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**KATHRYN B. BROWN** Publisher  
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OUR VIEW

# Rangeland fire protection groups are valuable

Nearly every summer, ranchers are forced to risk their lives to rescue their cattle as wildfires approach.

When they offer to help state and federal firefighters by plowing fire lines, the offers are often refused.

In some instances, fire crews stand by, choosing not to stop an approaching fire because they are unsure which federal, state or local agency should be in charge.

In the meantime, grazing land — which ranchers depend on to feed their livestock — is allowed to burn.

We hesitate to criticize firefighters. They have one of the toughest jobs in the West, bringing massive wildfires to heel under hot and dirty conditions.

But on occasion ranchers find themselves in the position of having to stand up for themselves and their livelihoods when firefighters get wrapped up in what appears to be bureaucratic fumbling.

Washington state rancher Molly Linville recently was forced to jump on an ATV and race to the rescue when a wildfire roared across the land where her cattle were grazing. A neighbor, Justin Sachs, offered to build a fire line with his equipment but U.S. Forest Service firefighters turned him away.

Unfortunately, such anecdotes are too common around the West, where wildfires rage across public and private land.

In past years, firefighters from as far away as Australia and New Zealand have been flown to Washington state to

fight wildfires while ranchers' offers of help were rejected.

We understand how bureaucracies work. But it's also important to understand how ranchers work. Grazing lands need to be protected. They are the life blood of most livestock operations.

In parts of the West, such as Oregon, fire officials work with farmers and ranchers, who are ready, willing and able to provide manpower and equipment to fight wildfires. By setting up rangeland fire protection associations — the first was established in Oregon in 1964 — the states, federal Bureau of Land Management and ranchers have figured out ways to work together instead of arguing with one another. The states' legislatures provided funding for training, protective gear and equipment to these volunteer, nonprofit associations.

Now 22 rangeland fire protection associations are operational in Oregon and nine are in Idaho, standing ready to help BLM and state wildfire crews. These volunteer associations have repeatedly demonstrated their value in stopping wildfires before they can grow and in fighting large fires in Eastern Oregon and southern Idaho. Nevada has also set up similar associations.

Every state in the West should follow their examples. It's time to stop arguing and work together to fight wildfires that roar across the rural countryside each year. It's time to look for solutions, and rangeland fire protection associations are just that.

## Oregon is home to 22 rangeland fire protection associations.

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

# Important jobs, few candidates

The Charleston (W. Va.) Gazette

Here's a question for the future: Where will America get enough firefighters?

A report describes the difficulty of finding and keeping new volunteer firefighters. The number has been falling for decades, dropping by about 12 percent from 1984 to about 788,000 volunteer firefights in 2014, says Stataline, a publication of the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Work and life have changed, the story says. People drive farther to work and have less flexibility to leave when the firebell rings. Firefighters, mostly men, are more involved in child care, and their wives are more often working. Younger people have left rural areas to find work in cities.

The changes are particularly hard on rural areas, which depend on volunteer fire departments. Some states are trying to make the volunteer work more attractive by offering tax breaks.

About 87 percent of U.S. fire departments are run mostly or entirely by volunteers.

Citing a report from the National Fire Protection Association, the Stataline story says volunteer firefighters are estimated to save local governments \$139.8 billion a year in pay, benefits, operating expenses and maintenance.

Meanwhile, The Associated Press reported last fall that police departments are loosening up on qualifications such as educational requirements and some prior drug use. The reason is to draw more recruits in a time when interest is down because of low pay, physical demands, danger and public scrutiny.

There could be an upside to rethinking those requirements. Responsible police chiefs want departments that look like and communicate well with the populations they protect. It can be tough for some minority applicants to get past a criminal background check because black citizens are more likely to have encounters with the justice system, the report says.

In Baltimore, Police Commissioner Kevin Davis is working to change the rule prohibiting the city from hiring someone who admits to having used marijuana within the previous three years, the top reason applicants are disqualified from the force.

"I don't want to hire altar boys to be

police officers, necessarily," Davis told *The Baltimore Sun*. "I want people of good character, of good moral character, but I want people who have lived a life just like everybody else — a life not unlike the lives of the people who they are going to be interacting with every day."

Empathy is an important quality in police officers.

Burnout among social workers is nothing new. A combination of low pay and emotionally demanding duties can wear people out. Still, some places, including West Virginia, managed to keep social workers in public and private positions in the past, where they built up institutional knowledge and mentored the next generation.

That has been changing for years. A recent story in *Governing* magazine highlights the difficulties — and costs — of high turnover among people who do things such as find permanent homes for abused or neglected children or help parents navigate programs to get help, comply and keep their children.

It has gotten so bad in some places that states are trying new things — lowering educational requirements to make the price of preparation more commensurate with the low pay new hires will receive. Some are trying to weed out people who might not be able to handle the emotional toll of the job, and they are shortening and reconfiguring on-the-job training time.

The stakes are high. Social workers develop relationships with the families they are responsible for helping. Conditions that interfere with those relationships erode trust in individuals and in the programs intended to help.

The report cites one study that found that a child with one caseworker had a 74 percent chance to get a permanent and stable home. But if the child had two caseworkers in a year, the chance dropped to 17 percent, and with three caseworkers, it was only 5 percent.

Getting this stuff wrong costs. It costs states and governments time and money in training and retraining. It costs overburdened employees in stress and lost income when they give up and quit. It costs families and children who need the professionals assigned to helping them to be healthy and capable. Interventions at these moments can affect the trajectory of the rest of their lives, for good or bad.



OTHER VIEWS

# What campaign wouldn't seek motherlode of Clinton emails?

The public learned on March 10, 2015, that Hillary Clinton had more than 60,000 emails on her private email system, and that she had turned over "about half" of them to the State Department and destroyed the rest, which she said were "personal" and "not in any way related" to her work as secretary of state.

The public learned later the lengths to which Clinton went to make sure the "personal" emails were completely and permanently deleted. Her team used a commercial-strength program called BleachBit to erase all traces of the emails, and they used hammers to physically destroy mobile devices that might have had the emails on them.

The person who did the actual deleting later cited legal privileges and the Fifth Amendment to avoid talking to the FBI and Congress. Clinton's lawyer, David Kendall, told Rep. Trey Gowdy, chairman of the House Benghazi Committee, that investigators could forget about finding any of those emails. Sorry, Trey, he said; they're all gone.

Still, there were people who did not believe that Clinton's deleted emails, all 30,000-plus of them, were truly gone. What is ever truly gone on the internet? And what if Clinton were not telling the truth? What if she deleted emails covering more than just personal matters? In that event, recovering the emails would have rocked the 2016 presidential campaign.

So if there were an enormous trove of information potentially harmful to a presidential candidate just sitting out there -- what opposing campaign wouldn't want to find it?

There have been recent reports that last summer a Republican named Peter W. Smith made some sort of effort to find the missing Clinton emails, getting in touch with hackers, some of whom may have been Russian. But nothing came of it, and no evidence has emerged that Smith was connected to the Trump campaign. (The 81-year-old Smith later committed suicide, apparently distraught over failing health.)

In a recent phone conversation, Corey Lewandowski, the Trump campaign manager who was fired on June 20, 2016, said he never heard of or communicated with Smith, and wasn't aware of any effort to find the missing Clinton emails.

"I never solicited, or asked anybody to solicit or find a way to get these potential emails," Lewandowski said. "And to the best of my knowledge, nobody [in the campaign] did either."

Still, Lewandowski added that, "In the world of cybersecurity, it's fairly well known that when you delete emails, they're not gone."

Another former top Trump aide said that was a common view in the campaign. "The feeling was that they [the emails] must exist somewhere," the former aide said, "because once something is digital, it's never truly gone."



BYRON YORK  
Comment

"Trump believes that," the aide added. Still, the aide also said he had never heard of Smith, and didn't know of any effort to find the emails.

Both Lewandowski and the other former aide stressed the greatest political value of the missing emails, as far as Trump was concerned, was that they gave Trump a way to "poke" and "troll" his Democratic opponent. The Clinton team was BleachBitting and swinging hammers to smash devices -- and she says everything was on the up and up, that she has nothing to hide? Candidate Trump could riff on that all day.

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But at least one high-ranking Trump team member apparently did believe the missing Clinton emails still existed. In August 2016, Gen. Michael Flynn, then the Trump campaign's top national security adviser, discussed the emails with a conservative radio host named John B. Wells.

"Does somebody have the 30,000?" Flynn asked. "The likelihood somebody has all of those emails, at a nation-state level, meaning Russia, China, Iran, North

Korea, or even other countries, or some other large hacktivist group, like the WikiLeaks group that we know exists — the likelihood is very high, and I'm talking, like, better than 95 percent."

Which leads to a question. Would it have been appropriate for the Trump campaign to try to find the emails? After all, the emails were under congressional subpoena, under FBI investigation, of intense public interest, and a potentially explosive issue in the presidential campaign. What opposing campaign wouldn't want to know what was in them?

Talking with a number of veteran Republican operatives, the answer is: Yes, of course, the campaign would want to know what was in the emails. More importantly, they would want the emails to become public. But the campaign wouldn't want to touch them, would want no fingerprints on them.

None would have met with Russians, as Donald Trump Jr. did in June 2016, because they would want nothing to do with shady people offering information. (That information was not, as far as we know, related to Clinton's emails.) But the operatives would have searched for a third-party, arm's-length way to get the information to the media.

"You can get easily burned with bad info," said one operative. "This is why everyone outsources research."

And that is what baffles some of them about what Trump Jr. did. Why put the campaign's fingerprints — and palm prints and footprints, too — on such a sketchy enterprise? Terrible political judgment is not against the law. If it were, the operatives suggested, the Trump team would be guilty, guilty, guilty.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

