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OUR VIEW

State of Oregon owes rural counties

Across the West, rural counties, school districts and local governments that once depended on natural resources such as timber have been slowly sinking into a sea of red ink.

The problem: State and federal land managers have unilaterally changed the rules of how natural resources are managed. The result has been less economic activity such as logging, leading to ever-tighter local budgets. Those local governments and school districts once shared the revenue from timber cut on public lands. Now they receive only a small fraction of what they previously received.

Those who defend the change in resource management say those counties and school districts should just pass special tax levies to cover the shortfalls. Such statements reflect their ignorance about the economy of the rural West. If logging is the primary economic activity and it is curtailed, then a tax levy will not cover the shortfall. People collecting unemployment insurance cannot afford higher tax bills.

This argument is playing out in a courtroom in Albany where Linn County officials are suing the state for \$1.4 billion they and 14 other counties have been shorted since 1998.

According to Linn County's lawyers, that's the year the state changed the way it manages Forest Trust Lands. The counties gave those timber lands to the state to manage on their behalf.

Under the change, instead of managing the timber to produce revenue, the state decided to manage it for other objectives — without the counties' consent.

During a hearing in July, the state's lawyers essentially tried

to duck the question of whether the state owes the counties any money. They talked about "greatest permanent value" and that the statute doesn't require "revenue maximization."

What they didn't argue is whether the state has a moral and ethical obligation to manage those lands in a way that doesn't leave the counties and school districts broke.

It should be noted that across the West, the federal government has also done its best to squeeze natural resource companies out of business. In many rural areas, where once a thriving timber industry existed, there remains only abandoned mills or a mill operating at a fraction of its capacity. The only mills that remain profitable are those that own timber and don't depend entirely on government timber sales.

This is a direct result of federal managers — Uncle Sam owns most of the land in the West — deciding to shut down or vastly reduce logging in many areas.

With the state of Oregon managing timber land for "greatest permanent value" and the federal managers tightening the timber supply, rural counties and school districts have suffered financially.

Instead of ducking this lawsuit, we'd like to see the state's lawyers argue in open court that precious few bigwigs in state government care one bit about rural communities. We want them to argue that the trees — a renewable resource — are more precious than rural economies. We want them to tell the judge that it's more important to the state of Oregon to protect as many trees as its managers see fit, no matter the impact on rural Oregonians.

Of course, they won't say that outright, but that's what they mean.

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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.

Culture Corner

'All or Nothing' perfect warmup for football season

All or Nothing: A Season with the Arizona Cardinals" is a documentary series unlike anything else going. You know this is not the same old sports documentary when coach Bruce Arians drops the F-bomb in the first scene.

The Cardinals, one of the NFL's hottest teams, allowed award-winning NFL Films to go behind the scenes through the entire 2015 season, from draft night to player meetings to the sidelines during the easy wins and the bitter losses. The steady voice of actor Jon Hamm delivers note-perfect intonation as the narrator.

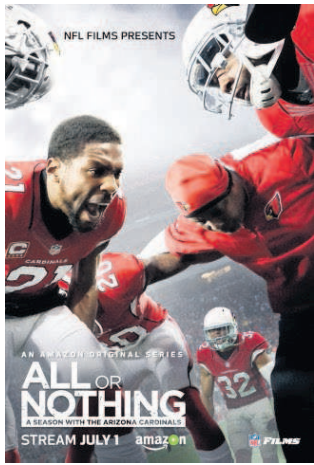
The cameras also went into Arians' home, and the homes of key players, Cardinals president Michael Bidwill and general manager Steve Keim.

Defensive end Dwight Freeney makes a mean chicken dish. Arians and

his wife drink when they talk about the bad news of coaching friends losing their jobs, a painful experience they know well. Defensive back Pete Peterson makes just about any outfit look good, even an elf costume.

Sure, "All or Nothing" is something of image rehabilitation for a pro league that in recent years fumbled and blundered on issues of domestic violence and players suffering brain damage. And "All or Nothing" does not touch on those topics.

But that's not the focus of "All or Nothing." We're watching a team aim for greatness, and whether or not you know how the season ended for the Cardinals doesn't matter. The eight-episode series streaming only on Amazon Prime reveals pro football most of us never get to see. — Phil Wright, East Oregonian senior reporter



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

Marijuana black market alive and well

The (Medford) Mail Tribune, July 26

It's been suspected for some time that a lot more marijuana was being produced by medical growers than could be consumed by patients, and now the evidence is beginning to surface.

First came the arrest of a Jackson County dispensary owner in Siskiyou County for allegedly hauling marijuana across the California line for illegal sale.

Now an economic analysis has concluded that a huge percentage of marijuana ostensibly grown in Josephine County for medical patients is instead feeding the black market.

The Grants Pass Daily Courier reports the study, prepared by the consulting firm ECONorthwest on behalf of Grants Pass and Josephine County, estimated 70 percent of the medical marijuana produced in Oregon is not being consumed by patients. The analyst who made that estimate admits it's a guess, but it's probably a fairly good one. And it suggests that those who defend the medical marijuana industry should get serious about cleaning up the image of what is supposed to be a compassionate endeavor.

When Oregon voters legalized marijuana for recreational use by adults, it put state statutes in conflict with federal law, which still considers marijuana illegal for any purpose. Federal authorities told state officials

they would take a hands-off approach to what the voters had legalized as long as the state cracked down hard on black-market production that sent marijuana out of state.

The result was a new system of regulation for the medical marijuana industry, which had operated without much oversight for years. Growers and advocates protested that the

new rules would jeopardize patients' access to medicine they need to counter the pain of chronic and terminal illnesses.

The ECONorthwest study looked at the number of plants allowed the number of patients, and concluded that large quantities are "disappearing" from the market.

One grower in Williams disputed the 70 percent figure, saying the real numbers are probably reversed. That would mean 30 percent of the crop is being diverted. Even if that's the accurate figure, it's still too much if the goal is a functioning legal marketplace operating in the light of day and accountable to regulators who are trying to keep federal drug agents at bay.

The new world of legal recreational marijuana and stricter reporting requirements for producers of both recreational and medical marijuana will take time to sort out. In the meantime, growers who continue to operate illegally are doing their law-abiding colleagues no favors.

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YOUR VIEWS

BMCC pool helps our community's health

As a former Pendleton High School and Pendleton Swim Association swimmer, the potential of closing the Blue Mountain Community College pool is heartbreaking, as I'm sure it is to all the people of the community for whom it has a direct impact. I know there have been previous letters pointing out how much being able to use the pool has meant personally to specific individuals, and I hope more people will continue to speak out in a similar way against the potential pool closure.

The purpose of my letter, however, is to hopefully point out to those community members for whom there is no direct impact that this issue still concerns you and you do benefit from our community having this facility open. Both the Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute of Health consider drowning a public health concern due, in part, to its high ranking in causes of death among children. Furthermore, research has shown that drownings are more likely to occur in rural areas than in urban centers.

When you consider the close proximity of multiple bodies of water to and within Umatilla and Morrow counties, this region has the potential to be just another statistic. So far, however, we have been lucky and I strongly believe that is related to the fact that our community has done a great job in teaching swimming and water safety.

We have excellent instructors and lifeguards who keep us safe and prepare our children for safety in the water in other areas. And where do these lifeguards and swim instructors come from? A lot of them are either current or former competitive swimmers who have a passion for swimming. Many of your children have learned from them, have interacted with them at the pool, and are safer because of them.

Unfortunately, without access to an indoor pool, it would be more difficult for PSA, PHS, and Hermiston High School to continue viable swim teams, and while some would find a way to continue, many will not; this can have significant long-term consequences for the health and safety of our children and the community as a whole.

I hope those of you who enjoy going to the pool or who have children who love to swim will consider this and will support the efforts to reopen a pool that truly benefits us all in one way or another.

Mary Sara Wells
Pendleton

Citizens denied information about massive proposed transmission line

We are members of the coalition to STOP B2H. We believe that most citizens will be negatively impacted by this high voltage transmission line.

Property owners who would have the line cross their property will be the most impacted, and we believe they should have access to information beyond what the Bureau of Land Management and Idaho Power choose to provide them. The Bureau of Land Management is completing the Environmental Impact Statement for the transmission line.

They have refused to provide the list of landowners who will be impacted because the line either runs directly through their property or close to it. The decisions regarding this industrial line are occurring with those most impacted being denied full disclosure of information and impacts the line will have.

We believe that landowners should not have to absorb the damages and costs of being forced to allow a 250-foot right of way to go through their property in order to meet the needs of customers living in Idaho. Irwin and I are part of a sub-group of STOP B2H that is identifying actual costs to landowners who will be forced to allow this 250-foot right of way to cross their land.

We want to identify landowners who will provide us with information such as: What use is being made of your property? (Raising cattle, raising crops, timber, recreation, home, etc.). What is the current assessed value of your property? What are the economic losses you expect if the transmission line is built and how did you come up with that figure? Will the proposed transmission line run through your property? If not, how close are you to the proposed line?

You can get information about how far your property is from one of the proposed routes by calling the local planning department.

Call 541-963-8160 or e-mail ott.irene@frontier.com if you are willing to help us by providing information on how you are using your land so that we can identify what the real costs are to those taking the brunt of the impacts this line will have.

Anyone who would like to join the STOP B2H coalition can leave your name and phone number or e-mail address and we will add it to our mailing list.

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