

## Quick takes

### Eastern Oregon economy

Local communities dependent upon commodity extraction (e.g. logging, grazing, mining) are inherently unstable. Those who remember the “good old days” of resource extraction are looking at the world through rose-colored glasses, because for every boom, there was a “bust.”

— doug fir

There is no heyday of logging now, there is nearly no logging. The pendulum has swung too far. We are setting up for some major fire issues and the trees will be lost to all.

—Brownknight

Non payment of property taxes by largest landowner in the county? Poverty.

PILT does not even come close to the taxes which would be generated.

— EQ\_Pres

In the past we have witnessed the destruction of old growth forests, rivers and streams that are in these areas by logging and mining. The industries involved never pick up the tab to fix the mess they created.

— David Ewers

### Malheur occupation holdouts

Time to quit wasting money, personnel and time. Put them in jail and don't let them out until they have put up money and/or property to cover damage and cost incurred.

— William Akers

I was wondering if their rap sheets were as impressive as the first bunch arrested. These guys look like lightweights but they'll make up a lot of ground by the time this is over, they're tried and put away for twenty to life.

— Joel Watson

Terrorists!

— Don Wirtz

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.

# The surprising history of the Malheur refuge

By NANCY LANGSTON  
Writers on the Range

National wildlife refuges such as the one at Malheur near Burns have importance far beyond the current furor over who manages our public lands. Such refuges are becoming increasingly critical habitat for migratory birds because 95 percent of the wetlands along the Pacific Flyway have already been lost to development.

In some years, 25 million birds visit Malheur, and if the refuge were drained and converted to intensive cattle grazing — which is something the “occupiers” threatened to do — entire populations of ducks, sandhill cranes, and shorebirds would suffer. With their long-distance flights and distinctive songs, the migratory birds visiting Malheur's wetlands now help to tie the continent together.

This was not always the case. By the 1930s, three decades of drainage, reclamation, and drought had decimated high-desert wetlands and the birds that depended upon them. Out of the hundreds of thousands of egrets that once nested on Malheur Lake, only 121 remained. The American population of the birds had dropped by 95 percent. It took the federal government to restore Malheur's wetlands and recover waterbird populations, bringing back healthy populations of egrets and many other species.

Yet despite the importance of wildlife refuges to America's birds, not everyone appreciates them. At one recent news conference, Ammon Bundy called the creation of Malheur National Wildlife refuge “an unconstitutional act” that removed ranchers from their lands and plunged the county into an economic depression.

This is not a new complaint. Since the Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1980s, rural communities in the West have blamed their poverty on the 640 million acres of federal public lands, which make up 52 percent of the land in Western states.

Rural Western communities are indeed suffering, but the cause is not the wildlife refuge system. Conservation of bird habitat did not lead to economic devastation, nor were refuge lands “stolen” from ranchers. If any group has prior claims to Malheur refuge, it is the Paiute Indian Tribe.

For at least 6,000 years, Malheur was the Paiutes' home. It took a brutal Army campaign to force the people from their reservation, marching them through the snow to the state of Washington in 1879. Homesteaders and cattle barons then moved onto Paiute lands, squeezing as much livestock as possible onto dwindling pastures, and warring with each other over whose land was whose. Scars from this era persist more than a century later.

In 1908, President Roosevelt established the Malheur Lake Bird Reservation on the lands of the former Malheur Indian Reservation. But the refuge included only the lake itself, not the rivers that fed into it. Deprived of water, the lake shrank during droughts, and squatters moved onto the drying lakebed. Conservationists, realizing they needed to protect the Blitzen River that fed the lake, began a campaign to expand the refuge.

But the federal government never forced the ranchers to sell, as the occupiers at Malheur claimed, and the sale did not impoverish the community. In fact, it was just the opposite: During the Depression years of the 1930s, the federal government paid the Swift Corp. \$675,000 for ruined grazing lands. Impoverished homesteaders who had squatted on refuge lands

eventually received payments substantial enough to set them up as cattle ranchers nearby.

John Scharff, Malheur's manager from 1935 to 1971, sought to transform local suspicion into acceptance by allowing local ranchers to graze cattle on the refuge. Yet some tension persisted. In the 1970s, when concern about overgrazing reduced — but did not eliminate — refuge grazing, violence erupted again. Some environmentalists denounced ranchers as parasites who destroyed wildlife habitat. A few ranchers responded with death threats against environmentalists and federal employees.

But violence is not the basin's most important historical legacy. Through the decades, community members have come together to negotiate a better future. In the 1920s, poor homesteaders worked with conservationists to save the refuge from irrigation drainage.

In the 1990s, Paiute tribal members, ranchers, environmentalists and federal agencies collaborated on innovative grazing plans to restore bird habitat while also giving ranchers more flexibility. In 2013, such efforts resulted in a landmark collaborative conservation plan for the refuge, and it offers great hope for the local economy and for wildlife.

The poet Gary Snyder wrote, “We must learn to know, love, and join our place even more than we love our own ideas. People who can agree that they share a commitment to the landscape — even if they are otherwise locked in struggle with each other — have at least one deep thing to share.”

Collaborative processes are difficult and time-consuming. Yet they have proven that they have the potential to peacefully sustain both human and wildlife communities.

Nancy Langston is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, an opinion service of *High Country News*. She is a professor of environmental history at Michigan Technological University, and the author of a history of Malheur Refuge, *Where Land and Water Meet: A Western Landscape Transformed*.

# A tale of two sheriffs

When a tough guy loses his composure, it startles us. That happened last week at the FBI press conference following the arrest of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupiers.

Following an FBI agent and a deputy U.S. prosecutor for Oregon, it was Harney County Sheriff Dave Ward's turn at the microphone. Speaking without notes, Ward fought to contain his emotions as he described how the armed occupation had torn the town of Burns apart.

Beneath the national story of armed occupiers versus the feds were two significant subplots. One of them was just what Sheriff Ward described — the stress of feeling incipient violence in the midst of a small rural town. The other subplot was the tale of two sheriffs.

While Sheriff Ward was one of the solid, impressive players in this drama, Sheriff Glenn Palmer of neighboring Grant County was at best embarrassing, and at worst an enabler of lawbreakers, putting his own county's residents at risk.

A major motif of the mythology of the West is the sheriff who defends his community from armed invaders. Palmer effectively threw his support to the outsiders, preferring hotheads instead of the rule of law.

It was Palmer's invitation to Ammon Bundy that drew Bundy and his leadership core to John Day on the fateful afternoon of Jan. 26. The FBI set up a highway block at the county line, arresting Bundy and seven others and killing one.

Sheriffs occupy a unique place in American law enforcement. While they must be certified by the Oregon Board of Police Standards and Training, they are not hired in the manner of a police chief or FBI agent. They are elected at the ballot box. That allows many of them to assume they have leeway that police chiefs do not. And it gives a sheriff the opportunity to make boneheaded moves, unchecked by a superior.

Prior to the appearance of the Malheur refuge occupiers, Sheriff Palmer decided last September that he would write a natural resource management plan for Grant County. The County Court (its governing body) reminded Palmer that he had no authority to do so. Then Palmer made sheriff's deputies of a group of 11 citizens to execute the task.



STEVE FORRESTER  
Comment

In his remarks beckoning the lawbreakers inside the Malheur Refuge, Sheriff Palmer exhibited three self-destructive characteristics. As with his baseless attempt to write a county natural resources plan, Palmer acted as though he were a law unto himself. And by intimating that the armed lawbreakers would be welcomed in Grant County, he undercut the sheriff of Harney County. Thirdly, Palmer chose to destabilize the communities' security and stability for which he is responsible.

Because they are elected by local people and thus particularly accountable to them, sheriffs and the deputies they employ are often the most well-liked law enforcement personnel. Especially in rural areas where their mission often includes search and rescue, sheriffs are rightly considered to be on the side of the people.

However, unlike a thousand years ago in Anglo-Saxon England when the role of neighborhood boss or “shire-reeve” originated, they have long since ceased to be the top elected officials in their counties.

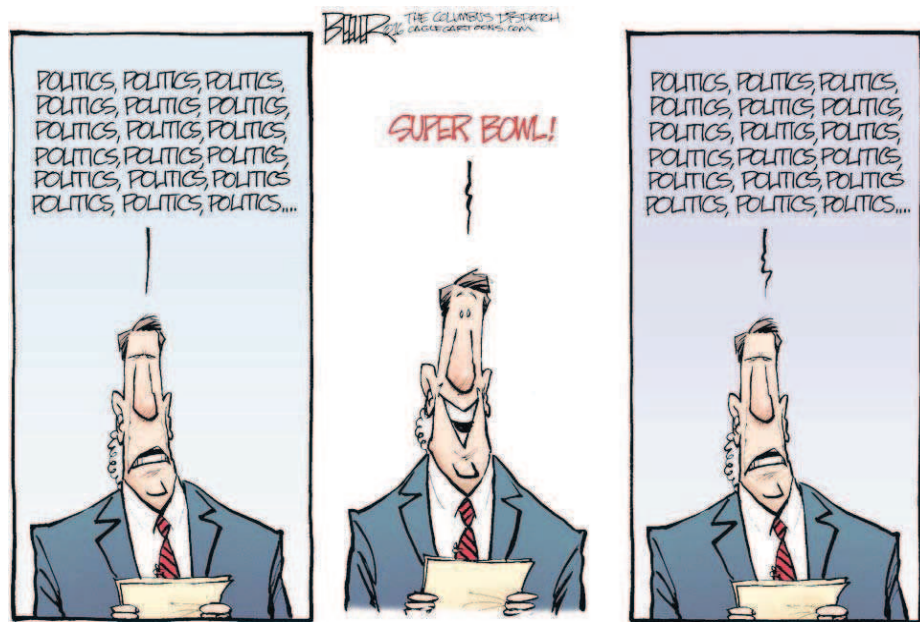
Boards of county commissioners — who themselves must follow state and federal laws — set local policy.

This evolution in local government partly came in response to sheriffs who acted like powers unto themselves. At worst, they behaved like gangland bullies, choosing which laws to enforce and who to enforce them against (Think sheriffs in the Jim Crow South).

Sheriff Palmer aligns himself with the so-called “constitutional sheriff” movement, in which mainly rural sheriffs and others like the Bundys designate themselves as the ultimate authorities on what is and is not “constitutional.” Seldom possessing any actual training in constitutional law, they presume to interpret it for their counties. This arrogance flies in the face of everything that makes our nation great.

One of the primary strengths of our nation is one law for all. We can't afford to remain silent when local officials act outside this system.

Steve Forrester is publisher of *The Daily Astorian*, a sister publication of the *East Oregonian*.



A Brief COMMERCIAL BREAK

# Renewable energy has benefited Eastern Oregon

By GARY THOMPSON  
Sherman County Judge

Oregonians east of the Cascades have long enjoyed a unique way of life that is blessed with wide open places that allow for farming and other business while preserving our natural environment and great outdoors.

This is possible in part due to Oregon leading the way in renewable energy that creates jobs, keeps power bills low, and helps preserve our environment and climate.

Thanks in large part to Oregon, Washington, and California passing Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) over the past 10 years, mid-Columbia counties have greatly benefited from economic activity generated by the need for renewable energy to comply with the RPS policies.

Since 2000, more than \$9 billion has been invested in renewable energy in Oregon — most of that in the mid-Columbia region — to install more than 3,350 MWs of generation—enough to power more than 750,000 households.

Wind power projects in the mid-Columbia region have resulted in over \$2.5 billion in investment and over \$150 million in new county revenues. In Sherman County alone, wind projects have resulted in more than \$77 million in revenues to the county budget to date. The wind projects also have created needed employment in our region — more than 700 construction jobs and 60 long-term operations and maintenance jobs.

The new revenues have been a godsend to our counties in funding needed public services, road improvements, and other infrastructure,

and they helped us to survive the Great Recession.

Even better, these huge new benefits to our region have not caused any significant increase to rates paid by our citizens — and for most of the energy consumers using public power from BPA, there have been absolutely no impact on rates!

**Wind projects in the mid-Columbia region have resulted over \$2.5 billion in investment and over \$150 million in new county revenues.**

Now, however, Oregon and Washington utilities have largely met their obligations to acquire new renewable energy under the respective RPS, and new wind project development is drying up in our region. Fortunately, a bill (HB 4036) has been introduced in Salem to increase Oregon's RPS from 25 percent to 50 percent.

The bill is supported by an interesting coalition of electric

utilities, clean energy advocates, and economic development advocates. If passed, the mid-Columbia region and the state stand to gain enormous additional economic benefits over the coming decades, and economic analysis shows that it can be done, again, with no significant impact on electricity rates in our region or throughout the state.

Oregon and the Mid-Columbia region have benefited greatly over the past century and today from the first wave of renewable energy — the Columbia River dams.

Now we are blessed with another wave of economic opportunity in the form of wind and solar development. We strongly support passage of HB 4036 this session and urge you to voice your support for the legislation as well with your state legislators.

Gary Thompson, of Moro, is a Sherman County Judge.

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