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OUR VIEW

Forest plan revision must be a public process

It's hard to know when to care about the Blue Mountains Forest Plan.

The gargantuan document, which covers more than 5 million acres spread across three national forests and two states, has moved forward at a glacial pace. Little progress has been made in a decade and currently all alternatives have been pulled off the table. No one knows what's even under consideration right now.

But perhaps, just for that reason, this is an important moment.

Public comment periods have ended (we think) and the U.S. Forest Service and Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision team has tucked itself away to create a list of new alternatives for forest management, which it will present at a later date. Once that is done, the process will rev up again in a higher gear.

But before they punch that gas pedal, we'd like to advise the USFS to keep the process clear and transparent, to take the thousands of submitted public comments into consideration, and to allow enough flexibility in the plan to incorporate future economic and environmental changes.

We editorialized a year ago that going back to square one was a bad decision, even though public comments were overwhelmingly against each of the alternatives the Forest Service had put forward. We're not sure what benefit has come from another year of listening sessions — some of which were filled with threats and vitriol that just ratcheted up the anger and frustration — but perhaps some good will be found.

Union County Commissioner Mark Davidson told the *East Oregonian* editorial board earlier this week that a lawyer hired by counties affected by the plan had the opportunity to release a detailed

explanation of their problems with each of the alternatives, and their recommendations for how they could be improved. But Davidson said there had been no response. He said it is frustrating to put so much time and energy and money into an informed, considered rebuttal and be met with silence.

The Forest Service asks for more patience. They say they are scouring over those thousands of comments, and that takes time.

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan will never make everyone happy, even if we work on it for another decade.

"It's just a big effort. It's a lot to make sure we're treating everyone equitably, and nobody is getting shortchanged," Sabrina Stadler, team leader for the forest plan revision, told the *East Oregonian* earlier this week.

We have a ton of respect for the Forest Service, understand the immense complexity of their jobs, the pressure that is pushing on them from every direction, and the overwhelming scale of the plan. And we understand they face an impossible task, balancing the desires of the local users and economies, the directives flowing from Washington, D.C., and the needs of the birds and the bees that call the forest home.

But perhaps the public would welcome their comments on the matter, spoken plainly in plenty of public meetings. Because these comment periods have been a one-way conversation, us talking and government officials mum and straight-faced, taking notes. That's not quite a conversation.

The Blue Mountains Forest Plan will never make everyone happy, even if we work on it for another decade.

But openness, transparency, respect and honest disagreement will at least keep this debate a civil one. As we see right now, that's not always the case in Eastern Oregon land management disputes.

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.

YOUR VIEWS

Powerball prize barely a dent in U.S. national debt

Is it just me, or has anyone contemplated the odds of winning the Powerball lottery? The figure is 292,000,000 to 1. Almost astronomical, until you compare the numbers to our current national debt, which is approaching \$19 trillion. This amount is unfathomable for my pea brain to comprehend. Perhaps I'll find my "Einstein hat" and get back with you.

I just found an example: A trillion \$1 bills would fill 168 forty-foot shipping containers, stretching 1.27 miles. Wow! Thanks for your patience.

Rod Triplett
Hermiston

Sentencing reform would save Oregon billions

I am writing in response to what Barbara Dickerson wrote about Measure 11 reform. We shouldn't just focus on Measure 11, but reform from top to bottom for everybody serving day-for-day sentences.

If we just allow all inmates with a release date the chance to earn up to 20 percent off their sentence, Oregon could invest the \$137 million into education

for our children and our police force to have a stronger presence to deter future crime and invest in programs to help those in need of change.

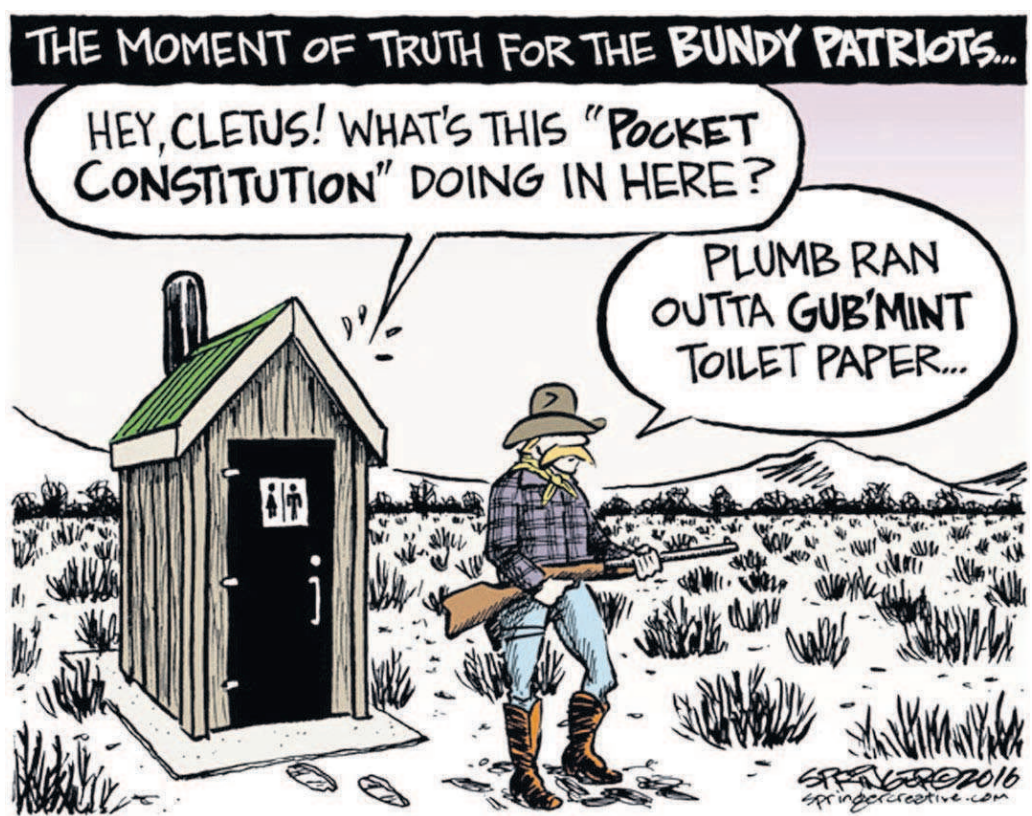
With just the numbers I see in the paper here, Oregon could redirect, over a ten-year span, over \$1 billion. What we see behind bars is all the problems in Oregon where budget cuts need to take place and programs need funding.

If Oregon is serious about our youth and helping those in need, look at the Department of Corrections. If an inmate has a release date already, and giving him or her the chance to earn 20 percent off their sentence doesn't hurt anybody and allows the inmate to prove they deserve the time off, why not?

I am like other Oregon inmates, I have a family that needs me and would like me home doing my duty as a man, as a father. Yet I made a bad choice and here I am serving a day-for-day sentence — costing Oregon taxpayers instead of being a taxpayer.

As a whole our children need education, the best we can provide, and people need to feel protected. Time for reform.

Jeremy Leighton
Two Rivers Correctional Institution,
Umatilla



OTHER VIEWS

When beauty strikes

Across the street from my apartment building in Washington there's a gigantic supermarket and a CVS. Above the supermarket there had been a large empty space with floor-to-ceiling windows. The space was recently taken by a ballet school, so now when I step outside in the evenings I see dozens of dancers framed against the windows, doing their exercises — gracefully and often in unison.

It can be arrestingly beautiful. The unexpected beauty exposes the limitations of the normal, banal streetscape I take for granted every day. But it also reminds me of a worldview, which was more common in eras more romantic than our own.

This is the view that beauty is a big, transformational thing, the proper goal of art and maybe civilization itself. This humanistic worldview holds that beauty conquers the deadening aspects of routine; it educates the emotions and connects us to the eternal.

By arousing the senses, beauty arouses thought and spirit. A person who has appreciated physical grace may have a finer sense of how to move with graciousness through the tribulations of life. A person who has appreciated the Pietà has a greater capacity for empathy, a more refined sense of the different forms of sadness and a wider awareness of the repertoire of emotions.

John O'Donohue, a modern proponent of this humanistic viewpoint, writes in his book "Beauty: The Invisible Embrace": "Some of our most wonderful memories are beautiful places where we felt immediately at home. We feel most alive in the presence of the beautiful for it meets the needs of our soul. ... Without beauty the search for truth, the desire for goodness and the love of order and unity would be sterile exploits. Beauty brings warmth, elegance and grandeur."

The art critic Frederick Turner wrote that beauty "is the highest integrative level of understanding and the most comprehensive capacity for effective action. It enables us to go with, rather than against, the deepest tendency or theme of the universe."

By this philosophy, beauty incites spiritual longing.

Today the word eros refers to sex, but to the Greeks it meant the fervent desire to reach excellence and deepen the voyage of life. This eros is a powerful longing. Whenever you see people doing art, whether they are amateurs at a swing dance class or a professional painter, you invariably see them trying to get better. "I am seeking. I am striving. I am in it with all my heart," Vincent van Gogh wrote.

Some people call eros the fierce longing for truth. "Making your unknown known is the

important thing," Georgia O'Keeffe wrote. Mathematicians talk about their solutions in aesthetic terms, as beautiful or elegant.

Others describe eros as a more spiritual or religious longing. They note that beauty is numinous and fleeting, a passing experience that enlarges the soul and gives us a glimpse of the sacred. As the painter Paul Klee put it, "Color links us with cosmic regions."

These days we all like beautiful things. Everybody approves of art. But the culture does not attach as much emotional, intellectual or spiritual weight to beauty. We live, as Leon Wieseltier wrote in an essay for The Times Book Review, in a post-humanist moment. That which can be measured with

data is valorized. Economists are experts on happiness. The world is understood primarily as the product of impersonal forces; the nonmaterial dimensions of life explained by the material ones.

Over the past century, artists have had suspicious and varied attitudes toward beauty. Some regard all that aesthetics-can-save-your-soul mumbo jumbo as sentimental claptrap. They want something grittier and more confrontational. In the academy, theory washed like an avalanche over the celebration of sheer beauty

— at least for a time.

For some reason many artists prefer to descend to the level of us pundits. Abandoning their natural turf, the depths of emotion, symbol, myth and the inner life, they decided that relevance meant naked partisan stance-taking in the outer world (often in ignorance of the complexity of the evidence). Meanwhile, how many times have you heard advocates lobby for arts funding on the grounds that it's good for economic development?

In fact, artists have their biggest social impact when they achieve it obliquely. If true racial reconciliation is achieved in this country, it will be through the kind of deep spiritual and emotional understanding that art can foster. You change the world by changing peoples' hearts and imaginations.

The shift to post-humanism has left the world beauty-poor and meaning-deprived. It's not so much that we need more artists and bigger audiences, although that would be nice. It's that we accidentally abandoned a worldview that showed how art can be used to cultivate the fullest inner life. We left behind an ethos that reminded people of the links between the beautiful, the true and the good — the way pleasure and love can lead to nobility.

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



DAVID BROOKS
Comment

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LETTERS POLICY

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