

## Quick takes

### Round-Up tax fight

If it has no value, then why should there be a price on tickets to the Round-Up?  
— Pat Gaede

The Round-Up is irresponsible. Pay your taxes.  
— Amanda Tinhof

If you are a property owner, no matter what type, it is your responsibility to pay your taxes to the county. If they are leasing the facility to the school district doesn't that constitute doing ... business?  
— Jon Patterson

### Gregs take to the legislature

I love that our Rep. Greg Smith looks ready to take on the world. Thanks Greg!  
— Sandy Bennett Matthews

### Voss named fair marshal

Very well deserved for sure. Always look forward to seeing him in the parking lot keeping things organized. Good pick.  
— Sharrie Renick Copeland

One of the great lessons of the Twitter age is that much can be summed up in just a few words. Here are some of this week's takes. Tweet yours @Tim\_Trainor or email editor@eastoregonian.com, and keep them to 140 characters.

# Proposed forest plan is a step backward

By NICK SMITH

Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities

The recent editorial by the *East Oregonian* is correct that the region needs to move forward in resolving the future management of federal forests. Unfortunately, the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision (BMFP) as it is currently written will mean a step backward with regards to forest and community health.

There are good reasons why so many different stakeholders don't support a plan that takes us in the wrong direction, regardless of how much time and resources that have been put into it.

Throughout the development of the BMFP, it has become clear that the proposed Forest Plan is deeply flawed. Even if it's not the agency's intention, the documents suggest the U.S. Forest Service is not interested in active, multiple-use management necessary to restore forest health, keep the forests accessible or protect the region's remaining forest products jobs and infrastructure.

As written, the plan fails to use the best and most recent science, doesn't adequately address community input and completely ignores many of the collaborative forestry principles that have shown some progress in forest treatments.

The plan would treat less than 2.5 percent of suitable timber acres annually,

and would offer harvest levels far below what is needed to keep many of our workers employed and mills open. In fact the plan completely disregards the social and economic needs of nearby communities.

It is also easy to agree with the *East Oregonian* that a forest plan should be about the forest. But as the region endures yet another catastrophic fire season, the BMFP fails to address the underlying problems that are putting our forests at risk. If implemented, forest density and mortality will continue to increase and serve as fuel for future wildfires. Currently, none of the alternatives will actually reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire that threatens our local communities, mills and recreational opportunities.

That's why so many individuals and groups have called on the Forest Service to scrap the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision and urge them to move in a different direction that protects our forests and rural communities. Rather than spending more taxpayer dollars and resources tweaking a flawed BMFP, each of the three National Forests should work with community stakeholders, including

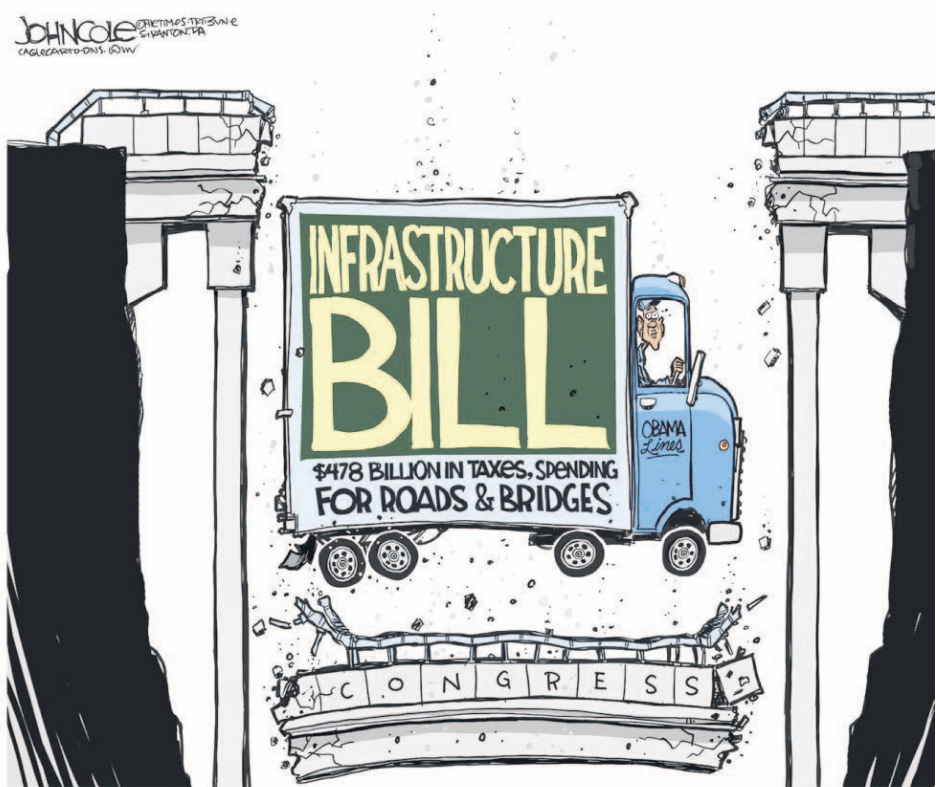
citizens, collaborative groups, industry, local governments and others, to revise (not completely re-write) the current Land Management Plans.

To be clear, the Forest Service deserves credit for taking a step back on the BMFP to reengage the public. Hopefully, these discussions will lead to a more balanced management strategy that keeps the forests healthy, accessible and productive for Eastern Oregonians.

The development of the BMFP, and the public backlash against it, should also encourage our Congressional delegation to seek comprehensive reforms that give front-line agency employees the tools they need to better manage the forests and implement collaborative decisions. Rational federal forest policies that truly balance economic, social and environmental values represent the best possible path forward for the forests and the people who live, work and play on these lands.

Nick Smith is executive director for Healthy Forest, Healthy Communities, a Rosburg-based nonprofit that supports active forest management.

It is clear that the proposed Blue Mountains Forest Plan is deeply flawed.



## The moral 'American Sniper'

Things we can learn from "American Sniper":

You know the movie, right? It has not only been nominated for the Best Picture Oscar, it could wind up selling more tickets than the other seven nominees combined. Plus, it's triggered a left-right controversy that makes the old dust-up over "Duck Dynasty" seem like a tiny cultural blip.

"American Sniper" tells the story of Chris Kyle, a real-life Iraq War veteran and sharpshooter. The film is certainly powerful, and it celebrates our Iraq veterans. But it also eulogizes the killing of Iraq insurgents, including children, and critics feel it ought to be put in the context of an invasion that didn't need to happen in the first place.

There's been less conversation about the final scene in the movie, which shows the hero walking through his family home, where the kids are romping. He's carrying a handgun, which he points at his wife Taya, playfully telling her to "drop them drawers." Taya says she can see he's finally getting over his war traumas and back to his old fun-loving self.

This is, by virtually any standard, insane behavior. Mike Huckabee, a big "American Sniper" fan, recently published a book called "God, Guts, Grits and Gravy," which is so wildly opposed to any weapon regulation that Huckabee opens his chapter on modern education by complaining that public schools are anti-gun. Yet he also presents a list of universally accepted gun safety rules, many of which boil down to: don't point it at anybody as a joke.

"Yeah, but if you want to complain about the casual treatment of guns in movies, you don't have to look very hard on any Friday night," said Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut. Murphy hasn't seen the movie, but he's one of Congress' leading advocates of gun-control regulation. It's not the world's most rewarding job. In recent years, his colleagues have not only refused to pass an extremely modest bill on background checks, they've failed to ban the sale of guns to people on the terrorism watch list.

"American Sniper" is on one, supremely obvious level, a celebration of gun culture. But it's also a cautionary tale. The real Chris Kyle was shot to death while the script was being written. He had volunteered to help a troubled veteran, Eddie Ray Routh, who had a history of violent behavior and was an apparent victim of post-traumatic stress. Kyle felt the best way to get him to relax was to take him to a shooting range. While they were there, Routh turned his gun on Kyle, and one of Kyle's friends, killing them both.



GAIL COLLINS  
Comment

"American Sniper" could actually be seen, at least in the final scene, as a good-gun, bad-gun message. The real Chris Kyle did enjoy walking around the house, twirling a pistol. His wife said that as the clouds lifted after his Iraq service, he would playfully point a gun at the television and pretend to shoot down the bad guys.

Jason Hall, who wrote the movie screenplay, said the scene was meant to both show Kyle in recovery and presage the violence that was about to occur off-screen.

"There's a tension in the scene that builds toward the ending," he said in a phone interview.

The U.S. gun lobby has pushed its cause so far that it, too, may be falling off a cliff. Texas, where Chris Kyle's alleged murderer is going on trial next week, has always had

a gun-friendly culture, so much so that visitors can bring concealed handguns into the state Capitol. Some people definitely do not think this goes far enough, and, on opening day of the Legislature last month, they demanded new laws making it legal to carry handguns in the open, preferably without a license.

One particularly bouncy group, Open Carry Tarrant County, flooded the office of Rep. Poncho Nevarez, a non-supportive Democrat. A video of the ensuing scene showed Nevarez, looking extremely wary, asking the demonstrators to leave his office, while one of them yelled back: "I'm asking you to leave my state." When Nevarez tried to close his door, one of the protesters stuck his foot in it. This was all happening, remember, in a building where carrying concealed weapons is perfectly fine.

When it was all over, some legislators in both parties wore "I'm Poncho" badges in solidarity with Nevarez, who was assigned a security detail after he and his family received threats.

The leader of Open Carry Tarrant County, Kory Watkins, then posted another video in which he claimed that the resistant lawmakers were forgetting their duty was "to protect the Constitution. And let me remind you: Going against the Constitution is treason. And treason is punishable by death."

Meanwhile, in the Texas Capitol, enthusiasm for watering down the gun laws seems to be dwindling. That could qualify as a happy ending.

Gail Collins joined *The New York Times* in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an *Op-Ed* columnist.

In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the *Times's* editorial page.

'American Sniper' is on one, supremely obvious level, a celebration of gun culture. But it's also a cautionary tale.

## Oil pipelines will keep breaking

By ALEXIS BONOGOFSKY

Writers on the Range

On the second day of July in 2011, I walked down to my hay fields to see if the Yellowstone River had flooded its banks. It had — but so had crude oil leaking from Exxon's Silvertip Pipeline, which runs underneath the river upstream from my farm south of Billings, Montana.

That was the beginning of months of dealing with cleanup workers, water and soil testing, while my family suffered from chronic coughs and a lot of stress. In the end, it was determined that 1,500 barrels of oil had spilled into the river.

Three and a half years later, last month on Jan. 17, another oil pipeline broke under the Yellowstone River, 200 miles downstream from me and close to the eastern Montana town of Glendive. It is estimated that around 39,000 barrels spilled into the frozen river; we will probably see this number climb as time goes on.

The spill in Glendive happened despite the promises made by our politicians that oil pipelines would be made safer, and despite the passage of the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011. Really, not much has changed.

Here's how oil spills work. An oil pipeline breaks and the public is the last to know. You are told everything is under control. When you start to feel sick, you're told not to worry — there is no threat to public health. Getting answers always takes longer than it should. The state's Department of Emergency Services seems incapable of dealing with the spill and directs all public questions to the oil company.

People from the Environmental Protection Agency arrive. They tell you that even though you drank some benzene, it's not enough to hurt you. You trust them because they're the EPA, or else you don't trust them, because they're the EPA.

Politicians take tours of the site, nod their heads solemnly and pose for photos so they can show how much they care. The oil spill will get press coverage but the amount of attention will correspond with the location of the spill and the political importance of the residents affected. In Glendive's case, it helps that the Yellowstone River is an iconic river in Montana, but let's be honest here: Glendive is a small town and it's in eastern

Montana, two strikes against it.

The company lowballs the estimate of the amount of oil spilled in the beginning, and then that amount gradually increases as time goes on and fewer people are paying attention. In a river oil spill, once the oil is out, it is out. The company's booms and white napkins do a little, but not enough. Most of the oil that is in the river is in the river for good.

Here are some of the hard-earned lessons that landowners like me learned about pipeline oil spills:

Don't assume that the people running the cleanup operations — either from the government or the oil company — know what they are doing.

Being exposed to oil can make you sick. That may seem obvious, but citizens are usually told that public health is not threatened. So when people do get sick, many don't go to the hospital. I finally went to the emergency room with acute hydrocarbon exposure. (If people do not seek treatment, there is no record of the public health impacts from oil spills, which can be severe.)

You have to be your own advocate. You need to do research, go to public meetings and ask tough questions. It can be hard to confront people, and that is especially true in smaller communities. It is your responsibility to advocate for your community and to be a voice for the people who can't, or won't, speak out.

Don't assume that the people running the cleanup operations — either from the government or the oil company — know what they are doing.

In 2011, I was told by various people who were part of the cleanup that oil was organic so it was safe for my livestock to eat, that oil was essentially a fertilizer, and that our grass would come back greener than ever. Our public health agency even sent out a press release that said being exposed to oil was like being sprayed by a skunk.

Both of the recent oil spills in the Yellowstone River were preventable. Yet oil spills will keep happening to communities all over the West until politicians on both sides of the aisle decide to take pipeline safety seriously and not just pay lip service to the changes needed in oversight and regulation of oil companies. Until then, we're on our own.

Alexis Bonogofsky, a fourth-generation Montanan, is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, a column service of *High Country News* ([hcn.org](http://hcn.org)). She works for the National Wildlife Federation in Billings, Montana, and writes a blog [www.eastbillings.com](http://www.eastbillings.com).