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OUR VIEW

Drought hammers migratory species

National Geographic, authoritative observer of the world's wonders, on July 16 published a sad online story detailing drought's impacts on the birds that migrate through West Coast states.

Much attention has been given to dying and struggling salmon, but NatGeo highlights how species without much obvious commercial value are losing a battle against bleak conditions.

"Birds Are Dying As Drought Ravages Avian Highways" portrays an elaborate tapestry of life that is fading, tattering and being eaten away by big holes as vital wetlands dry up and blow away. This isn't just in California, but metastasizing up into Oregon. With 98 percent of Washington declared last week to be in severe drought, there will be fewer and fewer oases where birds, insects, amphibians or other creatures can find refuge.

The Klamath Basin in southern Oregon and northern California, described as the Everglades of the West, is a crucial link in an interconnected web of habitat essential to migratory birds and local wetland life. In 2013, a diversion of water to help salmon resulted in a short-term disaster:

"For six weeks in August and September, the refuge, which is typically filled with thousands of western sandpipers, greater white-fronted geese, snow geese and northern shovelers, stood desolate. 'It was just quiet and dusty. There was not a drop of water. It was quite a sad scene,'" a scientist told NatGeo. Without enough flow to flush contaminants, avian botulism killed countless birds. In 2015, the Klamath Basin wildlife refuges are again expected to dry up. Federal legislation to help the situation is stalled in Congress, to no one's surprise.

Rebuilding tidal marsh and shallow ponds is making a noticeable difference for birds around San Francisco Bay. Similar projects are being completed, planned and contemplated, all the way up and down the Columbia River. These will become increasingly important gathering places for birds and wildlife as inland watersheds become less reliable.

> It's time for personal and agency action to save birds.

On an individual level, regional writers offer worthwhile thoughts about what we can do as landowners to mitigate the life-and-death struggles of creatures that add infinite richness to the natural world. In her blog, Long Beach (Wash.) Peninsula garden expert Rebecca Hart urges immediate action:

"In view of record heat in the western states, please do all you can to put water out for small creatures. Weighted saucers with water — keep water in shade and refill as necessary. For bees and insects, a shallow dish with marbles for footing helps, too.

"And please join me to put out birdseed, particularly the high protein and black-oil sunflower seeds, because with the hot temps a lot of seed and food crops are burning up and blowing away. I typically don't feed until October, but I'm buying a 50-pound bag at my local best-price store, for $19. And I will continue to put out seed until further notice."

We can personally help alleviate suffering and death. Let's do so.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board of Publisher Kathryn Brown, Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, and Opinion Page Editor Tim Trainor. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

OTHER VIEWS

Consider end-of-life decisions

The (Albany) Democrat-Herald

Last week, when Medicare officials finally got around to announcing that the program would cover costs of voluntary end-of-life counseling, the response was quiet.

Gone were the shrill (and silly) denunciations that such counseling would lead to "death panels" that would be empowered to make the decision about whether it was time to "pull the plug on grandma," in the memorable and misguided words of U.S. Sen. Charles Grassley.

In fact, the furor over the proposal, initially launched by U.S. Rep. Earl Blumenauer of Oregon, threatened to stall President Barack Obama's health care proposal in Congress back in 2009 and 2010.

To his credit, Blumenauer has been quietly pushing the idea ever since. But he wasn't taking credit last week for Medicare's decision. Instead, he recognizes that the nation has moved toward a greater understanding of how important these end-of-life discussions are — and the federal government has taken note of that shift, small as it may be.

"There was a time when the federal government could have been a leader on this, but now it's basically responding to where the rest of America is going," Blumenauer said.

The Medicare policy change, to take effect Jan. 1, was tucked into a massive regulation on payments for doctors released last week. Counseling would be entirely voluntary for patients.

But it's still potentially a huge deal, especially considering that Medicare serves 55 million beneficiaries and is the largest insurer at the end of life.

Some doctors already have these conversations with their patients without billing extra. Some private insurers have begun offering reimbursement as well.

Those are signs of real progress, but we have more work ahead of us: A landmark report from the Institute of Medicine last year concluded that far too many people fail to make their end-of-life wishes known to their doctors or to other family members.

As a result, these vital decisions often fall to people who simply don't have the information they need to make these decisions about life and death. So it's no wonder that so many deaths are filled with breathing machines, feeding tubes, powerful drugs and other treatments that fail to extend life significantly and dramatically reduce the quality of life over those final days and weeks. And it's no wonder that people who say they'd much rather prefer to die at home still die in the hospital. (Although this is a secondary concern, these additional layers of treatment also drive up the costs of our health care system.)

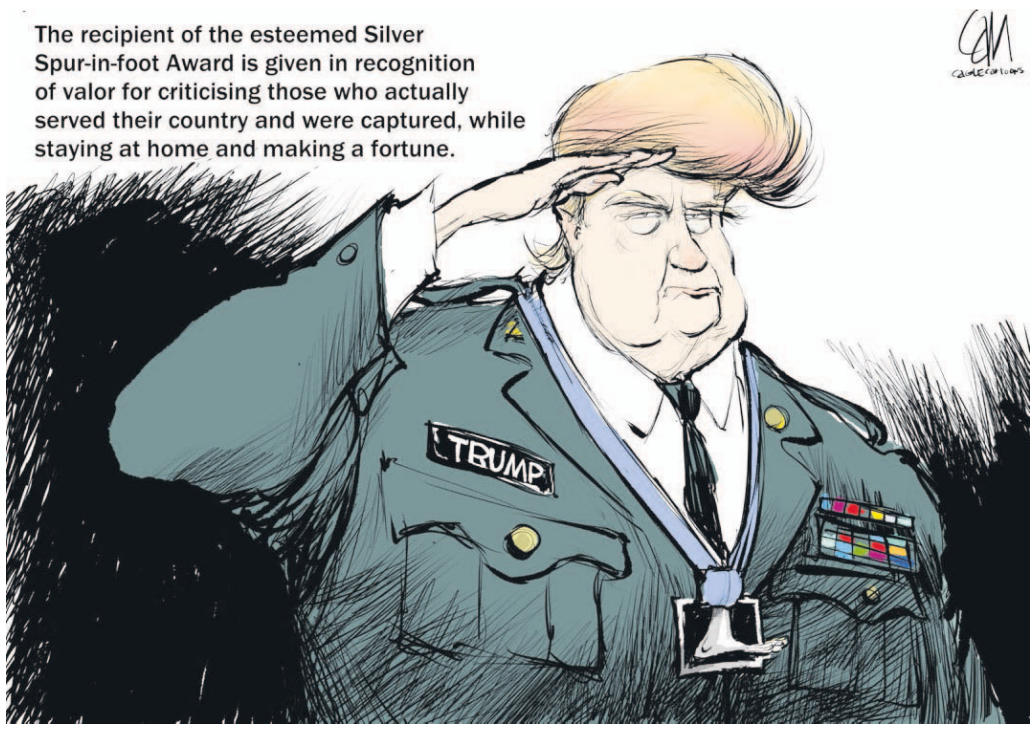
Patients here already have tools in place to help with these decisions: For example, Oregon is among the states that allow patients to specify their preferences with doctors via a document known as Physician Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment, better known by the acronym POLST. The orders, which are signed by a doctor, allow patients to specify their preferences in cases when they might not be able to speak for themselves.

The orders, however, require candid and open conversations about the end of life with doctors, patients and loved ones. This change in Medicare policy helps to pave the way for those discussions.

But it's still up to us to start the conversation.

LETTERS POLICY

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Submitted letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published. Send letters to Managing Editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 97801 or email editor@eastoregonian.com.



OTHER VIEWS

Dustin Yellin's modern community building

DAVID BROOKS
Comment

When Dustin Yellin was 17 he dropped out of high school. The school was filled with jocks and cheerleaders and he clearly didn't fit in. Plus he wasn't intellectually engaged.

He hitchhiked around New Zealand and returned to Colorado. He became an apprentice to an eccentric physicist who believed he could get free energy from space and who performed experiments on Yellin involving crystals, baths of saline solution and hallucinogenic drugs.

When he was 18 Yellin hatched a plan. He would go to New York, become a successful artist and create a place where painters, scientists, writers, billionaires and other cool people could gather to try to change the world. Yellin turns 40 this week, and that's more or less what he's done.

Yellin is a successful artist with a staff of 23 and a studio in Red Hook, Brooklyn. Four years ago he threw the vast bulk of his money (and more) into buying a large brick warehouse that was built as the Pioneer Iron Works in 1866. The building now hosts, well, a little bit of everything.

> Yellin is a successful artist. His studio is a physical manifestation of his mental thrill seeking.

Artists from as far away as France, Israel and South Korea work there in residencies averaging three or four months. There's a magazine, a radio station, a recording studio, a film editing room and spaces for scientists working on everything from nanotechnology, astrophysics and virtual-reality software to 3-D printing. There's a cathedral-like exhibition space, a bookstore, classrooms for adults and neighborhood school kids and lecture programs featuring Nobel Prize-winning physicists and other notables.

Yellin calls it a "museum of process." You can walk through the structure and see different kinds of people doing their art, or just hanging out.

The first time I went, a few months ago, a band was playing, hundreds of intimidatingly hip young people — part model, part geek — were talking, looking at sculpture or playing with their kids in the lush gardens off to the side. It was like a modern version of Andy Warhol's Factory, with microbrews, Web designers, quantum mechanics and consilience.

Yellin did this outside the system. He came to New York, completely ignorant of the canon of art history. The city was his education. He'd meet someone at a bar who'd recommend Dostoyevsky's "The Idiot." Elsewhere he picked up Joseph Cornell and Hieronymus Bosch, who are influential in his work.

Yellin started experimenting with layers of resin and found he could draw in three dimensions. Worried that the resin was too toxic, he switched to glass. He takes up to 50 sheets of glass, up to six feet high, and stacks them together. Between the sheets he inserts hundreds of little pictures, drawings and images clipped out of magazines, art books and the like — Inca masks, soldiers, pictures of old machines.

The effect is a colorful, complex, three-dimensional landscape of the unconscious, what critic Kenneth Goldsmith called a "pop-up utopia." The works are instantly beautiful and absorbingly complicated.

The most fascinating thing about Yellin is his style of community-building. He's a product of the highly distracted Internet age. During the day he bounces between his studio and the Pioneer Works Center, multitasking among sculptures, planning a lecture series or helping edit the magazine. He says he's a problematic boyfriend because he's there till midnight. His studio is a physical manifestation of his mental thrill-seeking and pluralistic attention — there are literally thousands of little images of everything under the sun. "I don't worry about inspiration as much as system overload," he says.

And yet he has brought everything into some sort of cohesion. His sculptures often have the coherent shape of the human figure, but viewers can examine a different part of the figure and then move in any direction to create their own sequence of meanings.

Pioneer Works is a social sculpture that works the same way. It is a cohesive physical community but informal and pluralistic. It is not siloed along disciplinary lines like a university. On the contrary, artists, scientists and writers are jammed together, encouraged to borrow one another's methodologies in pursuit of a project that is both individual and common — finding the hidden order of things.

Yellin's community seeks to be an interdisciplinary Jane Jacobs ballet: hundreds of bodies in different fields going about their own business interminglingly. I wouldn't want it to replace the university (the danger of dilettantism is real), but the creative pyrotechnics are inspiring.

The only question is whether Yellin will be able to enjoy what he's built. He's created a new institution and brought his life to a coherent point — hard things to do in a scattered era. But he can't sit still long enough to have patient conversations with the geniuses he's gathered. He's racing off to the next thrill, a creator too restless to fully savor his living creation.

■

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.

YOUR VIEWS

Trump's immigration comments are correct

Donald Trump of New York, billionaire real estate developer and current Republican candidate for president, made campaign kickoff remarks about illegal immigrants from Mexico deserves some serious examination: "The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems. When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with them. ... They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists," he said, adding, "And some, I assume, are good people."

Why would Mr. Trump, a man who was born in Queens, New York, who surely visited in his 69 years Liberty Island, home of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, make such remarks about illegal immigrants from Mexico?

I can't claim to know the heart of the Donald Trump, but I will speculate on Trump's views on illegal immigrants.

Trump most likely has taken the ferry ride to the Statue of Liberty and while touring the Statue site he must have read the bronze plaque cast with 1883 sonnet written by Emma Lazarus titled "The New Colossus."

Trump after reading Lazarus' "The New Colossus" would know as a student of circumstantial current and past immigration history that immigrants entering Upper New York Bay metaphorically by boat is the legitimate gateway to America while 5.9 million illegal Mexican immigrants sneaking across the country's southern border with Mexico violate federal law and invade the nation's sovereignty.

Donald Trump in preparation for his candidacy for President of the United States very likely knows that the U.S Federal Bureau of Prisons holds 33,108 Mexican nationals, they are 15.9 percent of the federal government's prison inmates.

Furthermore, Trump is also likely aware that there are 18,307 federal prisoners incarcerated for immigration crimes, 9.3 percent of the federal prison population.

Recently, Trump met with families of victims of illegal immigrant crime in California; Trump knows the life-changing impact on families who have lost their loved ones killed by illegal immigrants primarily form Mexico.

American's should thank Donald Trump for speaking so frankly on the topic of illegal immigration and for making it one of the top campaign issues in the 2016 presidential election.

David Olen Cross
Salem