

OUR VIEW

Merkley forest plan has merit

Oregon voters should feel pretty good about U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley's ideas on forest management, concepts he discussed last week.

Merkley wants to push the Biden administration to spend at least \$1 billion per year for logging, proscribed burns and other work to get the tinderbox forests of the state in shape to withstand disease and uncontrolled blazes.

Forest management are the key words Merkley used, and we hope that is exactly what happens. Forest management is not closure of forests. It does not mean blockading vast tracts of forest land to watch it die and then become kindling for another massive fire.

Instead, Merkley seems to back a cooperative concept where traditional rivals — such as the timber industry and conservation groups — work together to help forests.

Merkley correctly pointed out that in the 2018 federal farm bill he included authorization to double spending on forest collaborative projects. That is just not idle talk. That is putting hard cash behind a concept that is probably the only way we can move forward in the future.

Merkley's next challenge will be to get the money into the U.S. Forest Service budget.

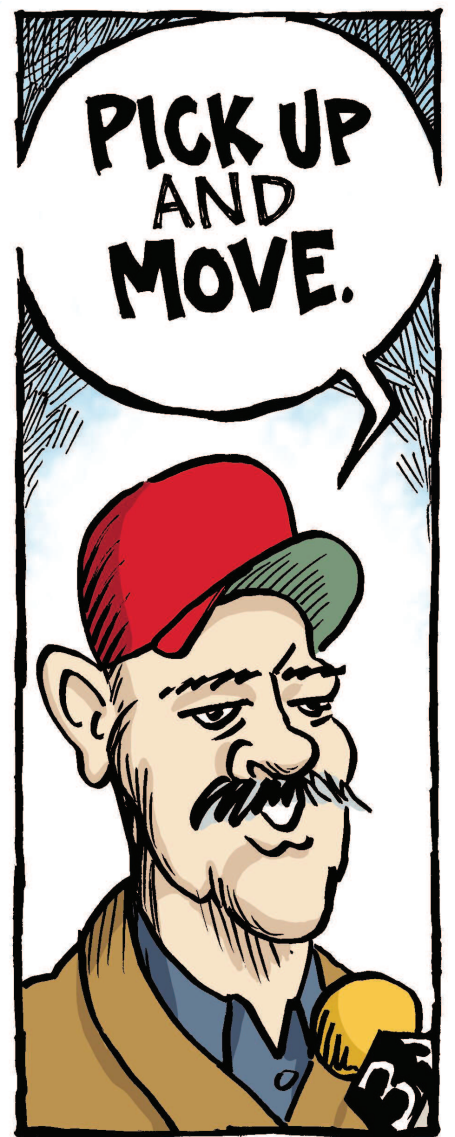
Meanwhile, Merkley's focus on cooperative projects has great merit. It seems obvious even to the most pessimistic observer of the forest situation in the Northwest, the only way forward will be through collaboration. That isn't going to be an easy sell for either environmental or timber advocates, but it is the way to the future.

For a special interest group — such as the timber industry or an environmentalist group — to believe they can have it all one way simply is not a viable solution. In fact, it is a roadblock that pushes important matters, such as the health of our forests, away and puts the focus on egos.

The cooperative model is one that will be, we think, utilized on rangeland as well.

For too long there was a "winner-takes-all" mentality regarding natural resources issues. On one side stood the timber advocates, on the other countless environmental groups. Both sides believed they were right, and both could conjure up data and rhetoric to make it all seem real.

Fact is, none of that matters when the broader problem of forest and range management is placed firmly into focus. What matters is finding compromise and solutions. Fighting over dogma is not going to get us to where we want to be in terms of forest health. Good, sound planning will.



More than just punching a time clock



DANIEL WATTENBURGER
HOME GROWN

If all goes well, I'm near the midway point in my working career. The six paid jobs I've had since the age of 15 — research assistant, pizza delivery driver, security guard, after-school youth mentor, journalist and communications consultant — also put me about halfway to the 12 jobs the average American holds during a lifetime.

I'm not planning on another six job changes in the next 25 years, but you never know. Learning new skills and working on new projects is equal parts challenging and rewarding. Finding fulfilling work that also pays the bills and allows for a healthy life balance is an ever-changing goal.

Thinking on the jobs I've had — and the times between jobs — I've been trying to make sense of worker shortages in nearly every occupation. From shorter-term positions like lifeguards and fast-food workers to careers in agricultural production and health care, everyone seems to be hiring but few are looking. Reporting in the East Oregonian has highlighted this quite well in recent months.

Some have chalked it up to an overabundance of unemployment benefits. There is truth to that, as COVID-19 restrictions sent a lot of people home and the government responded with fully replaced incomes. In some cases those benefits still are paying out as

restrictions subside. If that's the main driver, there should be a surge in the coming months as the checks stop coming and people get back into the workforce.

COVID-19 also kept a lot of people out of the workforce to care for their children. A recent report from the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis shows 350,000 working parents — about 17% of the total workforce — had no ability to work from home and no other nonworking adult available to provide childcare. With schools reopening, another hurdle will be removed although the larger issue will persist.

The shortage of workers, especially in Umatilla and Morrow counties, is not a new phenomenon. And the impact of government programs isn't new, either. Five years ago, Umatilla County and Blue Mountain Community College conducted a skilled workforce study to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the local labor supply.

The report, which relied on surveys from hundreds of businesses, found employers were struggling to find applicants who weren't already earning more money from government assistance and could pass a drug test. Other challenges included cumbersome licensing requirements imposed by the state of Oregon and an evolving definition of work ethic.

The lack of willing and able workers has many specific negative effects. The shortage of school bus drivers, for instance, leads to disruptive delays and stunts educational time for certain students. Too few lifeguards on duty

means limited instructional classes. A psychiatric or medical facility unable to maintain staff leads to diminished care for everyone.

There are broader effects as well, including developers and employers opting to set up somewhere with a more predictable workforce.

I don't know what the second half of my working life will look like, for myself and much less for the rest of the workforce. Automation will continue to play a growing role, protecting businesses from the expense of labor shortages. Cultural values will continue to change. The gig economy will grow.

There has to be room in society for these kinds of changes. We must be able to maintain a high quality of life, value personal development and encourage community contribution, while recognizing that punching a time clock isn't the only way to achieve these things.

Few people are lucky enough to find a dream job, the kind where it feels like you never have to work a day in your life. I'm skeptical that truly exists.

But that collection of less-than-perfect jobs you accumulate by applying and learning and growing have a real impact on yourself and your community. We'll be better off by embracing work as a societal good rather than simply a path to a paycheck.

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YOUR VIEWS

Forest plan needs robust input from all stakeholders

Almost every fall since childhood, I have headed into the Blue Mountains to hunt big game. As the decades pass, I spend more and more time here, hunting black bears and turkeys in the spring, and fishing the many rivers throughout the year. The Blue Mountains provide some of the best hunting and fishing anywhere in Oregon and contain more than 5.5 million acres of public lands across three national forests: the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman.

Finding the appropriate balance of multiple uses on 5.5 million acres is no easy task. The efforts to find that balance have been ongoing for nearly 20 years through the Blue Mountains Forest Plan Revision Process. A draft plan has already been completed twice, but they both received widespread objections and were never finalized.

These forest plans determine the social, economic and ecological goals on public lands and provide a frame-

work for future management decisions.

Strong voices and comments from sportsmen and women will be critical to ensure the final management plans contain ample fish and wildlife habitat protections.

Identifying and conserving big game migration corridors, reducing road densities in certain areas and actively managing forest and stream restoration projects should be priorities in the next plan revision, all while continuing to provide for local socioeconomic priorities. Proper management of fish and wildlife habitat will help to recover struggling mule deer herds and ensure the robust elk populations spend more time on public lands to minimize increasing damage concerns on private lands.

Michael O'Casey
Bend

Scooter complaints go nowhere

The city of Pendleton recently

licensed a company to rent their motorized scooters for use on city streets. An ordinance was modified to allow use in city parks, specifically to include the river walkway. State law requires that bicycle helmets must be worn, and operators must be at least 16. Riding on sidewalks is also prohibited.

I have yet to see any individual wearing a helmet, and riding on sidewalks seems to be preferred over using the streets. It seems they have become very popular with youngsters and adults wishing to avoid a driving under the influence charge.

I've discovered filing a complaint with city hall is simply a waste of time, as you are just given the Bird (the company that owns the scooters) phone number and website. Besides, I've been told the mayor claims he hasn't gotten a single complaint.

It's only a matter of time before there's a fatality, especially during Round-Up, but don't fret, explains the city attorney: The company has insurance.

Rick Rohde
Pendleton

EDITORIALS

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