

# O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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## OUR VIEW

# Preserving farmland must be a priority

Mark Twain is credited with telling readers to buy land because, he warned, they aren't making more of it. Unfortunately, farmland sold too often is put to other uses and is lost forever.

A new report from the American Farmland Trust warns that the Pacific Northwest stands to lose more than half a million acres of farmland to urban sprawl by 2040 unless cities make smarter development choices.

Between 2000 and 2016 alone, roughly 11 million acres of farmland has been lost or fragmented by development.

Across the Northwest, as many as 527,185 acres of additional farmland may be lost to urban and low-density residential development by 2040 — particularly in rapidly growing metro areas around Puget Sound, Portland, Spokane and Boise.

Washington would be the hardest-hit state, losing 238,614 acres of farmland under the worst-case scenario. That is an area roughly 4½ times the size of Seattle.

Oregon would lose up to 142,267 acres of farmland, while Idaho would lose up to 146,304 acres.

Our own reporting has shown that when urban development moves into rural spaces more than farmland can be lost. As areas fall to other uses, the overall viability of the local ag infrastructure comes into jeopardy.

As fields give way to housing developments, conflicts between homeowners and farms increase. New residents don't like the dust and smells associated with farm production, and complain about farm machinery on the roads and trucks during harvest time.

And, as developments break up the landscape, farmers find it ever more difficult to move equipment from field to field.

We can't fault farm families for getting the highest value for their property. Where there are buyers, there will be sellers.

As an alternative to development, we favor easement programs that allow owners to sell their development rights and realize the market value of their land while preserving it for farming.

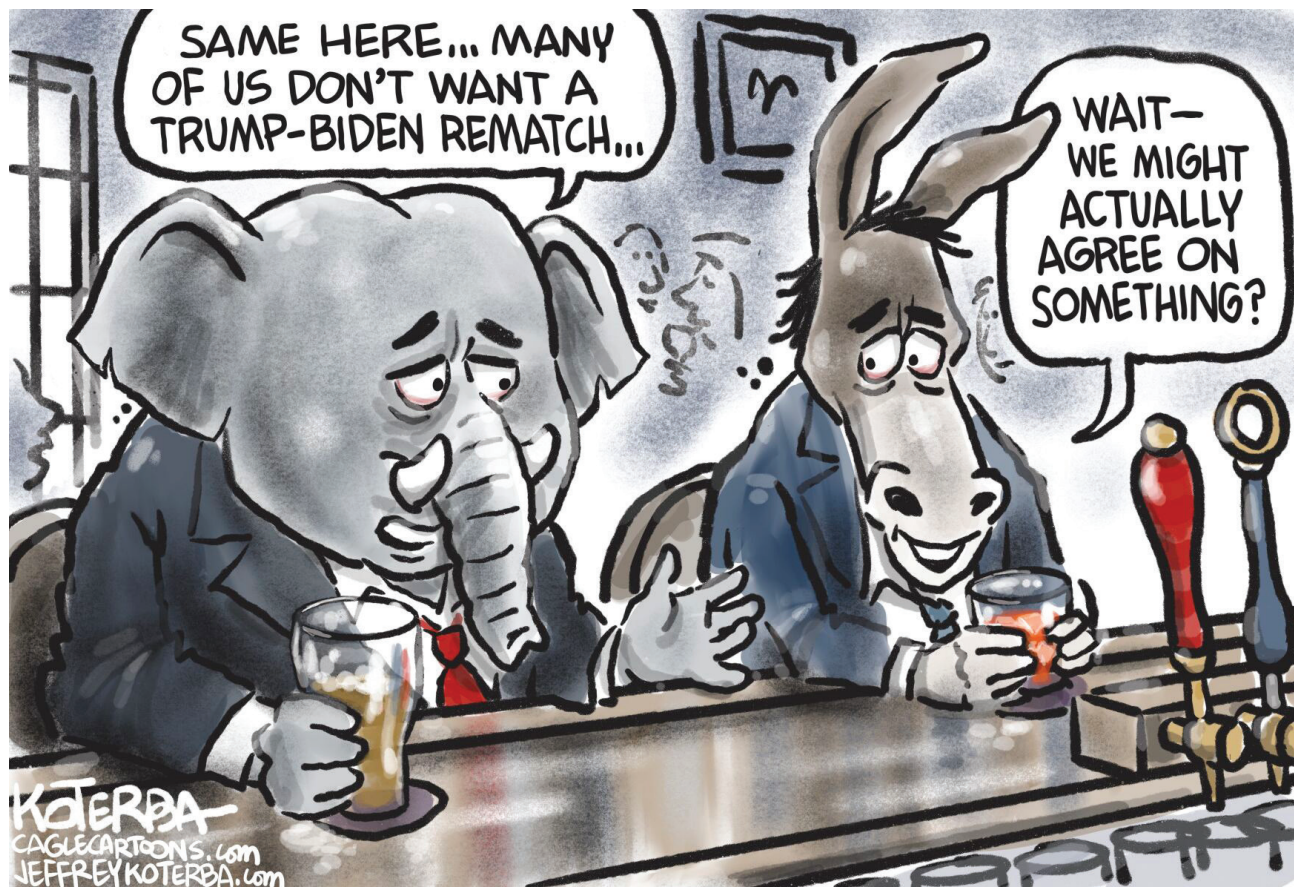
We encourage state legislatures to fund those types of programs while taking steps to rein in urban sprawl.

Preserving farmland must be a priority.

When developers look at farm and range land, they see "empty" spaces with nothing on it. They see parcels for subdivisions, apartment buildings, shopping malls and restaurants.

Farmland is far from empty. It provides the food that sustains us and the fiber that clothes us. It is a vital strategic resource. It is, as Thomas Jefferson said, the wealth of the nation.

Farmland is more than just a patch of ground with stuff planted on it. Once paved over and developed, it cannot be replaced.



## Will Washington, Oregon have a fire season this year?



MARY  
WISTER  
EYE TO THE SKY

It doesn't take the test of a magic eight ball to answer this question. All signs point to yes. We're observing a late season based on the cool and wet conditions this past spring, but we still have about two months of hot and dry conditions. Southeast Oregon already has seen a major wildfire. At the end of June, the Willow Creek Fire burned more than 42,000 acres near Vale.

What a difference a year makes. In June 2021, the Pacific Northwest suffered more than a week of brutally hot temperatures and extremely dry conditions. In June 2022, the Pacific Northwest was cool and wet for most of the month. Obviously, precipitation and temperature extremes during the spring play a role in the summer fire season.

Last year in early June, Oregon had its first large wildfire of the season (Joseph Canyon Fire) in Wallowa County that required an incident management team. It's not uncommon to have grass fires over Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon in June, but a

large wildfire in the higher terrain where fuels are often green is rare. Fires in this area often show their ugly appearance in July.

Monsoon season typically kicks off in the desert southwest in early July, and moisture is often transported north that could contribute to thunderstorms with lightning-caused fires over Eastern Oregon and southeast Washington. Unfortunately, human-caused fires add to the wildfire statistics in July as well.

The Climate Prediction Center is expecting the continued hot and dry conditions in the Pacific Northwest through September. Fine fuels such as grass and shrubs respond quickly to changes in the humidity and precipitation. If you look around, you likely will observe that cheat grass and foxtails are thick and tall. Most have cured with very little fuel moisture. Grass fires have been the primary concern this month. As we continue to experience more hot and dry conditions, the larger fuels in the higher terrain will show signs of curing and will be monitored for large wildfire potential.

The Northwest Coordination Center Predictive Service in Portland works closely with other geographical area coordination centers across the nation to compile a fire season outlook. The outlook is provided around the first

day of each month. From July through August, the Cascade Range and the southern half of Oregon have a greater than average potential for large wildfires.

Most of this area remains under a moderate to extreme drought. In September, the focus for large wildfires will be from the Cascades westward due to the likelihood of easterly downslope winds, and this area will remain under above average potential for large fires.

No matter what the season has in store, it's better to be safe than sorry. Maintain your lawn and cut down tall weeds and grass. Don't allow vehicles to idle along grassy areas. Campfires should never be left unattended and should be completely extinguished when no longer in use. Trailer chains should be properly secured around hitches and not left dangling to the ground.

The fire season in Washington and Oregon has been quiet so far; let's do our part to keep it that way.

Mary Wister is a meteorologist and fire weather program manager at the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Wister serves as an incident meteorologist when large wildfires or other natural hazards necessitate an incident management team's quick response to protect life and property.

## YOUR VIEWS

### LIHWA, ever heard of it?

It stands for Low Income Household Water Assistance. It's funded by the federal government and administered by the state of Oregon and supplements a program already in place through Community Action Program of Eastern Central Oregon.

It covers all aspects of your water/sewer bill, including reconnect and late fees. It does not cover those miscellaneous fees the city has tacked on, such as the street utility and public service fees, although the city does have programs that also offer assistance to these.

The original \$5 street utility fee that city officials felt was easily affordable to all already has climbed to near \$10 because it's linked to inflation. It's expected to climb dramatically with the latest increases in the cost-of-living.

Evidently all levels of government, up to and including the federal government, are now concerned that water/sewer rates in the city of Pendleton are too high regardless of the claims made by the mayor, city manager and public works director that they are fair and equitable.

Conservation? As a matter of fact, during a local major event, during a severe drought in Portland, a visiting

dignitary from the metro-area queried one of our top city officials as to the extent of our conservation efforts. The answer was pretty simple, our water is basically a revenue generator, so conservation is not a priority.

Other cities in our area have spent a fraction of what Pendleton has spent with our state of the art purification and aquifer replenishment systems while we ignored the ancient leaking distribution system. Our rate schedule prioritizes revenue over conservation.

So who wins? Certainly not the public.

Rick Rohde  
Pendleton

### Digital-only coupons not accessible for all

Our modern smartphone society has given us many benefits. Online vendors such as Amazon are convenient and expedient. Most consumers benefit. Supermarkets track our buying habits and offer us better deals on the products we buy. Apps allow us to download coupons to our smartphones that can provide significant discounts.

But, senior citizens are very often denied this boon. Having a preferred

customer ID is helpful and understandable, but apps that offer coupons online are often unattainable for those who are on fixed incomes and cannot afford the newest tech. Older people, who have lived many decades without these devices sometimes struggle, understandably, with their working.

Weekly, there are offers at stores like Safeway, Albertsons and others that are not accessible to seniors.

I have asked store managers about this issue. They always say that they will accommodate customers that do not have access or understanding of smart phone technology, but in action, clerks always refuse to give the discounts. At best, they call for a confused supervisor and seniors are embarrassed and disrespected. This is shameful.

In our high-tech society, it would be easy for stores to have the same digital coupons that are offered online at the check-out line to convenience senior citizens. Such discounts could also be programmed into the modern point-of-sale registers these chain stores use.

It is the least we could do for those who have given us so much.

Joseph Brusberg  
Hermiston

### EDITORIALS

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

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letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

### SEND LETTERS TO:

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