

# In the skies above Eastern Oregon

From a very early age, I have been interested in — or perhaps more correctly stated, enthralled by — airplanes. My grade school drawing-doodles were frequently rudimentary depictions of the “dogfight” scenes (much of which was actual archival footage) I had seen on the two-season run of the TV program “Black Sheep Squadron,” which was must-see viewing for an impressionable second- or third-grader who was “lucky” enough to occasionally hear a sonic boom growing up in 1970s Eastern Oregon.

I can recall our next-door neighbor in Echo, a then-nonagenarian born well before the turn of the 20th century, regaling us with a story about the historical significance of the first “aero-plane” sighting over the town when she was a young lass. I mowed her lawn as a kid and used some of the earnings to buy a model of a bubble-top canopy P-51D Mustang, which my dad and I assembled and painted at our kitchen table. That model still hangs in the basement of our house, 40 years later, in the bedroom formerly occupied by son Willie.

Apparently, the apple really doesn't fall far from the tree; numerous models constructed by him hang near the Mustang, including a highly detailed B-17 bomber. I bought him a ride on a B-17 for his ninth birthday — the first time he flew in anything other than our friend's crop-dusting helicopter.

When our family attended my cousin's wedding in Homer, Alaska, some years ago, Willie and I were late to

the reception (although we did witness the exchange of vows) because we had booked a sightseeing flight on a 1929 model float plane owned and operated by a 1932 model pilot with more than 10,000 hours of flying time in The Last Frontier.

Willie was also fortunate enough to serve as the unofficial aerial photographer at the Helix Rodeo a few years back when he was a passenger in the celebrity fly-over taildragger. His job also entailed opening and closing the hot-wire gate that kept livestock off of Runway One at Gerking Flat International. I, too, have enjoyed a flying tour from the same facility, albeit with a new generation of pilot and craft.

Recently, I was privileged to be invited by a neighbor to go flying on a perfect May day (please forgive my careless word choice). We flew over much of the eastern and northern areas of Umatilla County and this time I was the photographer, capturing images of my uncle's mountain ranch, a favorite neighbor's farmstead, and a certain fellow airplane aficionado's Caterpillar tractor and antique chisel plow hard at work only a few short miles from where the U.S. Navy “dropped in” on a farming project I was involved in a few years ago.

The EA-6B Prowler they were flying toward the Boardman Bombing Range experienced a catastrophic mechanical failure and ironically almost crashed into the only airplane hangar in North Juniper Canyon. Fortunately, all four

crew members parachuted to safety in the sagebrush-covered hills. It was in all the papers.

My friend's plane is a 1958 model and is in beautiful condition. It has been very well-maintained and he even has a new-fangled Garmin navigation device that he has retrofitted to the controls. This reminded me of how much navigation has changed in the last 100 years for pilots in our area and brought to mind a family story.

In the mid-1920s, when my grandfather was about 10 years old, he was employed in the aviation industry, in a manner of speaking.

The farm where he was raised just south of the confluence of the Columbia and Snake rivers was smack dab in the middle of the air mail route from Pasco to Salt Lake (likely with a stop in Boise). A light beacon was affixed to a tower in one of their fields to help guide planes safely. Being it such that the power line was still more than 20 years in the future for that neighborhood, a gas-line-powered generator was installed to make power. My old grandad, then an eager young entrepreneur, was hired to keep the light plant full of gas for the princely sum of \$10 a month.

A large concrete pad was poured in the field near the beacon and painted with giant orange and yellow markings to aid in daytime navigation. When the tower was torn down, my frugal Great Depression-trained grandad skidded the concrete chunks a quarter of a mile and reassembled the puzzle-like pieces into



**MATT WOOD**  
FROM THE TRACTOR

a relatively level shop floor in his repair building, which remained in use when I moved to the place in 1993. Recycling ain't nothin' new.

*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.*

## Wolves and Oregon's wildlife commission

Oregon's wolves are in serious trouble. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife recently announced their support for a misguided and reckless proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to end federal Endangered Species Act protections for all gray wolves across the Lower 48 states.

This proposal is premature and would jeopardize a nascent, but fragile recovery of these iconic canines. It flouts sound science and the values of the American public, including Oregonians. It further opens the door for trophy hunting and trapping more of America's wolves — including, possibly, the 137 living in Oregon.

This announcement comes on the heels of ODFW's release of the latest draft Wolf Conservation and Management Plan. The draft Wolf Plan contains numerous ill-advised provisions that portend a dark path toward wolf trophy hunting and trapping in Oregon. Oregonians should urge the Fish and Wildlife Commission to reject the Wolf Plan at its June 7 meeting.

As a lifelong hunter and Oregonian, I am deeply distressed by the plight of wolves in Oregon and across the country. Hunters have long recognized their important role as good stewards of the wildlife resources that we all share — hunters and non-hunters alike. As good stewards, we appreciate the vital importance of apex native carnivores, like wolves, in keeping ecosystems abundant, healthy, and diverse.

Most hunters I know follow a general set of principles connected to the modern era of wildlife management and the broad acceptance of the North American Wildlife Management Model. Those standards are inconsistent with trophy hunting, where the primary motivation for the hunt is for bragging rights or a trophy but not for sub-

sistence. As a lifelong outdoorsman, I am baffled as to why any hunters practice anything other than “eat what you kill.”

Those who seek to kill wolves give a black eye to all ethical hunters who do not engage in trophy hunting. It paints us all with the same brush as Walter Palmer (the dentist who killed famous Cecil the lion), Blake Fischer (the Idaho Fish and Game commissioner who resigned after amid public controversy over his killing a family of baboons), and other trophy hunters who shunned a basic tenet of hunting: respect and reverence for the natural world and to use what you kill for more than a photo op.

Three of Gov. Brown's five recent nominations to the very commission that will consider the Wolf Plan have significant conflicts of interest and are directly involved with the industries they would be charged with regulating. Thankfully one of these three, James Nash, a trophy hunter who has posted countless photos on social media standing over dead hippos, sharks, zebras, and other exotic wildlife, and who is a vocal opponent of wolves, was pulled from the list of nominees at a Senate Rules Committee hearing on May 8.

Rather than assuring the commission will be a scientific, diverse body, Gov. Brown nominated candidates who have pushed policies that do not reflect the conservation values of most Oregonians or even most hunters. This is the slate of folks will soon be making decisions about Oregon's wolves and wildlife. Now more than ever, Oregon needs a diverse, scientific, and unbiased commission.

*Rene Tatro is a resident of Lake Oswego and an Oregon hunter and outdoor sportsman.*



**RENE TATRO**  
COMMENT

## Editorial misses the mark on Brown's nominations

In today's world, we don't need an awful lot of help fostering misunderstanding and polarization. That's why a recent editorial defending Gov. Kate Brown's nominations to the ODFW Commission was so disappointing.

The editorial vilified the conservation organization for which I work in a rush to offer unqualified support for the governor. It ignored that our objections were based on legitimate concerns that deserve to be heard.

The media focused primarily on one nominee due to now-redacted photos of him posing with a zebra, hippo, and other exotic trophies. Even in Idaho, Gov. Butch Otter demanded the resignation of a commissioner for similar photos. But that glosses over the elephant in the room and the primary reasons for our objection.

Like several other nominees — and the Commissioner he was set to replace — he had a tremendous conflict of interest. He was asking to serve on a commission that his father frequently lobbies on behalf of the livestock industry. There he has pushed for weaker protections for wolves, elk, and other native wildlife. The nominee publicly stated he would not recuse himself from votes that would benefit his father or his organization.

Other candidates had similar conflicts with one even initiating a \$1.4 billion lawsuit against the state of Oregon on behalf of the timber industry.

It's the continuation of a pattern. The commission has long been dominated by profit-driven and consumptive interests — often the very industries they are meant to oversee. Those interests disproportionately influence policy, and that dynamic is largely responsible for the agency losing

public trust, suffering a financial crisis, and Oregon's standing as a conservation leader continuing to erode.

The Wildlife Commission has a troubling lack of diversity. Non-consumptive appreciators of Oregon's wildlife are barely represented and are often treated with outright hostility despite making up the majority of the state.

The Fish & Wildlife Commission is supposed to serve the public and ensure our fish, wildlife, and their habitats are conserved as a legacy for future generations.

My organization has supported ranchers, hunters, and others with diverse backgrounds from across the state. For months, the conservation community has made it a top priority to see a commission made up of diverse, thoughtful, science-minded individuals who represent 21st century Oregon values. Brown's recommendations to the commission undermined that vision.

The governor's staff essentially admitted their slate was unvetted and that they had simply rubber stamped the wishes of lobby groups the commission is supposed to regulate.

Knowing all that and more, it took a lot of audacity for the editors to say it was we who spun a “false narrative.” It's one thing to take exception to how another outlet (or its fans on social media) cover an issue. However, creating straw men and attacking them doesn't foster anything but more polarization and demonization on both sides.

Our communities deserve better. So do Oregon's fish and wildlife.

*Rob Klavins is the Northeast Oregon Field Coordinator for Oregon Wild. He also helps run his family's working farm and bed & breakfast near Enterprise.*



**ROB KLAVINS**  
COMMENT

## Standing up to China's Belt and Road Initiative

How should the U.S. regard China's multitrillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to build infrastructure all over the world? It has huge benefits for its own contractors, as well as enormous potential for China in future trade and influence.

Should we merely be critical and dismissive? Should we be primarily fearful of the security implications of its expanding global outreach? Are there opportunities to promote U.S. aid programs, businesses, inventiveness and wise counsel on standards and risk taking? Can we double down on bolstering our own competitiveness? So far the USG has tended publicly to adopt the first two positions — with warnings of a “clash of civilizations” and a new “Cold War” with China — and been weak on the third and fourth approaches.

What is BRI? The Chinese launched it in 2013, its title conjuring up the ancient Silk Road from Asia to Europe. They call it “the project of the century” in building global infrastructure. “Belt” is intended to connect China overland with the Middle East, Africa and Europe by railroads, highways, pipelines and fiber optic cables. It's investing in ports, dams, power plants, electric grids and much more. “Road” refers mostly to a sea route linking China to far-flung countries and energy reserves from the Arctic to the Indian, Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

**It's popular:** As of the second BRI Forum held in April in Beijing, China, had project agreements with 126 countries and 29 inter-

national organizations. There is no founding charter or a blueprint and the project agreements are opaque. BRI is nonetheless evolving from a loose network of countries coordinating with China on projects to a more structured one with a new ministerial “Leading Group” in Beijing to liaise with other country's foreign ministers.

**Its origin:** Until a decade ago, a developing China was content to let the U.S. prevail in the international order. The Chinese ventured abroad mainly for resources to feed its extraordinarily fast economic development and pretended to be just any third world developing country. Two events brought this change to a more aggressive foreign policy. One was the economic debacle on Wall Street in 2008-09 when China decided to lessen its dependence on the U.S.-led international economic order. Another was the rise of President Xi Jinping, who harps on China's humiliation by the West in past centuries and calls for China to herald its own model worldwide.

**Cost:** China has capital to spare and surplus industrial capacity. But it's not giving money in grants but rather in loans and investments. Chinese banks have provided at least \$200 billion in loans since 2013. Its loans are free of Western strings about governance or human rights — and it will even take on a bad credit risk country, such as neighboring Pakistan.

**Examples:** Project highlights include the

huge inland rail hub at Khorgos, Kazakhstan, where a container can now go from China to Europe in 14 days, faster than sea, cheaper than air. China is building economic corridors through Laos/Thailand, Myanmar and Pakistan to the sea. In the Middle East, China is constructing the central business district of Egypt's planned new capital east of Cairo. In Africa, there are now 10,000 Chinese businesses to support BRI projects and one million Chinese are living there. It is making inroads into Latin America.

In Europe, BRI's first project was in Serbia where China built, under cost and on time, a new bridge over the Danube. Greece has given China a major stake in its main port of Piraeus. And Italy has just signed up for improvement of the port of Trieste. Europe is engaging with China because EU countries trade over \$500 billion a year more with Asian countries than with the U.S.

**Debt:** The U.S. press has heavily emphasized a few countries that have run into loan repayment problems with the BRI projects, leading to a USG charge against China for “debt diplomacy.” Sri Lanka, Kenya and Pakistan are among them. But it appears that a majority of countries, so eager for infrastructure development, are not being warned off.

**U.S. companies:** It's a point to consider that countries benefiting from BRI infrastructure



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COMMENT

improvements will be the next wave of global growth, offering new markets for more countries than just China. And governments will get smarter about the exploitative contracts with China and the builders they choose.

Citigroup has just published an analysis of how BRI is graduating from Sino-centric to a more multi-directional and inclusive pattern of business. Honeywell International, Hewlett-Packard, General Electric, Caterpillar and Citibank are U.S. companies already taking advantage of new trade and contract opportunities.

**Stay Involved:** We can't just carp about BRI from the sidelines. If we do, we give China a free ride for its global ambitions. An old cliché still pertains that countries that trade together are less likely to go to war. And there's still room for economic development and trade for everybody. We need to be out in the world with our own know-how, inventiveness, aid programs and diplomacy, thereby demonstrating our own spectacular competitiveness. Remember we did this when the Russians shocked us in 1957 by launching Sputnik, the first artificial satellite.

*Ambassador Harriet Isom grew up in Pendleton and has retired to the family ranch. She was a career diplomat serving in Asia and Africa from 1961 to 1996.*

*Harriet Isom is a former U.S. ambassador who lives on the family ranch outside Pendleton.*