

OPINION



the Astorian

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GUEST COLUMN

Let's fix the habitat conservation plan

The Oregon Department of Forestry is preparing to change how the Clatsop State Forest is managed. For those who might not know, the department manages state forestland through a contract with 15 counties, including Clatsop.

The Department of Forestry harvests trees to provide revenue to the counties and local taxing districts and, in return, keeps a third of the revenue to manage the lands, provide public access for recreation and fight wildfire.



COURTNEY BANGS

Hoping to improve both financial and conservation outcomes on state forests, the Department of Forestry and federal wildlife agencies are developing the Western Oregon Habitat Conservation Plan to comply with the federal Endangered Species Act. Unfortunately, as written, the plan fails on both counts.

In negotiating this plan with the federal agencies, a process that took place behind closed doors without county participation, the Department of Forestry quite literally gave away the farm.

Their plan would convert over half of our productive state forestland into a habitat preserve. This would result in an estimated 38% percent drop in the harvest from current levels. Rather than inviting local districts and counties into the conversation to develop strategies that protect both wildlife, local economies and social concerns, the department prepared an unsustainable and financially unviable plan based on inadequate models and incomplete information.

As a mother, teacher and a county commissioner, I'm very concerned about the impact this plan will have on working families and the long-term health and vitality of our county. Each acre of working forests matters for individual taxing districts.

The ripple effect of the plan's pro-



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Public comments are open for the Western Oregon Habitat Conservation Plan.

posed reduction in funding on county programs, local taxing districts and small family-owned businesses would result in long-term negative consequences for our residents. Our forest sector businesses that harvest, transport and process wood from working state forests would take an even harder hit from this proposal – and mills could potentially close.

Roughly 5 acres of productive forestland harvest can pay a teacher's salary for one year. A hundred acres is the equivalent of two teachers for a decade.

It is for these reasons I do not support this habitat conservation plan as currently drafted. It shifts state forest management toward priorities set by Portland-based interest groups, the costs of which will be borne entirely by residents of this county and neighboring counties.

If the Department of Forestry's current plan is adopted, environmental groups will no doubt celebrate the

decrease in harvest, but the cost of those acres will be intimately felt on the North Coast for decades. The result will be lost jobs, shuttered family businesses, fewer teachers, reduced public safety and poorer quality of life.

I do not believe the people who support this plan want that to happen. However, I do believe they are out of touch with the majority of people who actually live and work among these forests and because of that, they do not fully appreciate the true human cost of what is being proposed.

We have significant needs in this county, from housing and homelessness to health services and education. Our financial needs will only grow as we prepare our communities to be more resilient to winter storms, flooding, wildfire and the potential for a Cascadia earthquake event.

Based on the experience of other rural counties who have lost major resource-

based industries, the path toward revenue replacement and recovery is long, steep and uncertain.

State forests make up just 4% of total forestland in Oregon and have different mandates than other public forests. These forests cannot and should not be expected to shoulder additional burdens associated with wildlife habitat conservation.

Sixty percent of forestland in Oregon is federally owned and managed almost entirely as habitat for species such as the northern spotted owl. Thirty years after these forests were all but shut down to harvest, spotted owl populations continue to decline. Habitat is not a silver bullet and yet, the Department of Forestry's plan is following the same failed conservation prescriptions that focus solely on habitat creation and hope.

We need to make smart, sustainable use of the few remaining acres of public forest we have left. We can't afford more ineffective nature preserves.

Let me be very clear, I am not opposed to the concept of a habitat conservation plan or setting aside certain acres for wildlife when occupancy occurs. What I'm opposed to is a plan that disregards experience and science. I'm opposed to a management strategy that ignores the socioeconomic needs of our communities.

The Oregon Board of Forestry has the ability to request the Department of Forestry make improvements to the plan. I will continue to advocate for our county's long-term economic health and sustainability and I urge you to join me.

Let the board overseeing the Department of Forestry know the current plan needs to be fixed. The public comment period has been extended to June 1. Written comments can be submitted on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's website. Comments can also be sent to the Board of Forestry at boardofforestry@oregon.gov

Courtney Bangs serves on the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners.

OUR ENDORSEMENTS

The Astorian made several endorsements for Tuesday's election

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners/District 3 (Astoria):**
Commissioner Pamela Wev

• **Clatsop County Board of Commissioners/District 5 (South County):**
Commissioner Lianne Thompson

• **State House District 32/ Republican primary:**
Cyrus Javadi

• **Measure 4-213/Gearhart firehouse bond:** Yes

• **Measure 4-214/ Knappa fire tax levy:** Yes

GUEST COLUMN

Reinstate federal recognition of Chinook Indian Nation

The Pacific Northwest is shaped by the culture and history of Indigenous peoples who have called this region home since time immemorial.

As leaders of foundations explicitly focused on racial justice working in the states of Washington and Oregon, it is impossible for us to ignore one of the country's most profound injustices unfolding right in our backyards: the historical oppression of the Chinook Nation and the ongoing roadblocks to restore federal recognition.

Federal tribal recognition allows for Native American tribes to possess a measure of sovereignty in the eyes of the federal government, and ensures access to federal and state resources to fund housing, public health and educational opportunities.

After more than a century of hard work, the Chinook Nation was formally recognized at the end of the Clinton administration more than 20 years ago. This rightful recognition was rescinded by the George W. Bush administration just 18 months later in 2002.

Rescinding federal recognition was a declaration that the tribe's sovereignty no longer existed in the eyes of the government, and this decision has led to unconscionable realities for the Chinook people.

The present-day impacts of the historical oppression of the Chinook community are clear: stolen lands, removal from villages, forcing children to attend boarding schools and denial of access to subsistence on their own lands are all part of our story as a nation. And we refuse to let this ongoing oppression continue.

Each of our foundations has a deep



Amiran White

A small group from the Chinook Indian Nation gathered in June at Tansy Point for an abbreviated version of their annual salmon ceremony.

commitment to Washington and Oregon. Through this work we have each found our way, through varying paths, to partnership with the Chinook Nation. Too often, we ask ourselves a familiar question: "Why must the work of justice, healing and reconciliation always rest on the shoulders of those oppressed?"

With so many lives on the line, federal recognition shouldn't be this difficult to achieve. In fact, every tribe that participated in the Chehalis River Treaty negotiations, the 1855 negotiations asking tribal representatives to leave their land, is recognized by the federal government today. All except the Chinook.

Yet the story of the Chinook people persists, even through unjust treatment by the United States government, as documented by our nation's leading law experts on this matter — including the U.S. Department of the Interior.

We have collectively seen the efforts and resilience of the Chinook Nation, and the decision to remedy this historical wrong now lies with Congress. The nation drafted a bill and garnered profound support from local leaders, non-profits, elected officials and tens of thousands of people across America.

This includes the unanimous support by all county commissioners governing Pacific County, Wahkiakum County, Clatsop County, and at various points, all neighboring tribes, including but not limited to, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, Shoalwater Bay Tribe, Chehalis Tribe, Quinalt Indian Nation, the Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde and many more.

This commitment is in partnership with Marguerite Casey Foundation, Arcora Foundation, Group Health Foundation, Schultz Family Foundation, Satterberg Foundation, Northwest Health

Foundation and Empire Health Community Advocacy Fund. As foundations that partner and work primarily with organizations focused on communities of color, we are encouraged and excited to see incredible support and advocacy from grantees and organizations serving Black, Latinx, Pacific Islander and Asian communities across the Northwest.

It is long overdue for Congress to consider the Chinook Nation restoration legislation — legislation that would restore the nation to its rightful place as a federally recognized tribe in the United States.

This legislation will also benefit the broader communities that also call the Chinook lands home. The restoration will assure a much-needed economic boost, enhancement of critical resources and protection of the Pacific Northwest's environment that can only happen from having a recognized tribe properly seated at the mouth of the Columbia River.

We are urging U.S. lawmakers representing Washington and Oregon to take action, but this restoration legislation and bill has yet to be championed through passage and implementation.

Congress has the power to make this legislative change. We urge people everywhere to stand with us and urge Congress to correct this historic injustice. With the growing number of Americans across the nation who support this effort, it will be impossible for our representatives to ignore the Chinook Nation any longer.

Carmen Rojas is the youngest and only Latina president of a nationally endowed U.S. foundation — the Seattle-based Marguerite Casey Foundation — and a nationally recognized leader in economic and worker justice.

Jesse Beason is president and CEO of Northwest Health Foundation, which seeks to advance, support and promote healthy communities in Oregon and southwest Washington state.

Their guest column was originally published in the Seattle Times.