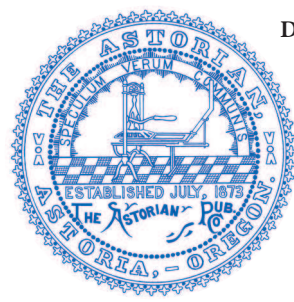


# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## OUR VIEW



AP Photo/Manuel Valdes

A sign welcomes drivers to Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Richland, Wash. A portion of an underground tunnel containing rail cars filled with radioactive waste collapsed at a sprawling storage facility in a remote area of Washington state, forcing an evacuation of some workers at the site that made plutonium for nuclear weapons for decades after World War II.

## GAO must review tunnel collapse at Hanford nuke site

One of the consequences of living at the outfall of an enormous watershed is that we must be on guard about major pollution threats nearly everywhere in the France-sized Columbia basin. The most ominous of these problems remains the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in Richland, Washington.

Awareness of the enormous scale of toxins at the former Cold War weapons site has been growing since a shroud of secrecy started to lift with collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Facilities once used to manufacture radioactive bomb ingredients at astounding expense now are the subject of a corresponding expensive cleanup. Almost pulsating with potential for harm, some of Hanford's vast stretches of desert will effectively be off limits for thousands of years.

What is new is the partial collapse of a rail tunnel at Hanford's PUREX plant, a hulking factory devoted to production of plutonium. Intended as a makeshift dump for large equipment rendered deadly by plutonium contamination, the tunnel was partially constructed of wooden railroad ties. Strong radiation like that in the tunnel eventually causes wood to crumble. The structural integrity of PUREX tunnel 1 has been compromised, leading to a recent emergency alert at the nuclear reservation. There is at least one more tunnel we're aware of.

This comes on top of other longer-term problems with the cleanup, including failure of some underground storage tanks that contain radioactive sludge, a byproduct of the nuclear-fuel manufacturing process.

A bipartisan group of federal lawmakers including Democratic U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Maria Cantwell and Republican Reps. Greg Walden and Cathy McMorris Rodgers are insisting that the Government Accountability Office conduct a review of this daunting mess. Their demand is broadly intended to make sure legacy toxin sites including the tunnels are on the U.S. Department of Energy's to-do list, with appropriate plans in place to safeguard workers and the public.

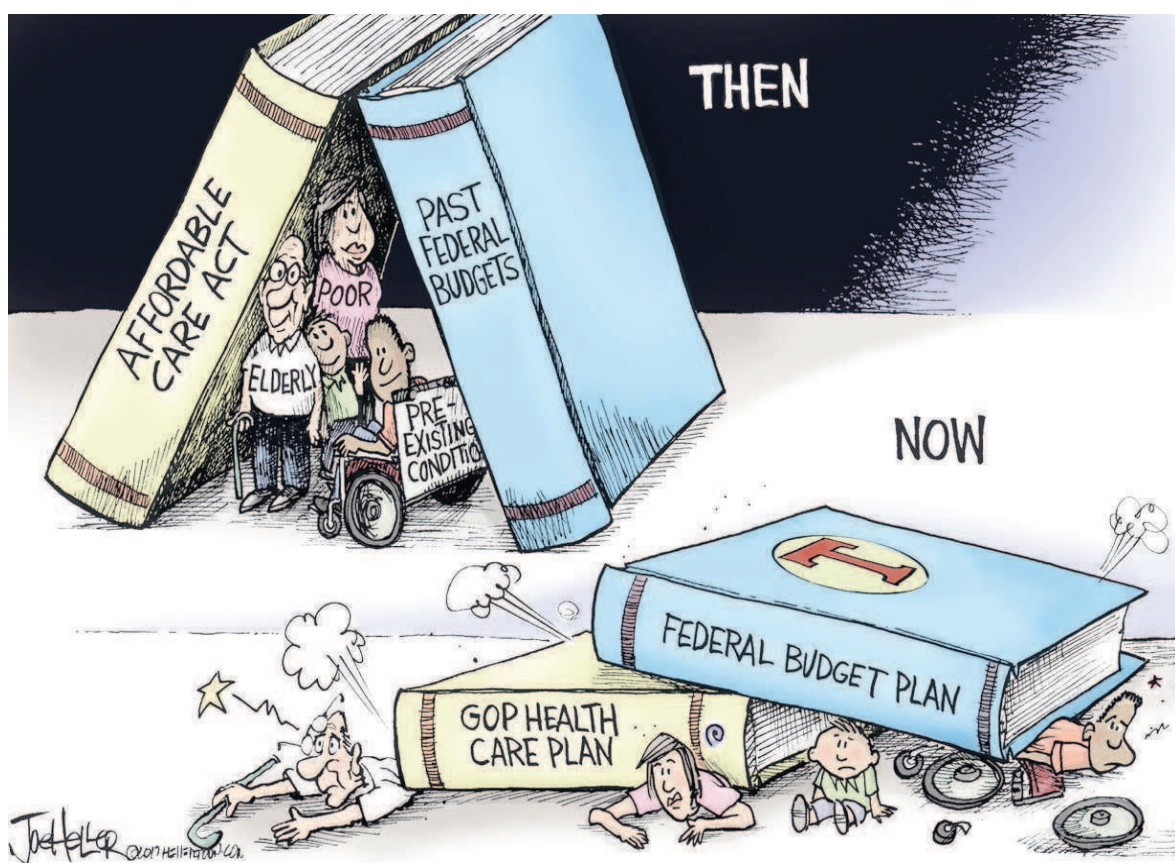
"As work continues to complete cleanup along the Columbia River Corridor, a long list of cleanup activity remains outstanding on the Central Plateau, including remediation and demolition of more than 1,000 waste sites, 500 facilities, and contaminated soil and groundwater — much of which is highly contaminated with radioactive and toxic waste," the lawmakers noted in their Wednesday letter to the GAO.

There's ample reason to keep an eagle eye on Hanford. Even now, the public is only starting to become aware of the kinds of abuses of trust that happened there — activities that placed the reservation's downstream neighbors at risk.

For example, the Nobel Prize-winning Physicians for Environmental Responsibility note, "By 1957 eight plutonium production reactors dumped a daily average of 50,000 curies of radioactive material into the Columbia. Perhaps the most dramatic of these events was the 'Green Run' in December 1949, when 8,000 curies of iodine-131 were intentionally released .... Although the plume covered an area of 200 by 40 miles, no warnings were given and no follow-up of area residents was conducted. By comparison, only 15 to 24 curies of iodine-131 were released at Three Mile Island," the famous 1979 reactor accident in Pennsylvania.

Given all this context, it probably is unwise to cut Hanford's \$2 billion annual cleanup budget by \$120 million, as President Donald Trump is proposing. While there undoubtedly has been financial waste during the cleanup, the tunnel collapse shows us that enormous unfunded expenses lie ahead.

Keeping more deadly contamination out of the Columbia River must be a top national priority.



## GUEST COLUMN

## Fighting to preserve local input on land management

By JEFF MERKLEY  
and RON WYDEN

Special to The Daily Astorian

Oregon has a long history of pioneering innovative ways to resolve pressing public land management issues. Our



state was built by Americans who relied on the land for their livelihood, and it has been protected and preserved by generations of Oregonians who want to ensure we can all enjoy our state's wild places and public lands while putting people to work.

Among the tools that Oregonians have used to balance these interests are Resource Advisory Councils, or RACs. Under the U.S. Department of the Interior, RACs help agencies and stakeholders navigate projects that can affect the health of the environment and the strength of the local economy. Public land management issues can be very contentious, particularly in the West, and RACs help to work through difficult issues and to get meaningful local input. Balancing these interests is challenging. But with RACs, projects are more likely to succeed.

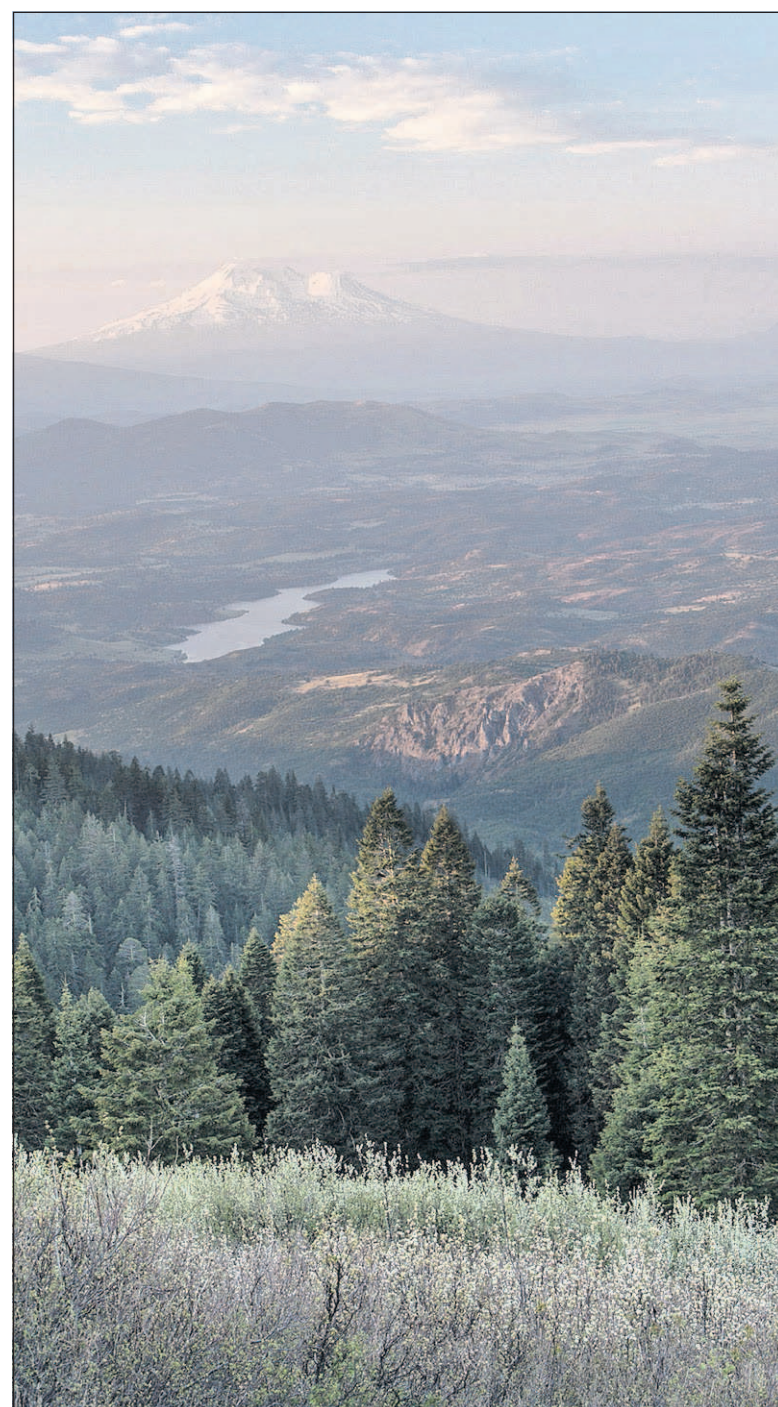
However, we recently heard from members of Oregon RACs that their meetings were postponed until September, pending a review by the Interior Department. Our offices did not receive notice of the postponements, and RACs got little explanation for the action.

Suspension of RAC meetings could hold up planning of innovative local projects, such as the "rails to trails" bike trail proposed along the Deschutes River; there, the RAC is needed to help resolve issues among boaters, rafters and cyclists.

And — with the timing of the administration's decision to reconsider the designation of 21 national monuments — the suspension could mean the review of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument could go forward without RAC input.

We expressed our concern to U.S. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, and urged him to allow RACs to continue their regular meetings. As a former congressman from Montana, he knows the importance of local input and collaboration on public land management issues — a point he stressed during his confirmation hearings.

RACs were formed to generate that local input and collaboration, and there are thousands of examples of RACs across the country con-



Bob Wick/Bureau of Land Management

A view of Mt. Shasta from the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

## Recreation, land use planning, grazing and other land management issues take all of us working together

tributing to successful projects that improve the quality of our public lands management. Postponing their progress hurts public land and forest management goals; to jobs and local economies; and to public confidence in the federal government. It is critical that local voices, including RACs, have the opportunity to provide input and take part in the process at all times — not just when those local voices align with the administration or a large special interest.

Recreation, land use planning, grazing and other land management issues take all of us working together — as generations of Oregonians did before us — to be successful. We encourage Oregonians to be heard, and join us in urging Secretary Zinke to allow RACs to continue their regular meetings and advance the important work Congress directed them to do.

Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden are Democratic U.S. senators representing Oregon.

## LETTERS WELCOME

Letters should be exclusive to The Daily Astorian. We do not publish open letters or third-party letters.

Letters should be fewer than 350 words and must include the writer's name, address and phone numbers. You will be contacted to confirm authorship.

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy and verbal verification of authorship. Only two letters per writer are printed each month.

Letters written in response to

other letter writers should address the issue at hand and, rather than mentioning the writer by name, should refer to the headline and date the letter was published. Discourse should be civil and people should be referred to in a respectful manner. Letters referring to news stories should also mention the headline and date of publication.

The Daily Astorian welcomes short "in gratitude" notes from readers for publication. They should keep to a 200-word maximum and writers are asked to avoid simply listing event sponsors. They

must be signed, include the writer's address, phone number and are subject to condensation and editing for style, grammar, etc.

Submissions may be sent in any of these ways:

E-mail to editor@dailyastorian.com;

Online form at www.dailyastorian.com;

Delivered to the Astorian offices at 949 Exchange St. and 1555 N. Roosevelt in Seaside.

Or by mail to Letters to the Editor, P.O. Box 210, Astoria, OR 97103