

Water rights reform appears inevitable

Enormous splashes of cancer-like drought consuming some of a nation's most productive agricultural lands: If CIA analysts saw the same thing happening in Africa, Asia or Latin America, they would warn of near-term economic and social upheaval. It's happening here in America and though nobody is predicting food riots right away, a substantial governmental and personal response is essential.

EDITORIAL

The voice of the Chieftain

The U.S. Drought Monitor (droughtmonitor.unl.edu) has been a source of worry for several years but is particularly worrisome this spring. With the exception of Montana and Wyoming, the mainland Western states are on track to repeat the dry pattern of recent years. Now in early spring when conditions might usually be expected to be moist, 60 percent of the West has some degree of water shortage — 7.23 percent in the worst, exceptional form of dead dryness. Years of this means that stored water and groundwater are being rapidly depleted. By its definition, NASA warned last month that California is working its way through its last year of water.

Crucial food-growing areas of California and Midwestern states like Kansas are in the grip of conditions that will drive up food prices, putting greater strain on families that already struggle to balance monthly expenses. Affordable food has been one of America's key advantages. The California Farm Water Coalition points out U.S. consumers pay just 6.2 percent of their disposable income on food, compared to 10.2 percent in 28 other high-income countries. At the same 10.2 percent rate, U.S. families would have to increase the amount they spend on their food budget by almost \$4,000 per year, the coalition's Mike Wade commented to The Wall Street Journal.

Allocating water in a time of scarcity will stretch the current boundaries of legal ingenuity. Water law is a topic highly peculiar to the U.S. West, a field that has sparked epic lawsuits and actual shootouts. We're fast coming to a time when this untouchable topic will have to be dealt with. As an Oregon State University Extension crop scientist told The Oregonian last week, "At what point does it go from being a dry spell to just having to accept where we are today and where we're going?"

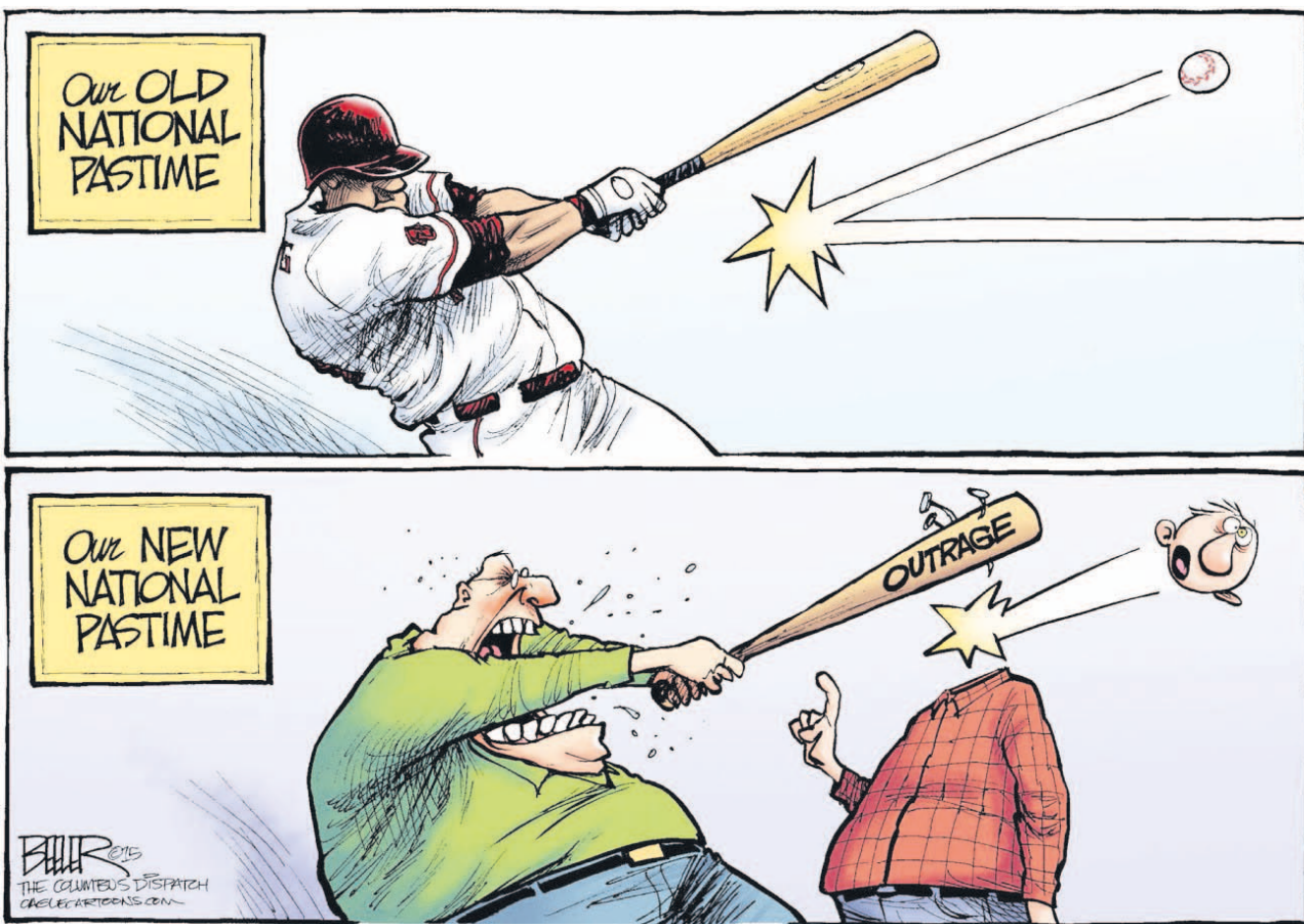
This crisis is generating a lot of discussion. In Southern Oregon, water users are awaiting congressional authorization of a set of agreements that will help settle water-sharing issues between farms, tribes and wildlife. In California, a venture capitalist and a journalist have proposed a new free market to buy and sell water like any other commodity, rather than narrowly linking specific water to specific land as the law now mandates. Other responses include a Facebook campaign seeking to make vegetable gardening a standard offering in public schools.

Western water was initially parceled out based on whomever first began using it for certain recognized beneficial purposes — usually by 19th century farmers and ranchers, and then eventually by growing cities. Byzantine court decisions and rural politics driven by property-rights philosophies make it astoundingly difficult to effect changes in this system.

The pressure for reform is only going to increase, however. Like requisitioning iron in a time of war, a time is fast approaching when we will be forced to develop ways to get water where it will do the most good. Having these debates now, before too much ag land is in deeper crisis, will be the best way to avoid more damaging impacts later on private water rights.

Correction

Although Enterprise's Ace Hardware store has no immediate plans to expand into lumber, it remains a future possibility. The headline above the story's continued portion on page A9 last week failed to reflect this option.



Spring means branding season

Branding season has come early to Wallowa County in 2015. It seems we got 60 days of May in February and March and now that April is here we will get 90 days of March.



OPEN RANGE

Barrie Qualle

I have gone to four brandings in four days and by the fourth one I had two tired horses and a weenie arm that could hardly build a loop. The fourth was at Aunt Dan Warnock's in the upper Imnaha. Due to my eroded condition I elected to leave my horses at home and just work the ground. I knew there would be plenty of ropers and they wouldn't miss my participation in the roping. I felt it was necessary to show up if only to serve as a role model for Warnock boys. The older ones may be beyond help, but Riley the roper shows some promise.

There appeared to be plenty of ground help also, so I opted to have a beer and offer constructive criticism to the workers. This brought on an unprovoked attack from Lisa Morgan who suggested that I was only drinking beer and not helping. I pointed out that pretty people shouldn't have to do hard work. I think it fell on deaf ears. Things went along pretty good until one of the ladies was justifiably, severely chastised by her relatives for using the wrong iron on one of the calves. I got to see a side of her I had never seen before. She seemed to shun the constructive criticism her family was

offering.

There is a lot that can go wrong at a branding and OSHA would never approve of the exciting action at all brandings. We got through this one with little more than a broken fingernail. When all was done and the cattle were being turned out, the crew decided to rope a cow for one of the Warnock boys to ride. The cow was necked and others were trying to heel her when Amanda Smith's horse decided it had all it was going to take and bucked her off. This caused Tyson McLaughlin's horse to do the same and we had a double buck-off. It was all pretty scary and both riders were pretty aired out. Amanda had us all pretty worried and was hurting pretty bad. Turned out to be a couple of cracked vertebrae along with contusions and abrasions. Tyson is just sore all over.

I find it odd when animal rights people gripe about things like ranchers processing cattle. Ranchers are immunizing their animals from sickness or death and maybe giving them a vitamin or selenium boost. Sure they brand and install ear tags, but five

minutes after the procedure the calf is happily sucking his mom and all is well. I look at the fit and active kids of ranch families participating, laughing and smiling. They compare favorably to some animal rights people's kids that commonly are sedentary while they play video games and try to decide whether to get another tattoo or do some more body piercing. They complain about how we treat a calf and don't appear to worry about their children.

Ranchers know that any abusive treatment is counterproductive and likely to affect them financially in the long run. These animals are worth over \$1,200 for a weaned calf and maybe \$2,600 for a bred young cow. Bull sales have been averaging about \$7,500 per head. Why would anyone jeopardize earning this kind of money on their cattle? Urban people trying to pass legislation to alter the way ranchers operate might better spend their time looking at the urban children and the way they are allowed to decorate their bodies with their parents' permission. There is plenty of time after you are older and have better judgment to tattoo, smoke, and pierce your tongue and nose.

What do you think Wally?
Open Range columnist Barrie Qualle is a Wallowa County cowboy who sometimes works and other times watches others work while he dispenses advice and drinks beer.

Envision bicyclists, fixed dam

By Rocky Wilson

In decades past, members of the Wallowa County Planning Commission, among others, spent hours strategizing on best ways to manage future growth in this rural corner of Oregon. Ordinances to govern setbacks and lot sizes, the drafting of precise definitions to separate industrial zones from residential zones, and much more were discussed at length and, in most cases, resolved via written decree.

All this was important work that had to be done, but maybe that anticipated future growth may never come.

Let's face it: Wallowa County, by its location, is an end-of-the-road destination and likely will remain so into the future. One access highway, play-dough for some, could be described as the most dangerous stretch of state highway in the U.S., and tourists as a whole aren't keen on retracing their steps when traveling on secondary routes. I mean

JABBERWOCK II

Wallowa Lake is beautiful, but driving twice over the 75-mile stretch between La Grande and the lake is a deterrent many tourists choose to avoid.

But even if future growth doesn't occur, there are definite needs here, many of them economic, that can and should be addressed.

Tourism is mostly seasonal, with many businesses closing their doors during the cold season, when icy roads of the fears of such keep people away and motel rooms vacant. But what can we do, right? Or, maybe better worded, what do we want to do?

We can't dictate the weather, which is under the control of an entity beyond human comprehension, but there are le-

gal avenues that can be tapped to remove money from the hands of willing tourists and into the hands of local businessmen.

And in society today, one excellent resource of capital outlay — one that won't come here overnight, but will come — will be an explosion of bicyclists who are mounting bikes on cars in ever-increasing numbers, driving distances in search of new locales of beauty (Wallowa County?) and unloading their foot-powered vessels to hop aboard and benefit from healthy exercise that many yearn for.

They also mean to breathe fresh air, and take in Nature's grandeur at their own pace.

And, historically, these touring bicyclists are environmentally conscious and spend twice as much money as other tourists when on vacations.

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Local foods have edge on quality

GUEST RESPONSE

Lauren Johnson

A recent Commentary piece published in the April 1st edition of the Chieftain from the Capital Press states that "the lone advantage of food grown near the consumer is a smaller fuel bill for the truck. Beyond that, it's difficult to see how food grown across the region is any better, or worse, than any other food."

I beg to differ. Although the term "local" can be stretched to mean different geographic extents, "local" food available at farmers markets is often required to be from the same county, surrounding counties, or only several counties away. This is the case with the farmers markets in Wallowa County. Freshness greatly affects the nutrition of

fruits and vegetables: as soon as you pick produce, vitamin and mineral content begin to decrease. Plus, many fruits on an industrial scale are picked unripe, meaning that their nutritional content doesn't develop to its full potential.

Buying produce at your farmers markets means that it was picked within days, sometimes hours, of being sold, that it was picked ripe, and that it's full of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. Buying directly from a

farmer creates a relationship of trust: you can speak directly to him or her about their practices, where it was grown, and how they treat their employees.

Although food from large scale farms in California and Mexico might be certified organic, agri-corporations find all sorts of loopholes around organic certification rules. Further, you have no way of verifying how workers are treated on the massive farms in Mexico that produce much of our fruits and vegetables. A recent exposé in the LA Times ("Hardship on Mexico's Farms, a Bounty for US tables") showed that

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Plato overlooked human rights

To the Editor:

Plato's political depth is best measured by one of the many questions he didn't inconvenience himself with: If man, by his nature, is unqualified to govern himself, then by what superior substitute for human reason does it follow that others of his species are entitled to "govern" him in his stead — and on whose worthy behalf?

The single pillar absent from each of the "ocracies" and "-archies" on Plato's list of inferior forms of government (including democracy) is absent also from the "ideal" form of monarchy that

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Plato favors over them — as if subservience to a philosopher-king were any less an instance of subservience. Missing from them all, most conspicuously from Plato's alleged "republic," is the concept of man's innate, inalienable, individually held rights — the factor apart from which the necessity and the proper role of government can't begin to be grasped or communicated. In re-

buttal to all the travesties appearing on (or off) Plato's S.-list, there is no such factor to consider as "the rights of the rich" or "the rights of the poor"; nor, most preposterous of all, "the divine right of kings" or whatever fibre of "qualification." Every such notion is an insolent denial of the authentic rights belonging, from birth, to every human being — his right not to be murdered, plundered or enslaved, no matter who or how many would benefit (monetarily) from his subjugation.

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