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OUR VIEW

Farmers right to be skeptical of being made whole

The results of a study of stakeholder attitudes regarding the proposed breaching of Snake River dams were hardly surprising, but ag interests say the document may serve to educate proponents of the complexities the issue presents. We can only hope so. The study was recommended by a task force on reviving the orca population in Puget Sound. Scientists blame a declining orca population on a lack of Chinook salmon for the killer whales to eat. All Snake River salmon runs are federally threatened or endangered species. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee and the Legislature supported the \$750,000 study to catalog different perspectives on breaching the dams as a way to increase fish runs.

The preliminary study represents the views of farmers, tribes, environmentalists, fishermen, shippers and government officials. Breaching the dams would make it impossible to ship grain down the Snake. Loss of water impounded by the dams would impact irrigation on thousands of acres of farmland, and the loss of electricity generated by the dams would increase the cost of pumping groundwater. Proponents of breaching the dams have suggested that subsidies to farm-



The Ice Harbor dam on the Snake River near Burbank, Wash. A survey has found that farmers and others doubt whether they would be made whole should the four dams on the lower Snake River be taken out.

ers could be built into the multibillion-dollar price tag. “It is important to make agriculture ‘whole,’ so farmers do not suffer significant economic losses if the dams are breached,” the study reported. But, according to the study, farmers don’t believe they will be made whole. Farmers are worried about being “at the mercy of railroads” that would take over shipping and “skeptical” about switching to crops that use less

water, according to the study. Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires said he appreciated that the report’s writers captured different views on breaching the dams. “I think they genuinely listened and began to realize this whole thing is more complicated than meets the eye,” he said. “It’s not as easy as giving a farmer a nickel, dime, 20 cents a bushel — case solved.” Indeed, it is complicated. The live-

lihoods of farmers, barge operators, deck hands, dock workers and the vendors who support them hang in the balance. The loudest proponents of breaching the dams seem to have the least personally at stake. We don’t know anyone who is against saving the whales or the salmon if the real human costs and impacts can be realistically addressed. Count us as skeptical that could ever be the case.



YOUR VIEWS

Tumbleweed snarl another symptom of climate change This writing has to do with the pile of weeds which the other day caused a traffic snarl on one of Eastern Washington’s roadways. I can’t resist stating here that as a farmhand I’ve “been there done that,” at least out in the fields — dug farm equipment out of piles of dried-out, wind-blown Russian thistles (even worse, green ones), which is the weed that was involved in the traffic snarl. Maybe this incident will help urban folks to better understand the serious need there is for farmers to change over to, or ramp up, conservation-based efforts to control this increasingly dominant weed, by precision farming (prudently chem-fallowing) the soils and direct seeding the crops they farm.

Vehicle traffic isn’t the only victim this weed can take hostage during its life cycle, if not wisely managed. More and more significantly large portions of crops grown en masse on dryland farms are simply unable to successfully compete for the moisture that Russian thistles, if they’re not dealt with early on in their growth stage, outright steal from the ground — especially with the warmer and drier weather years we’re experiencing today. Kinda reminds you of another form of “Russian mischief” and the problem with it, doesn’t it? Not to mention also reminding us, in part, of why there’s legitimate need for recognizing climate change as being something that’s genuinely real, and not the “fake news” one particular president so deceptively claims it is.

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FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

Adding more voices to the opinion page

A newspaper’s opinion page is a place where diverging voices and opinions are collected to help spur discussion and debate. That holds true with the *East Oregonian*. Or at least it’s supposed to. After several discussions between the paper’s editorial board, we have decided that we need to have more voices, talking about more issues and generating deeper discussions. That doesn’t mean the columnists already writing for the *EO* aren’t doing a good job — they are. Lindsay Murdock, J.D. Smith, Bette Husted and Matt Wood all produce thought-provoking columns and ones that tend to always make me think a little about my life. Those are good columns to have and I look forward to reading one every Saturday. But since those only come out on Saturdays, that leaves a lot of opportunities in the other issues for new voices and opinion. Now the columnists’ stable at the *EO* is growing and we’re adding to the lineup, starting with the additions of Corey Neistadt, Daniel Wattenburger and Valerie Wenzel as regular columnists.



Neistadt, who is a certified public accountant at Newhouse & Neistadt, LLC in Pendleton, will offer monthly commentary about various issues of interest to Pendletonians and Umatilla County residents. Wattenburger, the former managing editor of the *East Oregonian*, lives in Hermiston and is an account manager for Pac/West Communications. He will also write monthly about issues and topics of

interest in the county and Hermiston. Wenzel is a teacher, who lives in Athena. She will focus on rural issue topics of interest to all. We invited these three to become regular columnists for a number of reasons. All, at one time or another, have written letters to the editor or penned guest columns and all have been the kind of well-researched, well-thought-out perspectives that we felt would be illuminating for our readers. At a time when the national dialog sometimes devolves into who can shout the loudest, we believe in creating opportunities to understand one another on issues of local interest. Those only come when we debate public issues on the basis of facts and clear reasoning. We feel our new additions can help us achieve this goal. We plan to add more regular columnists in the first half of next year, looking for new voices representing the rich diversity of views and communities in Umatilla and Morrow counties. We have some ideas for additional columnists but want to approach this opportunity with as wide a sweep of possibilities as we can. There may be someone who many of us have never heard of that offers fresh political or social thinking that jumps the normal boundaries of civic discussion. Do you think you could produce well-researched commentary about issues important to Umatilla or Morrow counties on a weekly or monthly basis? Do you know someone whose writing would be a revelation to the area? Let us know. If you are interested, please email acutler@eastoregonian.com with the subject line: Opinion writer. If you have samples, please include those and a brief explanation of how you would approach the writing and what you would bring in the way of new or deeper understandings of our region. We would love to hear your ideas. Andrew Cutler is the editor of the *East Oregonian*.