

On the value of literature

The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness was established along Idaho's Salmon River in the early 1970s. At that point, the BLM and Forest Service burned several "unpermitted" cabins that existed on both shores of the Salmon.

There were some interesting folks living in those cabins, like Rollie Hammel who logged the river for driftwood during peak flow with a chunk of rope from an open 12-foot fishing boat, and the extended Jones family at the bottom of Carey Creek who counted coup on bears with a switch in the old orchards, and Lum Turner, the gangly old loner, who was eventually killed by the river after 70 years of threading the trail to town on his monthly Social Security quests.

I met Lum only once, in Summerville's Bar in Riggins, on a Saturday night when our whiskey quests happened to mesh and when coincidence, or his cantankerousness, provided an empty stool at his left elbow. As soon as I ordered a double shot of Jim Beam, with a beer back, he waded into me.

"Where you from, son?"
 "Well, I'm living up at Burgdorf."
 "No, I meant where you from, son?"
 "Grew up in the Sandhills of Nebraska. Got here by the way of Massachusetts, Italy, Mississippi, Illinois, California and Montana."
 "How do you make your living?"
 "Right now I'm rolling logs to the headworks in a houselog mill."
 "Oh yeah, for Little Bill Mockwitz up on the school section. You can't do that forever.

What do you want to do when you grow up?"
 "I'm thirty-one-years-old with a kid and figure I'm just about grown now, but, if you really want to know, I'd like to make my living as a writer before I stop living."
 "That's a good one. Somebody's got to put it all into words, I guess. I do some reading myself, but I never realized the true value of literature until the winter of 1953. Buy me a shot, and I'll tell you the story."
 I bought the shot. What follows is Lum's assessment of the value of the written word:

"I was wintering four mules, two of mine and two from the Owens' ranch, in a little set of corrals behind my cabin 15 miles upriver. It was a heavy winter for this part of the world, maybe a foot and a half of snow at river level that stayed forever. I hadn't got a whole lot of hay put up the summer before.

"Sometime around Christmas I belled one of my mules and turned all four out to fend for themselves. The river is gentle and quiet in the winter months, so I could hear the bell real good. When the mules got too far away from my place, I'd ski out to find them, chase them back home, and hay them a little, just enough so they would remember the joys of civilization and not wander completely off. I worried about cougar, too. Just about every critter in the Salmon River country comes down to the river during the winter.

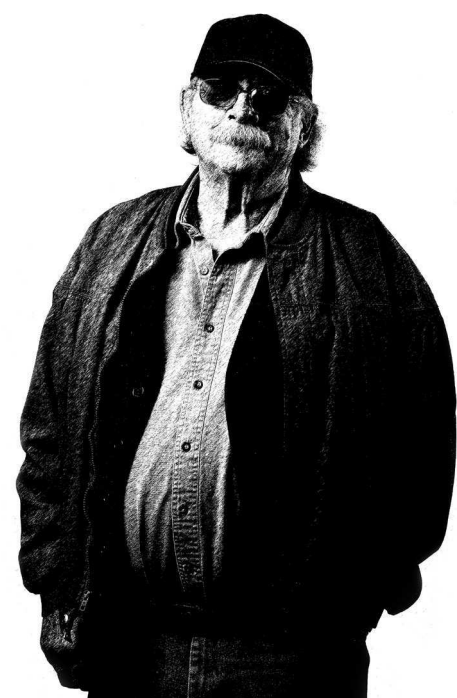
"A month or so before the snows came, I had been in Riggins to pick up my government check and get a few supplies.

While I was there a lady friend forced me to take darn near a cord of her old used Readers Digests back up the river to my place. I didn't want them in the first place, but I was taught to accept gifts gracefully, so I hauled them home and stacked them in boxes beside my bed.

"Along about January I got lonely and bored enough to read one. It was a Sunday morning, a pretty nice day, and I was sitting at my table with the window open, a pot of coffee and one of those magazines. The more I read, the more disgusted I got. The one that really torqued me was an article about this guy named Raymond L. Ditmars who was working to save the American rattlesnake. I'd lost two dogs to snakes the summer before. I pitched the book out of the window, out into the slop and snow of the mule corral.

"A couple of cups of coffee later I decided it was time to get to some sort of work, so I went out to bell the mules and let them wander for feed. While I was out there I got to thinking that it would be just my luck that this would be the day that the lady friend would come to visit and find one of her books out in the corral, so I'd best retrieve it. You know, I could not find that Readers Digest anywhere. And when I opened the corral gate, the mules just stood there looking at the cabin, didn't want to leave.

"That's when I discovered the true value of literature. Those mules had literally digested the Readers Digest, and were waiting for more reading material. That bunch of literature solved a lot of my problems that winter. I was out of hay, but not out of feed. Didn't even have to bell the leader anymore. Once every morning until the snow melted, I'd pitch a wad of Readers



J.D. SMITH
 FROM THE HEADWATERS
 OF DRY CREEK

Digests out into the corral and watch the mules shred them into fodder. They'd come home every night. I don't know whether it was the ink or whatever, but all four of them shed off early and were plenty slick and fat by mid-March when the grass started growing again. Yep, you go ahead and become a writer. You never know when a book is going to come in handy."

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.

Quick takes

Pendleton to ban smoking in public parks

How about dog crap in the parks? Can that be banned too? Nothing better than stepping in a fresh pile playing with your kids. Plus it's unsanitary.

— Paul Word

If you are mad you can't smoke at a park or on the levee, look it this way. Personally don't care if you do or not. I can leave the area you are smoking. Children can't. That's the difference. These are areas designed for them. Please. Give them a chance to choose for themselves.

— Cody Webster

More petty crimes they can get a little revenue from because the police have nothing better to do than respond to new moms protecting their babies from the evil man who hits the vape pen then took a chew!

— Malvin Jamison

You all remember the movie "Demolition Man" right? That's pretty much what the world is turning into now.

— Kristina Ellis

Wow! Such negative remarks! I see this as the city showing and caring for other people's health and addiction plus the beauty of our parks.

— ChrisTina Garner

Susie Arroyo passes away

Sounds like the world is a little bit better because of her. What a great story sorry to here about your loved one Arroyo Family.

— Christopher Waine

What a beautiful person inside and out. We are blessed to have you touch so many people with your love, joy and stories ... truly will be missed.

— Tina Zuelich-Longhorn

ODOT prepares new fleet of snowplows, salt for winter

To think, that is as clean and shiny new as they will ever be! Have a safe season ODOT. Thank you for all the work you people do.

— Jim Noise

Definitely won't be visiting there this winter. I've seen what even very limited exposure to salt can do to a vehicle.

— Jett Seale

Do not try to pass these plows on the right. Bad things will happen.

— Buck McEntire

New restaurants in Hermiston

I want a place like Sweet Tomatoes in Portland. It's a huge salad bar. You can make your salad however you like. They also have soup and bread.

— Anne Waid Tankersley

Although I am in Pendleton, I would LOVE to see more Mom n Pop types of restaurants, with good ol' fashioned home cooked foods! So tired of chain locations with no imagination to their foods.

— Pam Peterson

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.

Wolf and livestock coexistence is a delusion

It is a popular notion among some conservationists that the way to win acceptance for predators like wolves is to work with rural communities and ranchers. Gaining their support certainly helps wildlife managers justify killing packs or individual wolves whenever they prey on cattle.

But these control tactics have limited application. At best, they reduce conflicts in targeted areas and have no significant effect on the distribution or survival of native predators. At worst, they add to the delusion that widespread co-existence between predators and livestock is possible.

The killing of seven members of the Profanity Peak pack in Washington illustrates how a wolf pack paid the ultimate price for merely trying to eke out a living in a place where unfenced domestic livestock had been released to graze.

Hundreds of cattle were released on the allotment, and salt blocks used by cattle were placed near the den site. That led to wolf depredation on cattle followed by the killing of pack members.

A growing body of scientific research now shows that killing problem wolves often begets yet more conflicts. Whether the killing is done to protect livestock or for "sport" by hunters, it tends to skew wolf populations towards younger animals less skilled at hunting. Loss of individual pack members can also result in changes in a pack's ability to hold a territory, pushing the animals into new areas where they are less familiar with native prey. Both outcomes often lead to livestock getting killed by wolves.

Even "predator-friendly" operations harm native wildlife. When ranchers use noisemakers like boat horns or firecrackers, shoot at predators to scare them, or otherwise harass wolves and other predators, this hounding and stressing of our wildlife is considered legitimate. But why should conservation organizations pay for range riders or organize volunteers to harass public animals like wolves to protect someone's private livestock?

In effect, these groups are saying that wolves, coyotes and other native wildlife do not have a "right" to live on public lands



Courtesy of Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife
The wolf designated as OR14 was captured and GPS-collared by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in the Weston Mountain area north of the Umatilla River on June 20, 2012. OR14 weighed 90 pounds and was estimated to be at least 6 years old.

When there is a conflict between private livestock grazing public lands and the public's native wildlife ... just which animals should be removed?

that are being exploited by ranchers. Cows, not native to the West, have preference.

If I were to harass elk on a winter range, force bald eagles away from their nests or in other ways harass our wildlife, I would likely risk a fine. If I were to go out into the midst of a herd of sheep grazing on public lands and start shooting guns or firing off firecrackers to stampede the herd, I would risk imprisonment. But when it comes to harrying wolves, somehow this kind of harassment has become legitimate.

The negative impacts of livestock on our native wildlife go even further than harassment or lethal control — something that none of the "collaborative" groups ever mention to their membership or the press. Just the mere presence of domestic

livestock often results in the social displacement and abandonment of the area by native ungulates such as elk.

If one assumes that elk select the best habitat for their needs, then displacement to other lands reduces their overall fitness. And we cannot forget that on many public lands, the vast majority of forage is reserved and allotted to domestic livestock, leaving only the leftovers for native wildlife.

If we assume that one of the limiting factors for native wildlife is high-quality forage, and that less nutritious feed means fewer elk, deer and bighorns, then we are literally taking food out of the mouth of our native predators.

When there is a conflict between private livestock grazing public lands and the public's native wildlife, such as grizzlies, coyotes and wolves, just which animals should be removed? That is a question that "collaboratives" never ask. It is always assumed that if predators are causing problems for ranchers, the predators, not the livestock, should go.

This assumption adds up to direct and indirect subsidies for the livestock industry. As long as the dominant paradigm is that a rancher's livestock has priority on public lands, we will never fully restore native predators to our lands. That is why we need to reframe the narrative and recognize that domestic livestock are the "problem" for our native wildlife.

Next time one of these collaboration groups asks for your money, consider giving your funds elsewhere. Look for organizations that challenge the dominance of livestock on public lands through grazing allotment buyouts or that promote the notion that public predators have priority on our public lands.

George Wuerthner is a contributor to *Writers on the Range*, the opinion service of *High Country News*. He is an ecologist who has studied predators and published 38 books, including *Welfare Ranching: The Subsidized Destruction of the Arid West*. He lives in Bend.

Every day our choices show what kind of person we are

The choices we make every day say a lot about our view of others, the world, and our place in it. It's overly simplistic, I know, but in many ways the old saying is true, "there are two kinds of people in the world."

- For instance, there are:
- People who ease off the pedal to let a fellow motorists merge with traffic and those who consider such politeness a weakness.
 - Drivers who zip in and out of traffic to save a few seconds and those who realize calm and safe driving makes the trip much less stressful and only slightly longer.
 - People who hold the door for others and those too unperceptive or self-absorbed to bother.
 - Shoppers who faithfully take their cart back to the drop site and those who leave it to clutter the parking spaces.
 - Those who park in no parking areas and fire lanes because "they'll just be a minute" and those who think "no parking" means just that.
 - Round-Up revelers who will park anywhere — next to fire hydrants, no



HAL MCCUNE
 Comment

parking signs, in driveways, loading zones, etc. — and those who don't believe Round-Up magically dissolves the social contract of politeness, adherence to safe practices and considerate actions.

- People who are empathetic toward the poor, and those who think only lazy or dull people are poor.
- People who will give a buck or two to a panhandler, calm in the belief that a good deed is its own reward regardless of what the "gift" is used for, and those who sneer at the thought of sharing their good fortune with someone they are certain will just waste it on booze or drugs, is lazy and should get a job, owns a Mercedes parked a block away or just panhandles because it's fun and easy.
- Those who will circle the parking lot relentlessly to get two spaces closer and those who figure a little walking or rain won't hurt them.
- People who smile with understanding and tolerance at a parent combating a tired and unruly child at the store and those who scowl and mumble judgments.

- Those who think professing religious belief makes them better than people who don't, and those who consider religious belief a potential avenue to fulfillment but hardly a ticket to be preachy or smug.
 - Those who believe people have the right to make their own decisions regarding their body, and people eager to tell others what they can and can't do.
 - Those who smile at others, including people they don't know, and those who think smiling should be reserved for when you win the lottery.
 - People who like bagpipes and those who don't.
 - Those who consciously choose to enjoy the moment — the conversation, the food, the sunset, the music in the background, the walk — and those who choose instead to concentrate on a hand-held screen. (I appreciate my little phone/computer like everyone else. But come on. Look up, listen up, enjoy the real world and the people around you).
- So, what kind of person are you?

Hal McCune is a longtime Pendleton resident.