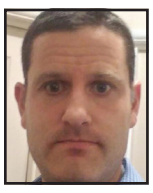

ALEX
COOPER
OTHER VIEWS

# Start opening your eyes at the Umatilla Museum

In early May, the Umatilla Museum reopened its doors to the public. But who cares about history, let alone local history, let alone Umatilla County history? You should.

Visiting the Umatilla Museum is a step toward eye-opening empowerment through questioning our world. It is liberation, detaching from "The Matrix" of disinterest and apathy surrounding our nature and identity.

In this process of liberation, history provides us with first with continuity, a connection to preceding generations and legacy. From the construction of McNary Dam that keeps YouTube buzzing, to Native Americans who left their mark on daily language, to artifacts marking military veterans' sacrifices that provided freedom to write this article, reflecting on cause-effect relationships unlocks a cascade of questions and subsequent insight. Absent these questions, we see only what is directly before us. In turn we erroneously believe ourselves to be a "blip," rather than belonging to a continuous flow.

From continuity comes humility. That is, while we are indeed the doers, the creators of today, as part of that flow of Homo sapiens there is little fundamentally new under the sun. Umatilla County's earlier housewives and craftsmen had different technologies but similar aims; and while future Umatillians will develop new tools, the purposes of these will be familiar. Humility acts as a thoroughfare connecting past to present to future and back again. It allows us to learn from all members of this flow to whom we are neither superior nor inferior. It affords us the ability to view our contemporaries as fellow travelers rather than as rivals.

Humility is neither natural nor easy to obtain, however. When 2021's teens reflect on the Umatilla Museum's 1950s editions of the Umatilla Viking, they may struggle to look past the "old-fashionedness," to fight a desire to look down on predecessors. If today's teens are open to seeing similarities with this earlier generation, however, they will find them. Accepting that one is not superior is a kind of "humble pie," an unpleasant part of the liberation process.

Despite such immediate bitterness, "humble pie" provides comfort. Yes, we should strive to be better, as individuals, morally and materially; yes, let's push the frontiers of technology. Nonetheless, we can take comfort in our status as mere Homo sapiens. Psychology and philosophy have value as theory, but are nothing compared to the millennia of field data (a.k.a. the "history") we have on Homo sapiens. While all the billions of us in this human laboratory have been individuals and responsible for personal actions, as a collective we have bumbled through, simply doing the best we can. Seeing ourselves, friends, and family in the faces of ancient Egyptians or even of Umatilla's 19th century pioneers can give us comfort, making us feel less alone in our shortcomings and limitations.

Once possessing comfort we are equipped to generate empathy for others, be they in the past or in the present. We can put ourselves in the shoes of a Umatilla railroad worker, or of Lewis and Clark. We can imagine that were we 19th century pioneers or Native Americans, we might have engaged in the same atrocities for which we judge them. Like "humble pie, "empathy pie" is bitter — swallowing it requires us to forgo our instinct to judge — but doing so is again the only way to unlock and unlatch.

A progression from continuity to humility to comfort to empathy under our belt, we can navigate forward with confidence. We can propel ourselves by the warmth of our predecessors, from Umatilla County and beyond. With lighter hearts we can continue writing the story written by frail Homo sapiens, one we realize to be as repetitive (cyclical) as it is progressive (linear).

Perhaps most important, we can give ourselves the power and others the permission to depersonalize challenges, shortcomings and conflicts. We are individuals but also part of something much bigger than any one of us. Recognize this, unlatch from apathy and disinterest and open your eyes. Make a visit to the Umatilla Museum as part of this process.

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*Alex Cooper works in the Migrant Education Program for the Intermountain Education Service District.*

# What is forest health?

GEORGE
WUERTHNER
OTHER VIEWS

The U.S. Forest Service continuously justifies logging our forests based on what it calls "forest health." The agency claims logging will "restore" resiliency. But few ask what exactly constitutes a healthy forest ecosystem?

The agency defines forest health as a lack of tree mortality, mainly from wildfire, bark beetles, root rot, mistletoe, drought, and a host of other natural agents. To the Forest Service, such biological agents are "destructive," but this demonstrates a complete failure to understand how forest ecosystems work.

This Industrial Forestry Paradigm espoused by the Forest Service views any mortality as unacceptable other than that resulting from a chainsaw.

This perspective is analogous to how U.S. Fish and Game agencies used to view the influence of natural predators like wolves and cougars on elk and deer. Over time biologists learned that culling of the less fit animals by predators enhanced the survival of the prey species.

Similarly, wildfire, bark beetles, and other natural sources of mortality enhance the long-term resilience of the forest ecosystem.

For example, the snag forests resulting from a high severity fire have the second-highest biodiversity found in forested landscapes. Large, high severity fires promote more birds, bees, butterflies, wildflowers, bats, fungi, small rodents, trout, grizzly bears, deer, elk and moose.

Many species of wildlife and plants are so dependent on snags and down wood that they live in mortal "fear" of green forests. Some estimates suggest that as much as two-thirds of all wildlife species utilize dead trees at some point in their lifecycle.

*"THERE ARE NUMEROUS OTHER KNOWN ECOLOGICAL IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH LOGGING THAT ARE MINIMIZED, OVERLOOKED OR IGNORED BY THE FOREST SERVICE."*

Even worse for forest ecosystems, the Forest Service emphasizes chainsaw medicine to "fix" what they define incorrectly as a "health" problem. Chainsaw medicine ignores the long-lasting effects of logging on forest genetics.

Research has demonstrated that all trees vary in their genetic ability to adapt to various stress agents. Some lodgepole pine and ponderosa pine have a genetic resistance to bark beetles. Others are better adapted to deal with drought and so forth. Yet, a forester with a paint gun marking trees for logging has no idea which trees have such adaptive genetics.

Research has shown that thinning even 50% of a forest stand can remove half of the genetic diversity because it is the rare alleles that are important in the time of environmental stress. Perhaps one in a hundred trees may have a genetic ability to survive drought or slightly thicker bark that enables it to survive a fire.

There are numerous other known ecological impacts associated with logging that are minimized, overlooked or ignored by the Forest Service.

For instance, one of the primary vectors for the spread of weeds into the forest ecosystem is logging roads. Logging roads are also a primary chronic source of sedimentation that degrades aquatic ecosystems. Logging removes carbon that would otherwise be stored on the site. Even burnt forests store far more carbon than a logged/thinned forest.

So when the Forest Service asserts it is logging the forest to enhance "forest health," one must ask whose definition of forest health are they using? The timber industry? Or an ecological perspective? So far, the agency is more a handmaiden of the industry than a custodian of the public trust.

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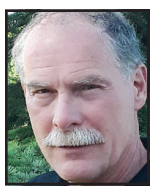
*George Wuerthner is an ecologist who specializes in fire ecology and livestock issues.*

# Regular, moderate sun exposure is the goal



JOHN
WINTERS
HEALTH CARE ESSENTIALS

I asked the man strolling on the beach why he was wearing a life jacket. Trying to be patient, he explained, "My goodness, don't you know the ocean is dangerous? Millions drown every year."

He's right. The ocean can be a very dangerous place and requires great respect. I encouraged him to learn a little about the actual risks of certain activities so he wouldn't feel so threatened. Understanding and respect are different than blind fear. This analogy also applies to our attitudes toward the sun.

We often hear, "Avoid the sun's harmful rays," "stay inside," and "protect yourself against the sun's damaging rays." Is our sun really out to get us, or is there more to the story?

These warnings have some truth to them, but they also are incomplete. The ocean sustains life on this planet, yet can kill you depending on your actions. You can learn to swim, fish or skipper a boat. You can safely row across the Atlantic given adequate preparation. Similarly, you can safely enjoy the sun's benefits while minimizing risk. The man on the beach probably doesn't need to wear a life jacket, and we probably don't need to hide from the sun.

According to my research, the sun and the human race have happily coexisted for a really, really long time. I googled it. Sunshine is both life-giving and potentially dangerous. Our skin does have built-in protections, but these take time to deploy. Humans who have lived near the equator for eons are born with ample protective melanin in their skin. Others that hail from the north don't need so much protection and are lighter in color.

For us northerners everything is dandy, until you move south or take a tropical vacation. The sudden increase in the sun's intensity causes problems.

Sunlight offers myriad types of light essential to life. Humans see only a small portion of the spectrum. Outside what we see are energy waves that warm us, help plants grow and improve our health. Yes that's right, the sun's "damaging ultraviolet rays" also are healthy.

So, how do we get the healthy part while minimizing the harmful part?

We require UV light to synthesize vitamin D. Vitamin D is noteworthy because it prevents skin cancer and has many other important properties. Optimal levels of vitamin D help prevent 17 types of cancer, hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, autoimmune diseases and influenza, including COVID-19. Optimal levels of vitamin D also improve moods, immune function in many ways, and inflammation. That's all very important.

Dr. Cedric Garland, an epidemiologist known for his research in the field of vitamin D deficiency, calculates that adequate vitamin D levels would prevent 600,000 cases of breast and colorectal cancer every year. Dr. William Grant, a NASA atmospheric physicist, was one of the first to recognize vitamin D's protective benefits. He believes more than 50,000 American lives would be spared yearly, 30% of cancer deaths would be prevented and cancers of the skin, prostate and lung would be halved.

The Journal of Investigative Dermatology found that sun exposure has an inverse relationship to melanoma risk, by far the most deadly skin cancer. Surprisingly, office workers have much more melanoma than outdoor workers.

Experts point out that skin cancer rates are rising the past 50 years, about the time we started hiding from the sun and using sunscreen. They ask, "If sunscreen worked we would see less skin cancer, but instead we are seeing more." Trustworthy sources such as The Lancet, The British Journal of Dermatology and the Cochrane Collaboration find that sunscreen use doesn't reduce deaths from skin cancer.

The relationship between skin cancer and sunshine doesn't fit into a one-sentence soundbite. You don't need to fear the sun, or the ocean — but there certainly are times for precaution. There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. BCC and SCC account for about 99% of skin cancer cases, and are important to treat, but rarely cause death. Melanoma accounts for about 1% of cases but causes 75% of skin cancer deaths. Optimal vitamin D levels protect against melanoma in many ways. The key is to get plenty of vitamin D but not too much sun.

Your overall health requires mindful sun exposure. Hiding from the sun or burning can each cause problems. Like water, the sun is essential to life, yet too much is dangerous. Regular, moderate sun exposure is the goal.

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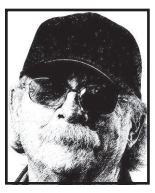
*John Winters is a naturopathic physician, who recently retired after operating a practice in La Grande since 1992.*

# An excellent reason to be a fraidy cat



J.D.
SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS OF DRY CREEK

More than 40 years ago, I was perched on a barstool in Wisdom, Montana, when a stubby older fellow in a hard hat limped through the door, climbed up on the stool next to me, ordered a double shot of Jim Beam with a beer back, looked me in the eye and asked, "How you doin' pup?"

I allowed I was fair to middling and asked why he was so stove up. He launched into a tale about a thieving pack rat that was robbing doodads from his mining partner and how he had laid a trap for the varmint at the end of his bunk, waited most of one night with a flashlight and a pistol then blew away the rat, sure enough, right along with the big toe off his right foot. He ended the story with, "You never learn younger."

That chunk of advice has rattled around my brain ever since. It has only been recently, as I have grown impossibly old, that it has begun to make sense. For instance, I have discovered that I am quite afraid of alligators and mountain lions.

There is no objective reason for the fear of alligators. The only time I ever saw a live one was at Reptile Gardens in Rapid City, South Dakota, where my semi-sister was hired to "wrestle" alligators twice per hour. This amounted to her in a two-piece swimsuit leaping on the back of a toothless trained critter and flipping it over a few times. Nevertheless, when a gator appears on the television, I get the heebie-jeebies.

The fear of cougars has some basis in experience. It can be traced to an incident at a remote cabin in the Eel River country of Northern California where my daughter and I had been given the task of watching over an extensive grow and a pen of chickens while the gardener went back to New Jersey to attend her father's funeral.

We were accompanied by a blue mongrel named Patsy who was too cautious to work cows and calves but was really good at barking, rolling in horse turds and keeping my kid and me safe from attack by chipmunks. Her choice of perfume made her an outdoor dog.

It rained for a week, day and night. We were trapped in the oil-lamped cabin except for the 15 drenching minutes a day it took to gather eggs and feed Patsy and the chickens. My 8-year-old kid clobbered me at every board game we played, so after the fourth day we retreated to opposite corners of the living room where she read Nancy Drew and drew pictures of horses while I did what I do best, pretty much nothing. Even today when I am accused of being a tad too sedentary, I remind the person who tries to pry me out of my lounger that the Buddha sat below the Bodhi tree until his skin started to fall off, then he went back to partying, and that my skin still is in reasonably good shape.

On the night the rain finally stopped and the stars came out, we were in our bunks about midnight when Patsy came uncorked, yapping out 30 yards into the brush, then running back to the porch, then repeating the act. I yarded my 200 pounds of self out of bed, put some pants and T-shirt on, stepped into my moccasins, grabbed a flashlight and went out into the night to see what in tarnation was happening.

Patsy led the way. The yard was fenced with four strands of barbwire, which she maneuvered much more gracefully than I. Beyond it was a fairly dense willow thicket with a maze of livestock paths tromped into the mud and where, when we turned a blind corner, Patsy led me directly to a cougar straddling a fresh deer kill.

If you have ever heard the voice of an aggravated Siamese cat, imagine the sound turned up to 11 on a big amplifier. When my flashlight hit the lion's eyes, that is the voice that he/she deployed to remind us we were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Patsy abandoned the quest immediately and scooted toward the house. I followed as quickly as I could while walking backward and pointing the flashlight in the general direction of any attack that might occur.

I do not remember going back over or through the fence, or up the stairs onto the porch, but I was able to get through the door without being clawed or eaten right behind stinky Patsy, who had become a house dog. Then, as an indicator of how fully the experience had scared the peewadding out me, I very carefully locked the door, as though this particular lion might have learned how to operate a doorknob with its teeth or paws. You never learn younger.

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*J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.*