

Quick takes

Warm water stops fishing

Open the dams already! Sheesh let’s let us fish sturgeon only a few days out of a year, but the state can kill them.

— Jonathan Hale

I would love to see the speed boats banned in the Columbia, Morrow County until this problem is resolved.

— Ko-Ko Lalonde

Northwest earthquake risk

I live on the coast now. We know the risks. Anything can happen to anyone at any time. Live well and love hard and hopefully we will all get to continue to do so for a long time.

— Karen E. Davis

It definitely makes me feel uneasy to know that there is no plan with overwhelming evidence. At the same time most people should know by now the risk associated with living towards the coast.

— Jennifer Bush

I feel like someone got sick of high real estate prices and rent increases in both Seattle and Portland and came up with a way to discourage people from moving there.

— Zack Rock

Bacon-flavored seaweed?

Best news all day!

— Lindsey Lambert

Oh, I so hope this can be used for sushi.

— Phil Wright

So, all you have to do to this vegetable to make it good is fry it? It has that in common with every vegetable in existence.

— Jeremy Clark

One word. NO.

— Joy Senger

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.

Wallowa-Whitman forest revision needs input

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is well into summer mode. And that means the usual increase in forest activities, forest visitation and the opportunity to enjoy the seasonal splendor of the Blue Mountains.

As we approach the bustling summer season, I wanted to relay the status of ongoing planning projects here on the forest.

As most of you know, we are continuing to engage our communities on forest plan revision, focusing on several key topics that have been brought forward through formal public comments and continued public involvement. The forest will be participating in upcoming public engagement opportunities through assistance from local organizations including counties, tribes, members of the public and stakeholder groups.

We don’t have all the meetings scheduled in the communities surrounding the Wallowa-Whitman, but are working hard on making sure our publics have an opportunity to be a part of this dialogue on the Forest Plan Revision. So more information is coming soon about meetings in the area and how you can participate.

Secondly, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is continuing its efforts to complete Subpart A of travel management planning. Subpart A process is a science-based, interdisciplinary roads analysis at the forest level that will be documented in a Travel Analysis Report. It is important to understand that Subpart A is a process and not a decision with actions to be implemented. The TAR is a living document that displays findings as opportunities and recommendations to inform future management decisions. The TAR will support the objectives found in the current Wallowa-Whitman forest plan as amended.

The road system identified under the Subpart A analysis would: 1) be a baseline system for Forest Service administration and management of natural resources across the forest; 2) consider long-term funding expectations; 3) describe potential options for roads not identified as necessary for



TOM MONTOKYA
Comment

future resource management needs; and 4) provide recommendations for roads where resource concerns have been identified as well as looking at those roads where we do not have concerns. Based on the analysis roads could be considered for a status change (opened, closed, decommissioned or converted to a motorized trail). These are only recommendations which would be considered as part of future project level decision-making.

The Wallowa-Whitman remains committed to completing the Subpart A analysis by this fall.

The forest has incorporated key public concerns raised during the public involvement process over the past 8 years. A preliminary draft TAR that addresses these concerns is currently undergoing review at our regional office.

Based on the review results, the forest will complete any updates or changes needed and the complete TAR will be made available to the public and shared with our communities. It is also important to understand that the TAR is a living document that may be updated as needed in the future. This analysis is only providing road management suggestions for future site-specific planning efforts, and those site-specific planning efforts will be open for comment from the public prior to any decision.

I strongly encourage further public involvement during site specific project planning efforts when road management decisions will actually be made.

Many folks may recall that the forest previously prepared an environmental impact statement and Record of Decision for Subpart B of Travel Management. Subpart B is the process to actually designate the roads, trails and areas available for public motor vehicle use and publish in a motorized visitor use map. After careful consideration and recognizing intense community concerns, it was determined to withdraw the decision in early 2012.

In March, 2015, Jim Peña, Pacific Northwest regional forester, directed me, as forest supervisor for the Wallowa-Whitman

National Forest, to defer any additional work required under Subpart B of the Travel Management Rule until after the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision is completed, with the following exceptions: Hell’s Canyon National Recreation Area, Bald Angel and Sled Springs Travel Area decisions, to comply with court orders that resulted from past litigation, and complete implementation of the decision on the South Fork Burnt River Travel Planning Area.

In line with the regional direction, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest outside the above exceptions has paused Subpart B analysis until the forest plan revision is complete. Although the process is currently paused, we continue our efforts to develop and build trust and relationships with our communities, and when we resume work across the forest on the Subpart B analysis we hope to continue to work with you through both formal and informal engagements.

I recognize that travel management planning continues to generate considerable public interest and debate. I also know that forest access is vital to sustaining the customs, culture and economic stability of the region and that there are also those who are concerned about the impact of the road system on natural resources.

Because of these concerns the forest remains committed and obligated to providing a safe, responsible and affordable transportation system that meets the needs of the natural resources and public. I understand that this process has been and continues to be challenging, but we look forward to innovative opportunities and creative solutions that result in meeting community needs, improving forest resource protection, all while meeting the intent of the agency’s national policy.

Thank you for taking time to engage on these important issues, and I look forward to all of our community conversations.

Have a safe and enjoyable summertime in the splendid landscape of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Tom Montoya is supervisor of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in Eastern Oregon.



Memories from the gear shed

By MARY EMERICK
Writers on the Range

I could put it off no longer. The gear shed had long been an object of contention in my marriage. “You don’t use half this stuff,” my husband observed, more than once. “You need to go through it and make more room.” Defiantly, he rolled his fat-tired bike into the living room and left it there.

He met my gaze. “Why is that bike in here? That bike is in here because there’s no room in the shed! Because the shed is full of your stuff!”

I surrendered. “OK, I’m going in,” I said, and steeled myself for the task ahead.

For decades, I was a gypsy; everything I owned fit in the back of a Chevette. A seasonal park ranger, I followed summer, ranging from Washington to Idaho to California, making a long loop through Florida and New Mexico, fighting fires and leading interpretive talks. More recently, I moved from Oregon to Alaska and back again, stripping down to the basics. I pared down everything — except for my gear.

I kept it all because I suspected that it would be hard to let anything go. And I was right. This was like an archaeological dig: I was finding my way down through the layers of the person I used to be.

Each item I added to the to-go pile felt like letting go of a memory. Here were the water-bottle packs from my pre-knee surgery days, when I could still run 26 miles in four hours and change. Sorting through them, I remembered my intrepid running partner, Ken, just outside of Sitka, Alaska, the two of us dodging salmon guts freshly dragged by brown bears onto a fish-hatchery road. I could hear us singing, “I’ve lost that lo-o-ving fee-ee-ling,” bellowing soulfully at the top of our lungs to scare away the bears.

That Coleman backpacking stove, the first one I bought with my own money, was a behemoth by today’s standards. The upgrade, the finicky MSR Whisperlite, had a bad habit of exploding in a ball of flame in the Idaho backcountry as a result of over-priming. I remembered nights at high lakes camped with long-gone companions encased in down jackets, the darkness giving us the courage to talk about our dreams.

A dozen backpacks lay piled on a shelf. They reminded me of old boyfriends: The good-looking ones that were too good

to be true, the ones that worked until the relationship became uncomfortable, the ones that turned out to be unexpectedly fragile. A few of them — the backpacks, not boyfriends — ended up getting chewed by marmots.

In one corner lurked the Xtra Tuf rubber boots and kayak paddle from my Southeast Alaska days: In this land-locked, sun-drenched corner of northeast Oregon, would I ever need them again? Would I ever fix fence again with these leather gloves, feel the full-body shudder of a rock bar hitting immovable earth, or hold one end of a misery whip, slicing through a downed tree that blocked a trail? I had once had the latest in firefighting gear: high-heeled logger boots that slid like butter onto my feet, a fancy lumbar pack that hung just right around my hips. Now that was old school; there was newer, better gear.

By the end of the day, I had accumulated a large pile to bring to my town’s gear swap — sleeping bags I’d forgotten I owned, a kayak cart, tents that could house a small family. Piling everything in the truck, I felt both relief and sorrow. Why was it so hard to let the past go? I had a great life now, no longer subject to the whims of the weather, no longer beaten down by a \$5-an-hour wage and the hefting of a heavy chainsaw in the freezing bitter rain. Those were the times it was easy to forget when reminiscing.

The truth, I knew, was this: It’s hard getting older when you’re still in love with the outdoors. As much as you fight aging tooth and nail, as much as you work to keep up the pace, you will never be 20 again, scrambling fearlessly up a talus slope, knowing everything will turn out all right because it always has so far.

But how many more years, months, days did I have? When would 20-mile days become 15, 10, five, zero? I knew I was luckier than others who had succumbed to random falls, lightning strikes, illness. It was unfair to complain. But I did. I wanted it all — the freedom to follow the seasons, plus the security of steady work, the sense of being footloose yet firmly anchored — a thousand more sunsets and mountains, and a life with no end in sight.

Mary Emerick is a contributor to Writers on the Range, a column service of High Country News. She declutters and writes in Oregon. Her novel, The Geography of Water, will be published in November.

Liberals and wages

Hillary Clinton gave her first big economic speech Monday, and progressives were by and large gratified. For Clinton’s message was that the federal government can and should influence to push for higher wages.

Conservatives, however — at least those who could stop chanting “Benghazi! Benghazi! Benghazi!” long enough to pay attention — seemed bemused. They believe that Ronald Reagan proved that government is the problem, not the solution. So wasn’t Clinton just reviving defunct “paleoliberalism”? And don’t we know that government intervention in markets produces terrible side effects?

No, she wasn’t, and no, we don’t. In fact, Clinton’s speech reflected major changes, deeply grounded in evidence, in our understanding of what determines wages. And a key implication of that new understanding is that public policy can do a lot to help workers without bringing down the wrath of the invisible hand.

Many economists used to think of the labor market as being pretty much like the market for anything else, with the prices of different kinds of labor — that is, wage rates — fully determined by supply and demand. So if wages for many workers have stagnated or declined, it must be because demand is falling.

In particular, the conventional wisdom attributed rising inequality to technological change, which was raising the demand for highly educated workers while devaluing blue-collar work. And there was nothing much policy could do to change the trend, other than aiding low-wage workers via subsidies like the earned-income tax credit.

More than two decades ago the economists David Card and Alan Krueger realized that when an individual state raises its minimum wage rate, it in effect performs an experiment on the labor market. Better still, it’s an experiment that offers a natural control group: neighboring states that don’t raise their minimum wages. Card and Krueger applied their insight by looking at what happened to the fast-food sector — which is where the effects of the minimum wage should be most pronounced — after New Jersey increased its minimum wage



PAUL KRUGMAN
Comment

but Pennsylvania did not.

Until the Card-Krueger study, most economists, myself included, assumed that raising the minimum wage would have a clear negative effect on employment. But they found, if anything, a positive effect. Their result has since been confirmed using data from many episodes. There’s just no evidence that raising the minimum wage costs jobs, at least when the starting point is as low as it is in

modern America.

How can this be? There are several answers, but the most important is probably that the market for labor isn’t like the market for, say, wheat, because workers are people. And because they’re people, there are important benefits, even to the employer, from paying them more: better morale, lower turnover, increased productivity. These benefits largely offset the direct effect of higher labor costs, so that raising the minimum wage needn’t cost jobs after all.

The direct takeaway from this intellectual revolution is, of course, that we should raise minimum wages. But there are broader implications, too: Once you take what we’ve learned from wage studies seriously, you realize that they’re not relevant just to the lowest-paid workers.

For employers always face a trade-off between low-wage and higher-wage strategies — between, say, the traditional Wal-Mart model of paying as little as possible and accepting high turnover and low morale, and the Costco model of higher pay and benefits leading to a more stable workforce. And there’s every reason to believe that public policy can, in a variety of ways encourage more companies to choose the good-wage strategy.

So there was a lot more behind Clinton’s speech than I suspect most commentators realized. And for those trying to play gotcha by pointing out that some of what she said differed from ideas that prevailed when her husband was president, well, many liberals have changed their views in response to new evidence. It’s an interesting experience; conservatives should try it some time.

Paul Krugman, The New York Times.