



**NORM  
CIMON**

OTHER VIEWS

## A signal we should all pay attention to

Thanks to the East Oregonian for publishing a range of views about forest management. Those articles have focused on how trees store carbon and the perceived value of forest collaboratives. There's a bigger picture that needs to be understood, one that touches on both.

It's well known that a changing climate can take us down a path we can't quickly return from. That's the evidence from core samples drilled deep into ancient ice. Regular cycles have warmed and cooled our Earth during the last 400,000 years. Very rapid transitions to a much warmer Earth are followed by a slower return to cooler periods that can last thousands of years.

Now that we humans are pulling the climate strings, there's no knowing where this might lead. The wild gyrations we've been seeing, from blistering hot for days on end to a spring that only recently arrived, are a message we need to heed. That may signal even bigger changes.

That variability also reworks ecosystems. Climate records show that forests develop, expand and contract under specific conditions of precipitation and temperature. Once established they can persist and thrive even through climate swings.

In the Wasatch Range, which dominates the skyline in northern Utah, thick groves of Gambel oak are everywhere at higher elevation. But when the ground finally warms, it's too dry for trees to reproduce from seeds — though they easily germinate in a lab setting. The oaks we see are, instead, part of one large organism, a root mass that corkscrews its way up mountainsides. It sends up a thick growth of leafy stems above ground, visible to us as small trees. The clones, as they're called, can be tens of thousands of years old. In all likelihood, they migrate with the climate, seeding out successfully when conditions allow, hoarding resources underground when they don't.

A similar story plays out here in the interior Northwest. Stringers of trees work their way down from the slopes, forming a thick carpet in north-south running canyons, such as the Lostine. Direct sun only visits that realm for a few hours every day. The deep dark spruce-fir forest that results harbors a very different plant community from the one just a few miles north, where the Lostine River spills out onto the open prairie.

Such deeply shaded old-growth forests can sustain an ecosystem through hotter and drier periods, even over centuries, till cooler temperatures and plentiful rainfall return again. They do so as David Mildrexler has written about, also in the East Oregonian: by creating their own ecosystem reality. They tap water underground, and move it closer to the surface, which hosts plant communities dependent on that moisture. Water also is pumped to the very top of those big trees that transpire it into the canopy above the forest stand, maintaining the microclimate they've created. That's something anyone who's found cool refuge in such a forest on a hot summer day understands instinctively.

Because mature trees can be quite old — those that grow in the Northwest are some of the longest-lived of their kind — they can hold on until favorable climate conditions return again, taking advantage of the changes to expand their range. Seen this way, the ecosystem is a sort of super-organism, growing and changing over time.

Older trees also store very large amounts of carbon. In wetter forests those trees can be covered with lichens and mosses that add even more to the storehouse. Log the big trees from those stands and there is no guaranteed return path to that wetter ecosystem. The water isn't going to be as available to younger growth, the new vegetation will be hotter and drier, and the forest openings will no longer support the same plant community. It could be a very long time before conditions allow for reemergence of that ecosystem. The microclimate has vanished.

That brings focus back to Lostine Canyon, a very wet place. That cool refuge offers us a humble lesson we should take to heart. We live on the margin of wet and dry. Over thousands of years, our forests have adapted to that reality. We need to do the same by keeping them intact.

That's a signal we all need to heed.

*Norm Cimon, of La Grande, is a member of Oregon Rural Action, a nonprofit, but his column represents his opinion only.*



## The best thing before sliced bread?



**J.D.  
SMITH**

FROM THE HEADWATERS  
OF DRY CREEK

The question rattled around inside my baseball cap last Saturday afternoon while I stood behind the glass cases of the only grocery store within 15 miles of my trapper's shack, watching the essential worker as she pushed the sliding table on her whirling stainless steel Hobart machinery, feeding a chub of peppercorn salami into one end and plucking quarter-inch meat frisbees from the other. Watch your fingers.

Yummy. None of your dry, artisan, artsy fartsy, goes-great-with-Cabernet, Italian salami here. No siree, this was workers' food, good solid proletarian lunchmeat all dressed up for the dance. Sliced salami could, indeed, be the best thing since sliced bread. But wait a second, how did sliced bread come about anyway? And what was the best thing before sliced bread? Time for another lesson from "History without Underpants."

Factory-sliced bread has only been around for a hundred years or so. The inventor of the bread slicer was Otto Frederick Rohwedder, born July 6, 1880, in Des Moines, Iowa. He grew up in Davenport, Iowa, and entered the Northern Illinois College of Ophthalmology and Otology in Chicago, from where he received a degree in optics in 1900.

In the early 20th century the optometrist's trade was just being developed and a person needing eyeglasses purchased them from a jeweler. Rohwedder operated three jewelry stores of his own in St. Joseph, Missouri, until 1916. That year he sold his stores and moved back to his hometown because he had been visited by a brilliant idea.

His idea, which he had begun working on since 1912, was to create a bread slicer that

would automatically cut loaves of bread into slices for consumers. He worked on several prototypes, including one that held a sliced loaf together with metal pins. This model did not prove to be very tooth-friendly and was unsuccessful. His biggest challenge came in late 1917 when a fire destroyed his design blueprints at a Monmouth, Illinois, factory that had agreed to build his better slicing devices.

It would take several years for him to get it all back together, but Rohwedder continued to make refinements to his design. In the course of his research he realized from talking with bakers that he would need to find a way to prevent a loaf of sliced bread from going stale. By 1927, he had devised a solution to this problem: a machine that would slice the bread and also wrap it.

Meanwhile, a man named Charles Strife invented the spring-loaded, automatic, pop-up toaster, but ran into a series of insurance claims from hand-sliced bread jamming the toaster mechanism and burning down a few houses. Chuck's toasters desperately needed uniformly shaped pieces of bread, and he urged Otto to go ahead, please, with his slicing machinery ideas.

The toaster safety issue gave Rohwedder the marketing wrinkle he needed to get his latest version of the bread slicer off the ground. Sliced bread was safer than whole loaf bread. He filed for patents on his new slicing-and-wrapping devices and sold his first machine to the Chillicothe Baking Co., in Chillicothe, Missouri, in 1928.

On July 7 of that year, the company sold its first loaf of sliced bread, which they marketed as Kleen Maid Sliced Bread. Demand climbed swiftly. Within a year, Rohwedder found himself scrambling to keep up with the pace of requests he was getting from bakeries to supply his slicing machines and Mr. Strife's toasters were all the rage.

In 1929, just as he was getting his Daven-

port-based Mac-Roh Sales and Manufacturing Co. up and running, the Great Depression hit and his company took it in the shorts. In order to put bread on his own table, Rohwedder was forced to sell rights to his invention to the owners of Micro-Westco Co. of Bettendorf, Iowa, who purchased the machines and hired Rohwedder to serve as a vice president and sales manager within its newly formed Rohwedder Bakery Machine Division.

Even while the United States slipped into economic gloom, sliced bread became more and more popular. Sales skyrocketed nationally beginning in 1930 when big city folks got wind of sliced bread. Wonder Bread, packaged with the balloon-type dots on the wrapper just like today, began producing the product on its own specially designed equipment.

By 1933, bakeries were selling more sliced bread than unsliced bread. The only time sliced bread experienced a downturn was during the middle of World War II, when Agriculture Secretary Claude Wickard banned its sale in an effort to hold down prices during the time of rationing.

Rohwedder, meanwhile, became known as the "father of sliced bread," and spent the last 10 years of his life traveling and speaking to groups around the country. He died in Concord, Michigan, on Nov. 8, 1960. One of the first models of his original slicing machine is now housed at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.

OK, that's sliced bread. What was the best thing before sliced bread? I have no idea, but if I were able to travel through time and meet the 2.7 billion folks alive on this planet when Wonder Bread made its debut, I'd ask them what was the greatest thing on earth before that, and I bet you 50 pesos that the answer would be bread, hot from the oven, unsliced, was the best thing before sliced bread.

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

## Faithful companion still part of the story



**LINDSAY  
MURDOCK**

FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN

The floor was cool as I slid down the cupboard door to the concrete, waiting for our vet to finish up outside on another patient. It was Sunday, and thankfully, Carrie was on call.

I watched with wide eyes as Deets gulped the water from the small bowl placed on the floor in front of him. His body shook a bit and his heartbeat seemed to accelerate with each lapping of the liquid. How much could I let him drink? Would he be able to tolerate it after so many days without? I guess we'd find out. I closed my eyes, trying to remember exactly where Ian had told me he'd been found.

I had already searched in the same place for the second time two days earlier, seeing and hearing nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, I had parked the mower right next to the giant pile of tires that his body had been stuck in for the past nine days. How was it even possible that he was still alive and standing in front of me after nine long days?

I had been in the produce aisle when Ian had called that afternoon asking if I had seen his text. Irritated that he was calling after I had already asked at least three times what was needed from the store, reading through text messages was not a priority at the moment.

"No, I haven't seen the text. I am shopping now, so just tell me what you need," I replied. "Just look at the text, Linds. Please just look at the text. He's alive! Deets is alive," Ian said.

I gasped and stood in the middle of the aisle in complete shock. My hands trembled and tears welled up in my eyes as I stared at the photo on my phone. Our dog, who had been missing for nine days, was indeed alive, stand-

ing in our front yard looking skinny and a bit sad. Making my way through the checkout line and then bagging my groceries as quickly as possible, I couldn't help but wonder how this was even happening. Where had he been found? Was he really OK?

So many questions were unanswered, but did those questions really matter when the dog that half the county had been searching for with us had been found alive?

Twelve miles had never seemed so far away as they did that warm afternoon. I kept my speed steady on the freeway and then accelerated down the mile of dusty gravel toward home. Ian was standing in the driveway with friends who had come to look at the tractor we were selling as I turned toward the orchard trees.

Pulling the car into the shade, I jumped out, running toward him, praying he was as alive as he looked. When I reached the apple tree, his head moved ever so slowly as his eyes focused on mine, his tail wagging back and forth with a steady beat that seemed to reassure me that everything was going to be OK. He stunk so very badly, but the stench didn't keep my hands from rubbing his sides and nuzzling into his neck. He was alive.

The next two hours were a bit of a blur. Ian was able to tell me the complete story of how he was found, and after a call to our veterinarian, I loaded Deets into the car so he could be examined properly. I was certain that nine days without any food or water was nothing short of a miracle, and I wasn't taking any chances of losing him now.

After arriving at the vet clinic, I carried him in through the back door, laughing to myself that I had actually put the leash around his neck. There was no way he was going to be able to run off in this kind of condition, but habits play tricks on the mind, especially in stressful conditions.

Carrie came in through the back door and

let out a heavy sigh when she found Deets and I both on the cool cement floor. Apologizing for keeping us waiting, I laughed out loud. I had been waiting for nine days, and the past half hour had been a wonderful opportunity for me to sit in the stillness and soak up the miracle that was lying next to me.

Together, we worked at getting two bags of liquid down him through an IV and then attempted to wash the stench away. He wriggled and squirmed all 50 pounds of himself around, avoiding the water with every ounce of energy he could muster up. The rinsing off would have to wait for another day. Getting the liquids into his tired body was much more important.

I left for home with Deets curled on the floorboard of the car about an hour later. His eyes were closed, but he had a steady heartbeat. The other dogs greeted us at the car when we got home, hoping and praying as much as I had that their best pal was doing well.

It's been just over a month now, and our sweet Deets is as good as new. He walks miles of gravel roads with me daily, lies next to me on the back porch as I read and is soaking up summer like the best of them. I'm not sure he'll ever chase another cat or rabbit into a pile of tires ever again, but he'll definitely have a story to tell for the rest of his days.

Sometimes I catch myself looking at him while he walks with me, wondering what kind of lesson God was trying to teach me during those nine days when I had searched for miles on foot and in my car knowing deep down he had to be alive. Was it perseverance or patience? Hope? Determination?

Whatever it was, you can be sure that I continue to whisper thanks with each wag of Deets' tail. The happiest and most faithful walking partner I could have ever hoped for in a dog still gets to be a part of my story.

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