

Port of Morrow gives take on DEQ fines, water crisis



LISA MITTELSDORF



RICK STOKOE

OTHER VIEWS

You saw recent headlines about large fines levied against the Port of Morrow by the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality for repeated violations of our wastewater permit. You should know the whole story.

Large, job-intensive industries in our community generate an annual average of 3.5 billion gallons of wastewater. The Port of Morrow receives that wastewater, processes it and distributes it to irrigate 10,000 acres of farmland, enabling farmers to raise higher-value crops such as potatoes, carrots and onions.

Oregon environmental policy encourages innovative practices that save resources and promote sustainable outcomes, including industrial wastewater reuse. The port views turning industrial wastewater into a community asset as part of our economic mission and our environmental stewardship.

There are significant benefits to wastewater reuse. In addition to providing a reliable source of water for irrigation without drawing down groundwater, the wastewater contains nitrogen that substitutes for commercial fertilizers produced with fossil fuels. Our farming partners are operating under best management practices to provide sustainable and responsible nutrient use. The port is also pursuing additions to its wastewater system that would capture methane emissions.

The port has a DEQ permit to provide industrial wastewater to irrigate farmland. Our wastewater system was sized to distribute 3.5 billion gallons of wastewater over an entire year. What changed was a DEQ permit modification issued in 2017 that severely limits what farmland can receive wastewater during winter months.

When this modification was made, the port told DEQ we had no viable alternative to store or divert winter-month wastewater. To put that practical problem into

context, our local industries generate an average of 1.3 billion gallons of wastewater during the winter.

To avoid winter wastewater land application will require new wastewater treatment systems, more storage and additional farmland that can benefit during the growing season from the stored wastewater that would have been applied in the winter. That's a big order with a big price tag. It also will take time to realize.

We are exploring federal and state funding options to help the port pay for these investments. Without additional funding, we have no short-term options. It is unrealistic to ask local industries, which also lack wastewater storage, to shut down during the winter. The best option is for an orderly transition until capital investments can be made that allow the port to store all wastewater generated during the winter and then use that stored wastewater to assist farmers during the growing season.

Our actions to date haven't occurred in the dead of night. The port's professional staff informed DEQ of what we were doing and why since the permit was

modified in 2017. The fines are based on data we supplied. That's why the fines came as a surprise, especially since DEQ acknowledges that wastewater application from all industrial sources is a minor part of a region-wide problem that has existed for decades.

Community leaders and citizens should be concerned about contaminated drinking water. Port commissioners and staff who live in this community share that concern. Instead of assigning blame, we should focus on pursuing solutions that are available and attainable. Singling out the port isn't a solution. The port is in compliance with our DEQ permit except for winter land application. We believe improvements we are pursuing will enable us to eliminate winter land application and continue the port's contributions to improving groundwater in the basin.

This is a moment for cooperation, not conflict. It is time to solve our collective problem, not point fingers.

Rick Stokoe is the chair of the Port of Morrow Commission, and Lisa Mittelsdorf is the executive director of the Port of Morrow.



KAREN KING

OTHER VIEWS

Title IX's impact on equity in education

Title IX of the Education Amendments of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law on June 23, 1972 by President Richard M. Nixon. Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."

As we reach the 50th anniversary of this landmark legislation, it is important to review its impact on educational equity.

Title IX is best known for its impact on female athletics. It requires the equal treatment of female and male student-athletes in everything from equipment and supplies to scheduling of games and practice times to recruitment to coaching. Thus it has created a more equal playing field for male and female athletes, and the number of female athletes has climbed more than ten times since the law was passed. Furthermore, Title IX has allowed women to gain the recognition and remuneration in sports they have long deserved.

Not only has Title IX had significant impact on athletics, but it has also had far-reaching effects in other areas. Title IX protects students as well as staff in elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges and universities, for-profit schools, career and technical education programs, libraries and museums receiving federal funding. The law affects all areas of education, including in the areas of career and technical education; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); sexual harassment and assault; harassment based on gender identity; recruitment, admissions and housing; pregnant, parenting and/or married students; comparable facilities and access to course offerings; financial assistance; and student health services and insurance benefits.

Despite the progress toward gender equity realized by the passing of Title IX, there is still room for improvement. Sexual harassment continues to be a significant problem for female students, creating barriers to an equal education. In some schools, girls still do not have equal opportunity to play sports that boys have. In schools where students are predominantly racial and ethnic minorities, progress for girls in sports and academics still lags far behind that of boys. Boys and men still dominate STEM and other fields that lead to the highest paying jobs. Full implementation of Title IX will require stronger enforcement as well as more resources, training and technical assistance for schools.

All girls have the equal right to an education and associated activities free from sex-based discrimination and harassment. Each institution or organization that receives federal funding must designate at least one employee as the Title IX coordinator.

If you have questions or concerns about Title IX implementation in your school or college, contact the school or school district and ask to speak with the Title IX coordinator.

Karen King is retired and is a member of American Association of University Women, whose mission is to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education and advocacy. Karen enjoys reading, gardening, camping and Tai Chi.



We deserve the truth about forest management, collaboratives



MARK WEBB

OTHER VIEWS

In a recent opinion piece ("We need to do better in our approach to fires," June 4, East Oregonian), Rob Klavins, of Oregon Wild, cites five different restoration projects as evidence that collaborative efforts across Eastern Oregon are eroding environmental protections, decimating forests and silencing environmental dissent as "extractive interests" take over collaborative groups.

Klavins is not telling the truth about forests or collaborative groups.

Klavins claims the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest "invoked collaboration to get away with logging centuries-old trees in the Lostine 'safety' project" that resulted in "lawsuits and an increased fire risk." But this project does exactly what years of scientific research in Eastern Oregon has shown to be effective in reducing fire risk: reduce stand density and shift species composition from fire-intolerant grand fir to fire-tolerant larch and ponderosa pine. Moreover, the harvest prescription retains all trees 21 inches in diameter and larger. The Wallowa-Whitman is not logging "centuries-old trees."

This project did result in a lawsuit filed by Oregon Wild. But the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the lower court's ruling that the Wallowa-Whitman developed the project in accordance with federal law and that its public and collaborative engagement process was open, inclusive and transparent.

Klavins claims the Wallowa-Whitman is now "doubling down with the Morgan Nesbit Project, which would nearly clear-cut virgin forests from the edge of the Eagle Cap Wilderness into the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area." But this project is in the early stages of development and no decisions have been made about what management actions will occur in the Morgan Nesbit area.

Next, Klavins claims the Umatilla National Forest has "proposed logging over 27,000 acres of pristine forests and some of the biggest trees in Eastern Oregon on the Ellis Project." Again, he misrepresents the facts. No decision has been made about what management actions will occur as part of this project. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement that analyzes five different alternatives has been released for public comment. But no alternative does what Klavins claims.

"COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS ACROSS EASTERN OREGON HAVE ENRICHED PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT, IMPROVED ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTIONS AND ENHANCED FOREST HEALTH."

Klavins also claims the Umatilla is "with no environmental analysis ... developing Parkers Mill, which would allow more logging of roadless forests than has occurred across the lower 48 in the last two decades combined." But the USFS cannot undertake any kind of action that will have environmental impacts unless it performs an environmental analysis. There is no environmental analysis for Parkers Mill because formal development of the project hasn't started yet.

Next, Klavins claims the Big Mosquito Project on the Malheur National Forest was

supposed "to thin small trees to protect old growth from fire." But when "the logging equipment rolled in, the big old trees were considered a danger, splashed with blue paint, and cut down." His tacit claim here is that loggers ignored unit prescriptions and treated "big old trees" as danger trees simply to log them.

His claim is misleading. The unit he describes is a line-side unit for steep slope logging that uses a mechanical tower anchored by cables to nearby trees for stability as it pulls cut trees uphill to the landing. Anchor trees and trees near the landing are treated as work hazards and cut down per Oregon's Occupational Safety & Health Administration regulations.

Apart from these trees, you won't find "big old trees splashed with blue paint and cut down" inside Big Mosquito units. In fact, this project was designed to increase survivability of old-growth trees in the face of fire and drought by thinning young trees. The "big old trees" are still standing throughout this project area.

Finally, Klavins claims that "long-standing protections for big and old trees called 'the (Eastside) Screens' were eliminated" during the Trump administration. This is utterly false. The Eastside Screens were amended to better reflect current science and prioritize the protection of old trees, facilitate the recruitment of old and large fire-tolerant species like larch and ponderosa pine, and adaptively monitor this effort in the face of climate change.

All of Klavins' claims are part of a larger pattern: ignore important details and misrepresent the facts as needed to support his view. Klavins cannot be trusted. Nor can Oregon Wild, his enabler.

Collaborative efforts across Eastern Oregon have enriched public engagement, improved environmental protections and enhanced forest health. They embody the best way forward for those who truly care about fire-adapted landscapes and rural communities in Eastern Oregon.

Mark Webb is the executive director of Blue Mountains Forest Partners.