

Quick takes

Memories of elementaries

I remember living across the street and having fun at Washington: field day on the red rock track, climbing the tree, the unsafe playground equipment, roller skating in the gym, and Iris, the playground aide and neighbor.

— **Jovanna Centre**

Feds may cut airport subsidy

More unqualified pen pushers making decisions without considering the people who use the flights!

— **Pat Meuret**

I've really enjoyed Seaport for business travel but Amtrak would be a great alternative.

— **Micah Engum**

Just maybe it's a blessing in disguise. Cut some of that federal umbilical cord. If a private company can't make it work, then the government sure won't be able to either. Figure out another way.

— **Bryan N Becky Miltenberger**

ODOT asks for oil train halt

Why are we still using wooden ties when almost everywhere else uses concrete or steel?

— **Michael Lovejoy**

The train was headed to Vancouver and Tacoma. According to the risk assessment experts, the maximum foreseeable loss would be \$6 billion in Vancouver.

— **Don Charles Steinke**

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.

Blame the market, not environmental regulation

By **GEORGE WUERTHNER**
Writers on the Range

Critics of public lands like to say that timber jobs declined and mills closed over the last 20 years because environmental protections such as the Endangered Species Act and other laws made the cost of logging skyrocket. This complaint is repeated so often it is usually stated as unqualified truth.

If you believe the rhetoric, the way federal lands are managed has been the problem. If only there were more private owners of the land, local economies would prosper, and there would be stable, long-term stewardship.

If only that were true. But if you compare the mostly private wood-products industry in the state of Maine to the West's experiences on public land, you find that environmental regulations had little to do with the demise of logging.

Ninety percent of Maine is forested, and more than 93 percent of the state's land is privately owned, mostly by large timber companies that sell trees to the wood-products industry. If private lands lead to prosperity and healthy landscapes, Maine should be the poster child for the country. And unlike the West, Maine, imposes minimal regulations on private landowners. There are also almost no listed endangered species in Maine to harry the timber industry.

Yet today, the forest-products industry in Maine is a shadow of its former self. In 1980, there were 25 pulp and paper mills in the state. Today, two-thirds of those mills are gone. Since 1990, the state has lost 13,000 of its approximately 17,000 paper-industry jobs, including more than 2,300 in the past five years. The decline continues. Associated wood products companies in Maine have also seen a decline — everything from wood furniture,

wood flooring and clothespin producers have closed up shop.

The decline in both employment and production in Maine was caused by the same forces that drastically cut forest industry jobs in the West: foreign competition, which brought in cheaper wood products, technological advances and new automation that allowed computers instead of people to run machinery. High energy prices and labor costs also played a role as plastic and steel moved in to replace wood.

Think about the brightly colored plastic Adirondack chairs for sale at Home Depot now replacing the wooden chairs on which they are modeled. Instead of wood rafters, steel-beam has replaced two-by-fours in some construction, and so forth. The decline in newspapers and print materials has also dramatically altered demand for pulp production. All of these factors are affecting the West's wood industry as much as they affect Maine.

These days, most of the new sawmills and pulp mills built in the United States are in the South. Trees grow faster there, and unlike the western United States, they can reach harvestable age in a decade or two. To the timber industry, the longer you have to wait to cut trees, the higher the risk. Your trees might die in a forest fire, a beetle outbreak or some other natural event. So locating your mills in places where you can grow a tree to merchantable size quickly is a smart business practice.

Furthermore, most of the Southern timberlands are flat and accessible year-round. In the steep mountains of the West,

road construction costs are far greater, and snow limits seasonal access.

So that's the picture: The decline of the Western wood products industry — like that in Maine — occurred because of economic realities that favor other regions of the globe. Blaming environmentalists, endangered species protection, or environmental regulations is easy. But blame fails to explain a changing world, or help us understand its nuances.

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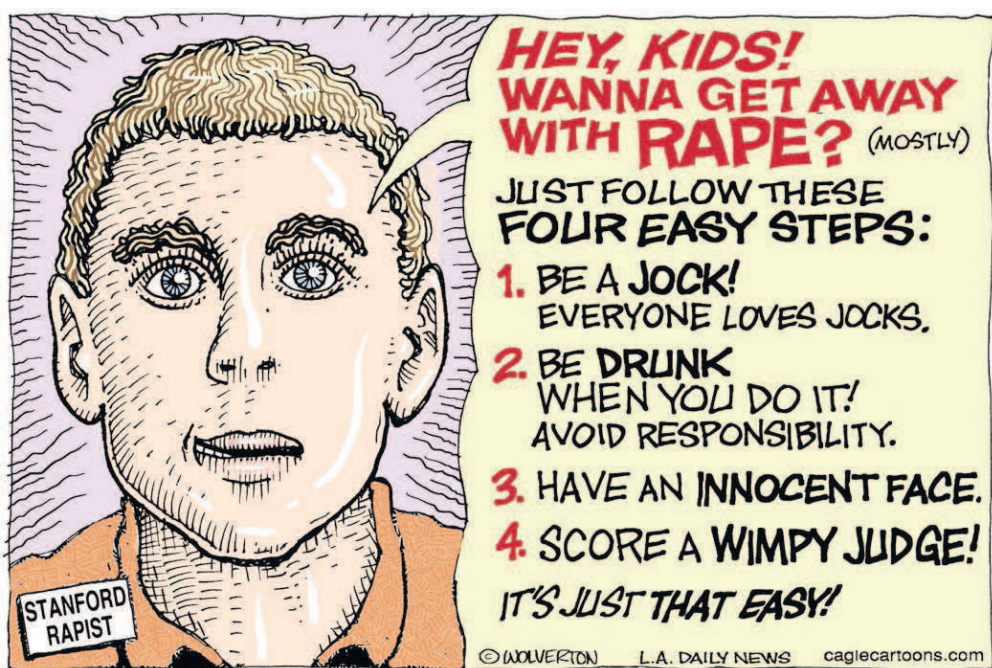
Unlike Maine, the West has an alternative. Its abundant public lands — in particular its wilderness areas, national parks and monuments — provides the foundation for another future for the region. While not all the changes that come with

the "new" economy are welcome — take sprawl and increased impacts from recreational users — they can be managed if we make intelligent choices.

The West boasts iconic wildlands like Grand Canyon and Yellowstone national parks, the Owyhee Canyonlands and the Gila Wilderness. In the end, federal ownership and protection of wildlands and open spaces is far superior to the Maine model of private ownership and maximized profits.

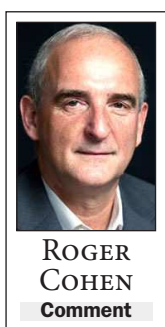
Our model gives us the chance to manage forests sensibly, and it offers at least some potential for a more sustainable future for Western communities.

George Wuerthner is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, an opinion service of *High Country News*. He lives in Bend and is an ecologist who has published 38 books about Western environmental issues.



Brexit would be a colossal blunder

BARI, Italy — The prospect that Britain might next week commit an act of national folly by voting to leave the European Union has politicians throughout Europe alarmed. Integration has been the Continent's leitmotif for more than six decades. Fracture would suddenly be underway. And what would be left?



ROGER COHEN
Comment

"If a British withdrawal were seen by Germany as opening the way to govern Europe as a Germanic federation, the European Union will fall apart," Michele Emiliano, the president of the southern Puglia region, told me in an interview. "Europe can only function as a union of equal states. Under German dominion, it would contain the genes of its dissolution." Germany has already become what the postwar strategic architecture of Europe was designed to prevent: the Continent's most powerful nation. But Britain, through the size of its economy, has played an offsetting role. Absent Britain, Germany would loom larger still, a source of alarm to the economically weaker Mediterranean states.

Postwar Italy was fragile, torn between the West and communism, between "scaling the Alps" and succumbing to the Mafia-suffused inertia of the south, or mezzogiorno. European Union membership was the country's anchor and magnet, securing it in the free and democratic Western family, luring it toward prosperity. Now that role is played most conspicuously for newer members of the union. But its importance persists.

Emiliano, a former mafia-combating public prosecutor, heads a region that is its own tribute to the union's quiet miracles. Puglia, long a languishing part of the chronically underdeveloped south, is now an area of fast-growing industry and tourism, the poster child of the generally depressed mezzogiorno. Like other outlying regions of the EU, it has been slowly tugged through stability toward the living standards of the European core.

In a Facebook post, Martin Fletcher, a former foreign editor of *The Times of London*, put these European Union achievements well.

"Contrary to the cartoon caricature of the EU we read about in the national press," he wrote, the union "has cemented peace in Europe. It allows younger generations to live and work anywhere in Europe in a way my generation could only dream about. It has vastly simplified travel across the Continent. It has brought Eastern Europe into the family of free, democratic nations after decades of Soviet control. It has broken up powerful monopolies and cartels in a way national governments acting alone could not. It has forced member states to clean up the environment."

He continued: "We would be willfully removing ourselves from a single market of 500 million people without the faintest idea whether, or on what terms, we would be allowed to continue trading with 27 EU states who would want to punish us. Why on earth would we take such a monumental risk?"

The answer is that this huge gamble would be taken for the chimera of restored "sovereignty." It would reflect petulant nationalism, base bigotry and laughable Little England pretensions. Fletcher expressed the reality behind all this with laconic bluntness: "As a single country we would have minimal influence on world affairs."

Does anyone seriously think the prospect of British sanctions would alarm Vladimir Putin, or have persuaded Iran to curtail its nuclear program?"

The European Union has significant failings, many of them precipitated by the sudden end of the Cold War, the reach to embrace states formerly enslaved in Moscow's imperium, and the flawed attempt to contain a united Germany by integrating it into a common currency called the euro. It is,

as an overarching European structure, short on democracy and long on bureaucracy.

But, as Italy's postwar development demonstrates, its achievements far outweigh its problems, which Britain could play a leading role in addressing.

"Politics is about seizing the moment, interpreting what history has given you the responsibility to do," Emiliano told me. "Thanks to the Americans who landed on Sicilian beaches, I have the freedom to speak and you the freedom to write. I never forget this. If politics is not about respecting the past to secure the future, it is merely a mirror you gaze in, a form of narcissism."

Such narcissism is rampant in Britain and America these days. For Britain to succumb to its delusions and leave the union would be a colossal blunder of historic proportions.

When in Italy, I often think of my late uncle, Bert Cohen, who, as an officer of the 6th South African Armored Division, 19th Field Ambulance, fought the entire Italian campaign, moving up the peninsula from south to north. After the Allied victory, he visited Berchtesgaden in the Bavarian Alps, on September 2, 1945, and went up to Hitler's mountain retreat, the Eagle's Nest. He etched his name on the Fuhrer's table.

What sweet retribution to have "Cohen" inscribed there!

Later, he made his life in Britain — the home of a freedom that, to him, was not insular but European and universal. To vote out would also betray that inscription and all it stands for.

Roger Cohen joined *The New York Times* in 1990. He was a foreign correspondent for more than a decade before becoming acting foreign editor on Sept. 11, 2001, and foreign editor six months later.

"Europe can only function as a union of equal states. Under German dominion, it would contain the genes of its dissolution."

— **Michele Emiliano**, President, Italy's Puglia region

Bridging Oregon's rural/urban gap

The (Albany) Democrat-Herald

Maybe you've heard of that song "How 'Ya Going to Keep 'Em Down on the Farm (After They've Seen Poree)?" The idea behind the song, a big hit during World War I, was that once our soldiers saw the bright lights of the city, they'd be reluctant to return to the farms from whence they came. Lorrie Andrews might argue that the song has it backward.

Andrews is the superintendent of the Burnt River School District, in Unity, in Eastern Oregon. Unity has a population of 71, according to the 2010 Census. Burnt River School, where Andrews also serves as principal and teaches, is a public charter school with 34 students this past school year.

Burnt River School is also the source of a terrific idea that might end up doing more to heal the gap between rural and urban Oregon than anything coming out of Salem: Recently, schools in Portland sent out an invitation to high school students there: Come to Burnt River for a semester and study agriculture and science.

Dozens of Portland students and their families emailed back. Eight of them will be at Burnt River when the new school year begins.

We read about the program in a recent story in the *Capital Press* by Eric Mortenson. Since I've written in the past about the rural-urban gap in Oregon, I was intrigued enough to speak with Andrews last week about the program. Andrews said the situation at Burnt River is similar to what's been happening at smaller schools around the state: The school has been facing declining enrollment for the last few years.

But Burnt River teachers and administrators knew they had something of value to offer students, and had to look no further than the experiences of the exchange students who came to the school from other countries (often from large urban areas). Those exchange students have found the experience life-changing: "They come as strangers and they leave as family," Andrews said. "It's a tough time when they have to say goodbye."

Andrews was cautiously optimistic when the time came to extend the invitation to Portland students: Not only did she think there might be some appeal in studying agriculture and science in a rural setting, but she thought some families might prefer the smaller school setting Burnt River offers.

The first batch of students will be all girls (the idea is to alternate between girls and boys each semester). They'll stay with ranching families, and so will get firsthand experience at working with animals.

The additional students will increase the school district's budget: The State School Fund pays districts \$7,100 per student, and that money will flow to Burnt River.

But that's a nice added bonus for a program that offers such promise to build bridges, one person and one family at a time, between rural and urban Oregon. And Andrews expects that the experience will be valuable to Burnt River students and staff members as well.