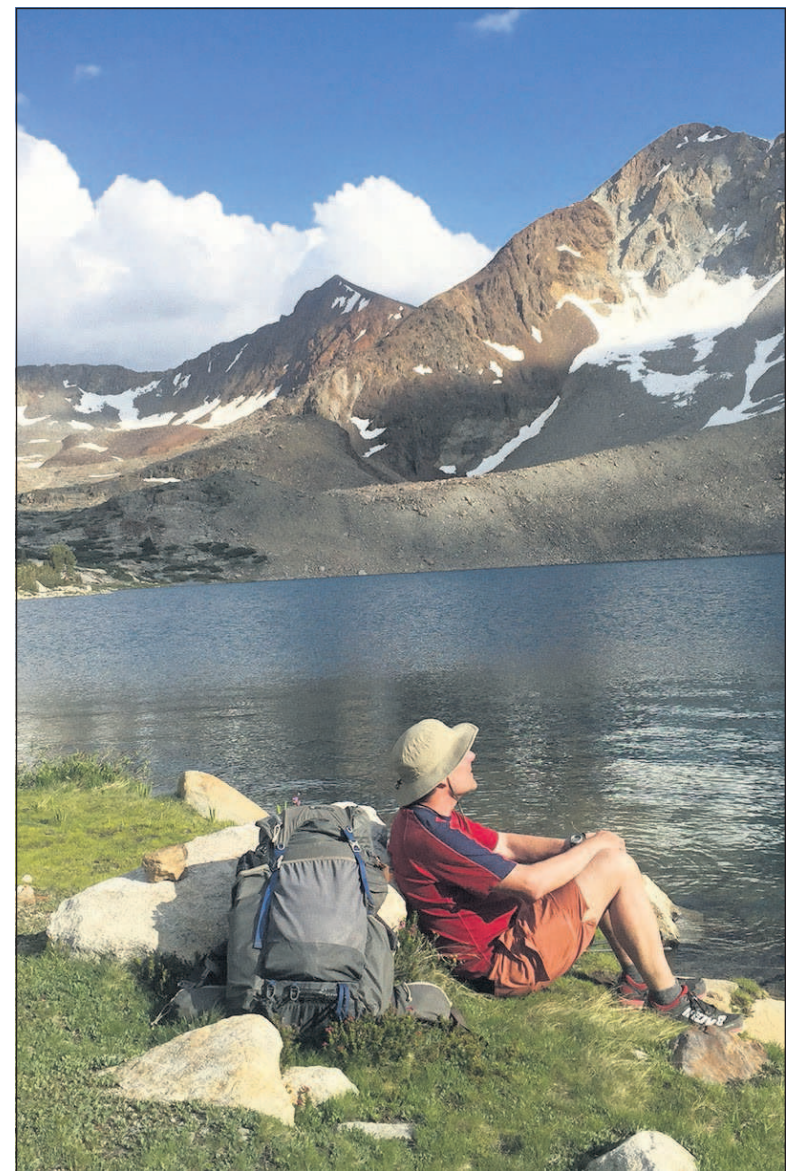
These trails are essentially free. Unlike car campgrounds, America's wilderness is mostly accessible without fees (there are occasional exceptions). In the evening, you spread your groundsheet on some flat spot, lay out your sleeping bag under the stars, and it's all yours. You have a location and a view that no billionaire can buy, and no one can pull rank on you (except a bear).

Sure, it takes money to buy camping gear and get to and from the trailhead, but my daughter and I have sometimes hitchhiked, and many other hikers do as well. Hiking trails are a rare spot where doctors mingle with construction workers.

Democratic spaces

In an age of enormous inequality, these public lands are arguably our most democratic space. Wealth may buy political influence such that to speak of "one person one vote" seems naive and incomplete. So the most democratic place in America is perhaps not the voting booth but rather our shared wilderness, as long as we sustain it.

If these magnificent lands were discovered today, perhaps they would soon be dotted with luxury weekend homes. Or companies would step in and this would be



Nicholas Kristof enjoys part of his inheritance as an American citizen, resting by a lake on the John Muir Trail in California. In an age of enormous inequality, these public lands are arguably our most democratic space — so long as they are sustained.

CitiCreek, or tapped for a brewery. But fortunately, beginning in the late 19th century a series of visionary political leaders argued that America's most glorious natural spots should be a common preserve for all people.

Pioneering conservationists like Theodore Roosevelt and Gifford Pinchot were enormously wealthy themselves and could afford their own private retreats. But they believed in a kind of democracy that gave the humblest citizen not only the vote but also access to the nation's natural wonders.

Cathedral of wilderness

So "my creek" is a tribute to the cathedral of wilderness — but also to the wisdom of long-ago politicians. Alas, that political wisdom is now evaporating, so that these lands are in peril.

As placid as the scenes seem in the pictures I brought home, they are a little misleading. To hike in the wilderness is not only to relish dazzling views, but also to be eaten alive by mosquitoes, to suffer frostbite and sunstroke, to discover just how bloody blisters can be, to drink squirming pond water that would give any urban dog nightmares, and to be endlessly frustrated that, contrary to all physics and geography, trails somehow are all uphill.

On one backpacking trip, my daughter ended up with 49 mosquito bites on her forehead alone (while wearing mosquito repellent and a head net!).

But the biggest threat to our long-term wilderness enjoyment isn't mosquitoes or ticks, bears or wolves. It's Congress.

Congress deprives government agencies of money needed to maintain our public lands. The National Park Service says that it has 6,700 miles of trails that are in poor condition because it can't afford to keep them up.

Even on the John Muir Trail, large stretches are in disrepair and had turned into creeks of snow-melt when my daughter and I hiked them. This quickly erodes the trails so much that new ones have to be built nearby. This reluctance to pay for maintenance isn't even fiscally prudent, for it's far more expensive to build new trails than to maintain old ones.

It's sad to see today's Republicans hostile to continuing federal stewardship of these lands, since it was Republicans like Theodore Roosevelt whom we most owe for this exceptional heritage.

Survey says ...

At a time when American politics are polarized, a remarkable 95 percent of survey respondents agree that "it is important to me that national parks are preserved for current and future generations, whether I visit them or not."

Even in the Great Depression, an impoverished America could afford to work on building paths like the John Muir Trail, yet today we can't afford to maintain them properly.

Our predecessors pretty much invented the idea of national parks and wilderness trails, bequeathing us an inheritance of incalculable wealth. And on our watch, as we mark the 100th birthday of the National Park Service, we're squandering it.