

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Disengaged leadership drove logging lawsuit

Canaries in coal mines don't have anything over young coho salmon when it comes to reacting to adverse environmental conditions by going belly up.

A California study showed, for example, that "Even small amounts of running water — less than a gallon per second — could mean the difference between life or death for juvenile coho," the *Columbia Basin Bulletin* reported earlier this month.

Water temperature, oxygenation, purity, flow rate and other factors such as availability of hiding places all play a part in how many little coho survive the perilous passage between egg and ocean. They are, in a sense, creatures of the forest, in some cases spending up to two years in freshwater streams and nearby brackish sloughs before venturing out into the sea.

About a dozen years ago, the Oregon Coast Coho Conservation Plan was adopted by the state with active involvement by Gov. John Kitzhaber, who smartly wanted to get out ahead of a potential endangered species quagmire.

But attention wandered. Faced with economic demands for more timber harvest, the Oregon Board of Forestry voted in June 2009 to increase logging in some state forests, allowing more timber production on 70 percent of the 518,000 acres. By then out of office, Kitzhaber cautioned that logging more of the state forests would compromise habitat.

System gone adrift

The quagmire of endangered-species contention looms once again with last week's filing of a federal lawsuit by fishing and conservation groups against the state.



AP Photo/Don Ryan

A coalition of environmental and fishing groups have sued Oregon over allowing logging on state forest lands and allege the activity is damaging streams used by coho salmon.

Mirroring an earlier threat in February 2014 by the Center for Biological Diversity, that group and several others are mounting exactly the kind of legal challenge that anyone could have predicted.

"Poor logging practices by the Oregon Department of Forestry is causing real harm to the coho ... and commercial fishing families who depend on these magnificent fish for their livelihoods," a spokesman for two of the litigants said. "Stronger protections for streams to protect the coho ... is decades overdue."

Are the conservation groups right? Or is it true, as some local officials in Oregon have long urged, that the state is failing to authorize enough logging?

As usual, all sides in the controversy make some valid points. All habitat is

not created equal, and in the pursuit of sustainable multiple-use of our expansive public forests, it makes sense to prioritize some areas for salmon and others for timber or other priorities. A fully functional system of forest management with ample participation by all segments of the public would stand a far better chance of achieving this balance. This, largely, is what the Oregon Coast Coho Conservation Plan was supposed to achieve. For a while, it had the prospect of succeeding.

As we editorialized in 2010, "Steps initiated by Kitzhaber were somewhat helpful in addressing some of the more obvious problems faced by these once-thriving salmon runs. Harvests have been brought into better alignment with reality and hatchery practices have been reformed. Local watershed

councils have proven to be a powerful force for good, with timber and agricultural interests often taking active roles in improving freshwater habitat."

In too many ways, this system feels like it has gone adrift. In the absence of engaged state leadership, it is no wonder this lawsuit was filed.

Hard compromises

For historians of salmon management, the list of streams and watersheds included in the state's coho plan summons up thoughts of waters that were once alive with salmon.

Starting on the North Coast and stretching southward to California, these include the Necanicum, Nehalem, Tillamook Bay, Nestucca, Salmon, Siletz, Yaquina, Beaver, Alsea, Siuslaw, Umpqua, Coos, Coquille, Flores, Sixes and some smaller oceanfront tributaries and sub-basins totaling 56 populations. These names speak of a time when salmon fishing and logging each generated thousands of jobs in dozens of Oregon communities, some of which are now mere ghost towns.

As more and more people discover Oregon, it would be an idle and pointless fantasy to think either salmon or forests will ever be what they were a century ago. Our large public forests can, however, be better managed in ways that support local industries and ecological functions including salmon habitat. The blunt weapon of litigation won't achieve this nuanced result.

What might do so is a regional consensus-based, citizen-driven process of stakeholders hammering out hard compromises. That will require wresting control from remote and disengaged Salem-based agencies. A citizens' initiative, anyone?

OTHER VIEWS

A counterattack on voting rights

In the suburbs of Salt Lake City, there is a planned community called Suncrest that has turned out to be a good place to study voter turnout. Suncrest feels like one community, full of modern, single-family houses. But it straddles two counties — Salt Lake and Utah. And in 2016, the two used different voting systems.

Salt Lake County switched to mail-based voting, which meant that all registered voters would receive a ballot at their home a few weeks before Election Day. They could then mail it back or drop it off at a county office. In Utah County, by contrast, residents still voted the old-fashioned way. They had to visit their local polling place on Election Day.

It was a natural experiment — with impressive results. Turnout in the Salt Lake County portion of Suncrest rose much more than in the Utah County portion.

It wasn't just Suncrest, either. In the 21 Utah counties that used mail voting in 2016, turnout was between 5 and 7 percentage points higher than expected, according to a new study. That's an enormous effect, as Amelia Showalter, the study's lead author, pointed out to me. "Normally," said Showalter, who advises campaigns, "we are thrilled if an intervention increases turnout by 1 or 2 percentage points."

This is a funny time for voting rights. On the one hand, some Republicans are engaged in a shameful effort to restrict voting access. They are telling lies about voter fraud — which remains extremely rare — and pushing for laws to suppress turnout by Democratic-leaning groups, especially African-Americans. It's nothing less than an attack on democracy, made possible by recent Supreme Court rulings.

Yet this attack has also helped feed counterattack. The counterattack is being led more by Democrats than Republicans. But as Utah — among the reddest states of all — shows, there are also a good number of Republicans who believe in expanding

voting rights.

Thank goodness. The United States continues to suffer from some of the lowest turnouts in the developed world. It is one reason government policy often doesn't reflect public opinion. It also makes it easier for extremists, like President Donald Trump, to get elected.

After digging into the research, I've come to think that universal vote-by-mail may have the biggest potential to lift turnout. It eliminates hurdles, like long lines at polling places and logistical difficulties of voting on a workday. (As a bonus, it usually saves money.)

The Utah analysis, which is being released Monday, follows a peer-reviewed study of Washington state that found voting-by-mail increased turnout between 2 and 4 percentage points. In both states, turnout rose the most among groups that tended to vote the least, such as younger adults. Colorado and Oregon also have all-mail voting — and above-average turnout.

The practice is spreading, too. California is moving to all-mail voting this year. Parts of Arizona, Minnesota, North Dakota and other states have adopted it, too. Automatic registration, which is the norm in much of the world, lets citizens become eligible to vote when they renew a driver's license or otherwise interact with the government.

Another voting-rights push involves restoring the franchise for people who previously served prison sentences. Florida, Louisiana and Virginia, among others, have recently made progress here. Still other states have increased early-voting hours.

Expanding voting rights usually isn't easy. It requires a dedicated political effort and consistent pushback against falsehoods and scare tactics. But when the effort works, it often proves enduring — because most Americans believe in the idea of universal, convenient voting.

— David Leonhardt is an op-ed columnist for *The New York Times*.

DAVID LEONHARDT
Comment

YOUR VIEWS

Second District could use new representation

Recently Rep. Greg Walden slipped into Umatilla County unannounced. I was always under the belief that our representatives were supposed to hold town hall meetings in their districts more than once every two or three years.

Rep. Walden, when have you come to either Pendleton or Hermiston and actually held a town hall meeting where you took questions? Not recently. Rep. Walden, what have you done to aid the timber industry that has been all but shut down by the radical environmentalists who have found a sympathetic law firm out of San Francisco who is willing to take the Forest Service to court every time they advertise a timber sale?

If Boise Cascade's announcement that they are closing the Elgin plant is an indicator, I have to say nothing. You have sat by and watched much of your district fall into the cesspool of unemployment because you refuse

to fight for their jobs. With the trade war that is going on with China, your Republican wheat farmers may not have a market for their wheat and your Republican cherry growers may not have a market for their prime cherries. Are you happy? It took Ivan Packard of the Oregon Wheat League 17 years to convince the Chinese to buy our wheat and now thanks to President Donald Trump his work may be for naught. I hope you're happy.

We need someone in Washington, D.C., from the Second Congressional District that cares more about the district and its economy than what we have now, and we haven't had that since Al Ullman was defeated. Frankly I'm getting tired of everybody else getting the gravy and Second District getting what the little boy shot at. I think it's time to vote in a new person who will fight for all the district, not just a select few constituents who give good campaign contributions.

Barbara Ann Wright
Pendleton

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