

Preparing the farm for winter

The changing of the season and — more specifically — the decrease in temperature and increase in precipitation, brings about a concomitant shift in the activities on our farm.

The neighbors have strung an electric fence around some of our wheat stubble and dropped off a water trough to facilitate pasturing a couple dozen of their cows. This means we will add breaking ice to our list of winter chores when Jack Frost pays his annual visit. The great cowboy poet Baxter Black says the true measure of severity of winter is the size of the ice pile next to the water trough.

Many other wintertime tasks are related to maintenance and overhaul of our largely antique equipment fleet. Rod-weeders may get new chains and sprockets, grain drills might have new points installed, and the combines need ... well, to be quite frank, too many repairs to dwell on in this limited space.

Among the routine winter maintenance chores we perform is the time-proven, cold-climate-induced installation of the pizza box in front of the radiator on the '58 International four-wheel drive pickup. This persimmon-hued brute can blaze a trail through snowdrifts that can only be envied,

but seldom matched, by more modern urban assault vehicle "trucks."

It will start when the mercury dips to negative 10 on the Mail Pouch tobacco thermometer nailed to the barn wall. And son Willie claims that one day it could even serve as a coffin because he "has never had it in a hole he couldn't dig out of" if it is chained up on all four corners. Unfortunately, one thing it lacks is a good heater, hence a piece of cardboard is placed over a large portion of the radiator to raise the operating temperature of the engine and hopefully enhance the performance of the window defroster.

The aforementioned alternative use for a piece of cardboard makes me ponder recycling. I have explained to friends and family that the ostensibly cluttered appearance of our farmstead is quite intentional and part of our master plan. I come from a long line of folks who are frugal by nature and of the mindset that no place, especially one in the country, is complete without a wood scrap pile, a collection of scrap iron near the shop and a boneyard full of extra farm equipment and parts rigs (a provincial term for what some folks in town call an abandoned vehicle). One can never be sure when one may need

a window regulator, a headlight bucket, a door hinge or a license plate. (Please don't think I'd swap plates — for that's against the law; an old license plate has many uses, foremost as a patch on a combine clean grain or tailings elevator.)

In case of a major mechanical failure, it's always good to have a spare rebuild-able engine or transmission. Parts rigs can also act as a sort of savings account in the event that one needs to sell something to raise quick cash or they can help a neighbor who is dead in the water and might need a certain part that is "obsolete."

I have always been a little suspicious of my friends who don't sort their garbage and thanks to former governor Tom McCall, it may even pay to do so — as evidenced by the dime I can receive for every pop can (and other beverage container) that I toss into my re-purposed 30-gallon drum located in my garden shed (itself a former chicken coop).

My kids occasionally say I'm a hoarder (I prefer collector) but my lovely wife generally tolerates my penchant for stockpiling. She has even offered what I took as an endorsement when she set the ring-tone for my phone — it's Quincy Jones' "Streetbeater," which is better known as the theme to "Sanford and Son" (now that was television worth watching).

I think we could all probably cut down on our wasteful ways. Even though I'm as addicted to the petroleum-fueled modern economy as anyone, I have been slowly accumulating a full line of horse-drawn farm equipment in the scab patch, just in case



MATT WOOD
FROM THE TRACTOR

everything goes to pot, although judging by the number of retail cannabis outlets in Pendleton, I think it already has.

So, does anyone want to see my yardstick collection?

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Matt Wood is his son's hired man and his daughter's biggest fan. He lives on a farm near Helix, where he collects antiques and friends.

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Wildfire and our failure of imagination

It's not the way we fight wildfires in the West that's the problem. The problem is the way we manage our fire-dependent forests.

Since 2000, 154 wildfires in the region have cost over \$20 million each to control. Many of them cost several times more. Together, these costliest fires, which were less than one-tenth of 1 percent of all Western wildfires in the period, cost more than \$9 billion to fight. If you factor in property losses, natural resource damage and environmental impacts, the true costs skyrocket, but they are rarely measured or accounted for. What can't be ignored is that these unprecedented wildfires tell us we need a much better land-management strategy.

In the aftermath of 9/11, the federal government established a commission to recommend ways to prevent future terror attacks. Among other findings, the commission's report faulted leaders for a "failure of imagination," citing a system that was hamstrung by convention.

We face a similar predicament with the West's wildfires. Nearly every summer, the wildfire season exceeds our imaginations, as each "worst-ever" disaster soon eclipses its predecessor. In the past 20 years, most of the 11 Western states have suffered their worst wildfires on record — several states have done so more than once. At a time when firefighting budgets have never been higher, the West is experiencing its worst wildfires since it first organized for fire protection more than a century ago. If the aim is to protect life and property and minimize natural resource damage — and to do so at the lowest possible cost, without compromising firefighter safety — then we are headed down the wrong trail.

We need to be exploring more imaginative approaches. Protection of human communities ultimately matters most, but sometimes we are simply unable to save homes. Despite state-of-the-art gear, training, determination and other resources, firefighters are rarely able to control the worst wildfires until they get some relief in the weather or a break in the fuels. Neither can managers deal with the compounding effects of climate change, deteriorating forest conditions and uncontrolled residential development at the wildland-urban interface. The West remains tethered to an unworkable protection strategy that is stalled at a dangerous impasse, while costs, losses, damages and deaths all keep mounting.

Imagine a credible commission tasked with investigating the West's wildfire problem. Its members would examine the



DALE BOSWORTH
Comment



JERRY WILLIAMS
Comment

full range of contributing factors. They would probably conclude that the West's wildfire problem is much more than a firefighting challenge — that it is, fundamentally, a failure to manage fire-dependent forest ecosystems at appropriate intensities, intervals and scales. They would find that many of today's worst wildfire disasters are, ironically, occurring in drastically altered forests that tolerated fire better and burned much less severely 100 years ago.

A century of fire suppression and take-the-best-and-leave-the-rest logging has brought us to this place. But in confounding ways, our contemporary budgeting practices, regulatory controls, land management plans and market forces are often at cross purposes with the most effective means to protect the West's fire-prone forests. Here's why:

- Budget appropriations provide almost unlimited funding for wildfire control but starve budgets for wildfire mitigation.
- On national forests, managers are required by law to meet certain regulatory standards for proposed actions aimed at reducing wildfire risks. Yet in the absence of these actions, wildfire impacts that are often far worse are exempt from any analysis of their effects.
- Depending on the way fire-prone landscapes are managed, wildfire risks can become high, but national forest plans don't require that those risks be identified or considered before plans are implemented.
- In most places, thinning the forest understory needs to precede prescribed burning. Yet few markets exist for small-diameter trees and deadfall, even when the true cost of wildfires could easily justify subsidizing their removal. We need to develop and encourage more of these markets. As this woody material continues to accumulate, wildfire risks only grow, and the business of firefighting becomes ever more lucrative.

We all know that the West's wildfire problem is getting worse, but we have been slow to confront this reality. Unable to envision future threats and explore solutions across the full range of contributory factors, we cling to an untenable position. Bound to convention, we are left to suffer the next unimaginable disaster.

It is time for a commission on wildfire.

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The writers are contributors to High Country News. Bosworth and Williams are both a retired directors for the U.S. Forest Service.

Echo city councilor should resign

By PAM REESE

I've recently learned, after living for three years on a ranch outside of Echo proper, that moving to town and opening a business and renting a studio is a little like living with someone after having known and admired them from a distance. Suddenly all the little quirks come to surface and begin to annoy you. And soon enough, those seemingly small things become big important things.

I'm referring to the recent incident of hate speech by city councilor Lou Nakapalau and the reluctance of the city staff and council to address the problem head-on, as I witnessed in the last meeting. As a result, a quasi apology was made to a very limited audience, and only after some pushback from constituents and the community at large.

I think this situation is a symptom of a larger problem. In my attendance at the past few council meetings, I've been shocked, as well you may be, at the lack of public participation in the process. In fact, the first time I attended a meeting with a full audience, council members seemed surprised to have so many visitors.

I've sensed a complacency and a reluctance on the part of the council members to speak with conviction when discussing matters of importance during meetings. Their comments are often inaudible, and it sometimes appears that members have not read the informational packets ahead of time. This gives the appearance of simply going through the motions, and as an observer, I'm often lost as to what is happening. And, the newly implemented policy of council members not commenting on public remarks only underscores that impression.

The reason for the situation, as I see it is two-fold: we have many people in town who are struggling financially and have turned their attention and energy to keeping food on the table and clothes on the kids.

Secondly, I don't see the political environment of Echo as a hospitable one. There seems to be an Us vs. Them mindset that probably roots deeply into institutional memory. "If you're not for us, you're against us." Surely that must be the reason that I was recently warned to "be careful and not piss off the folks in city hall or they will make your life miserable."

Dana and I are currently being shunned by the folks at city hall for speaking up against hate speech, but we are not really miserable. It's entirely worth it. We are, however, perhaps a little mystified that freedom of speech doesn't seem to go both ways. Perhaps, too, this is why people feel like they have to whisper to us on the street, "We're with you."

Let me just say here that there is no "them" or "you." It's us. All of us. We can no longer hide in a river bottom a mile off the interstate. We are digital citizens, and when any of us logs onto the

internet, we travel into the larger world. And just like Interstate 84, that highway goes both ways. When we log on, we also invite those teeming masses into our own homes and hearts.

When I tried to address Mr. Nakapalau's disturbing digital hate speech toward the LGBTQ community in meetings with city officials, I was told that the fact that his remarks were aimed at someone half a world away didn't really do any harm. I was also told that, at that point, not many people had read the *East Oregonian* article. The underlying message being, if it doesn't affect us here in Echo, we need not address it. And, I'm afraid that it appears that reluctance to address it may mean you secretly agree with Lou's homophobic attitude.

Alas, the digital world. It didn't take too long for the story to be picked up by the *Miami Herald*, the *Washington Times*, the *Chicago Tribune* and *U.S. News and World Report*, to name a few. Just this morning, I looked up Mr. Nakapalau's name on Google and had to go through five pages of results to get past newspaper and magazine articles, TV broadcasts and blog posts that tie him and his hate speech to Echo.

This is what we look like to the rest of the world. We didn't turn the lens on ourselves. Lou did.

In the council's quasi apology, which I can no longer find on the city's Facebook page, I recall a second paragraph, the purpose of which seems to remind us that council members are unpaid volunteers. While that is true, I would like to respectfully remind them that they are public servants. That is what they signed up for both when they ran and when they took the oath of office.

At Echo High School, I have the most amazing, intelligent students I've ever had the privilege to teach. On Monday, I was praising them for their level of tolerance and acceptance of newcomers, students of other races and people who are unique in their own ways. More than one of them responded, and here I paraphrase: "Yes, we're comfortable if a guy wants to wear makeup to school, but we don't think he would be safe in downtown Echo." I'm afraid that the council and administration's lack of concern about one of its representative's intolerance — and he does represent all of us — tells me what is currently in their own hearts.

The rest of us are moving on to make this an inclusive community. You can come along with those kids and us — because you are also a part of the us — if you'd like.

Mr. Nakapalau's actions while self-identifying as an Echo city councilman are unacceptable, and I am asking him to do the right thing and resign.

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Pam Reese and husband Dana own the Butter Creek Coffeehouse in downtown Echo, and she teaches English at Echo High School.