

Compromise returns to Capitol and ag benefits

It is common to find farmers and ranchers holding their breath and crossing all of their fingers and toes whenever the Oregon Legislature is in session.

That's because the state's best and brightest have, on occasion, fallen short of those qualities when it comes to agriculture. It seems some elected officials profess to know everything there is to know about farming — once they take the oath of office.

That's why this year's legislative session is remarkable. While not perfect, the work product the Legislature generated is worthy of praise.

Of particular note is the fact that compromise appears to have come back into vogue in the state Capitol. Not long ago, the "us vs. them" mindset appeared to dominate the political landscape, leaving innocent bystanders scratching their heads. Issues such as field burning were decided based as much on emotion as on science.

This year, the Legislature ultimately rejected radical proposals that would have banned aerial applicators, restricted antibiotic use in livestock — the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is working on that issue — and regulated genetically modified crops.

At the same time, legislators made good progress on difficult issues ranging from funding for much-needed water projects to helping neighboring farmers mediate disagreements that arise over genetically modified crops.

Of particular note was the Legislature's approval of \$50 million for water development projects. That includes about \$11 million for the pumps and equipment to provide water from the Columbia River to Umatilla Basin farms in Eastern Oregon. Though it's not full funding for the projects, it's certainly a good start.

The GMO mediation bill originally required farmers who refused mediation and then filed suit against their neighbors to pay court costs if they lost. When anti-GMO activists objected to that language, a compromise was reached in which judges will consider the refusal when deciding on sanctions.

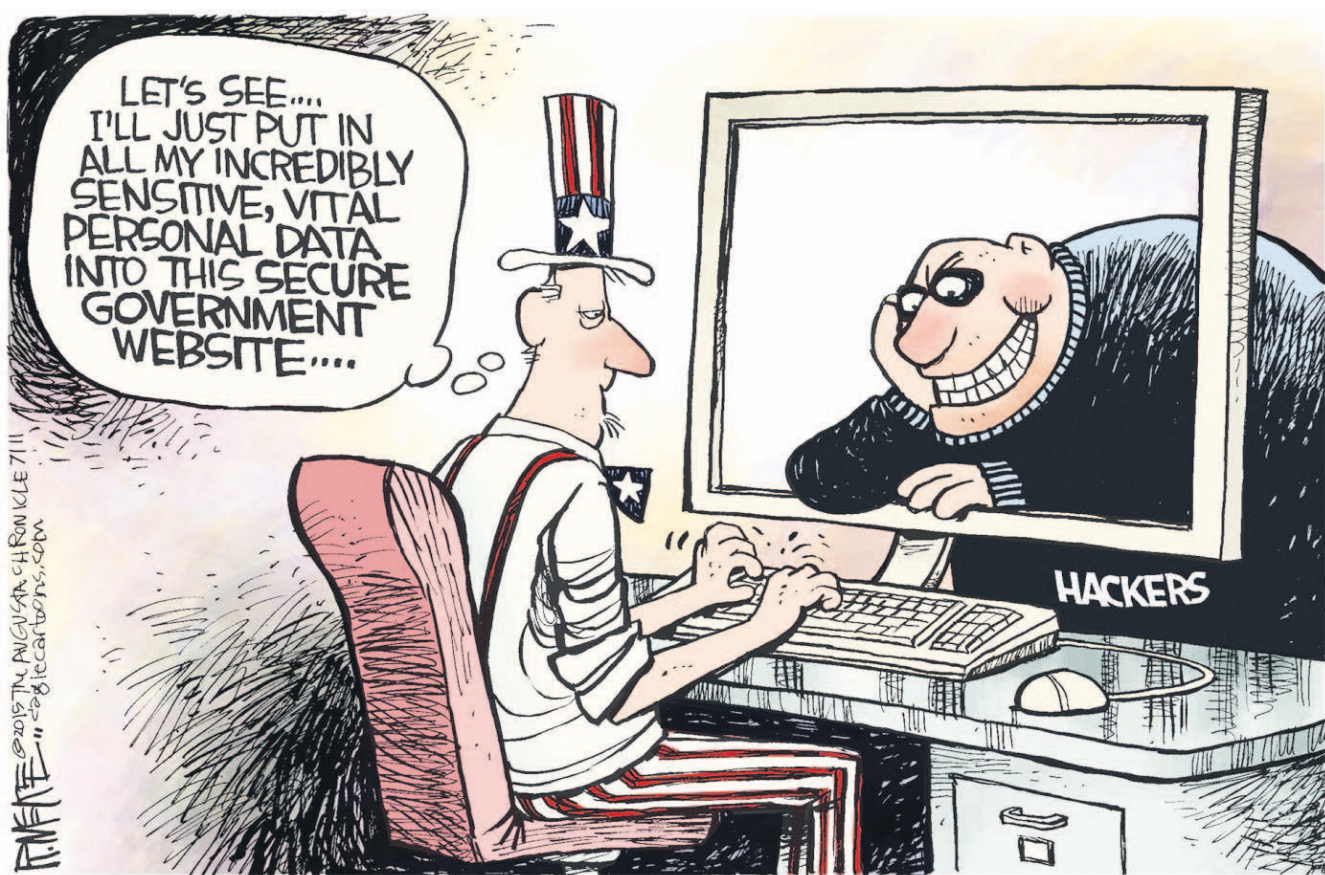
Both bills that were ultimately produced represent compromise — there's that word again.

Among the other agriculture-related issues, the Legislature:

- Added \$14 million to Oregon State University's budget for agricultural extension and research. This allows administrators to significantly increase those efforts after nearly a decade of reductions.
- Tightened the regulation of aerial applicators, especially while spraying forestland, and set up a hotline for complaints.
- Protected farmers who offer agritourism activities such as hay rides from liability provided they post signs and are not found to be negligent.
- Passed a bill that allows landowners to set up special assessment districts to fund USDA Wildlife Services, which offers predator control.
- Extended research on canola in the Willamette Valley. This had been a highly contentious issue among brassica seed growers, who argued canola could introduce new weeds and diseases into the area.
- Resolved a legal quandary in which state law forbid farmers selling raw milk from advertising. Legislators lifted the ban, which was unconstitutional, but left in place other restrictions on raw milk.

These bills allow Oregon's farmers to head back to their fields with the knowledge that the Legislature did its best to find workable compromises on issues that are important to them.

EDITORIAL
The voice of the Chieftain



How I came and stayed

I came to Wallowa County 44 years ago this week. I was living in Washington, D.C., after spending most of the previous five years in Turkey with the Peace Corps. It was 1971, the war in Vietnam raged on, my dreams of working in foreign countries dulled by the way that war had damaged my work and the standing of all Americans in Turkey. An old college roommate lived in Salem. I visited him, went to the Oregon State Extension Service office in Corvallis where I heard there were jobs, and in a blitzkrieg two days of interviews was offered and accepted a job in Wallowa County. I'd never been here.

The job was "community and economic development." My contract was one year. The office was on the second floor of the courthouse, where the DA's office is now. I sent pictures of the mountains from my office window to friends. With today's technology, instant photos would have flooded the world, and a different coterie of young back-to-the-landers might have found their way here.

It was that time. The heady Civil Rights Days and change the world days with the Peace Corps had given way to dissolution and distrust of government. Wallowa County and rural places from Tennessee to the Willamette Valley ballooned with young people looking for ways to make our own food, find our own



MAIN STREET
Rich Wandschneider

families, control our own lives.

So my time in Wallowa County started with a story: the flood of young Americans looking for peace and community in a world that had gone from promise to chaos in a heartbeat. I made a quick trip from Corvallis back to D.C., where Judy and I got married and prepared for the move west. I came ahead, bought a blue Volkswagen in Corvallis, and drove to the county. Volkswagens carried most of the flood.

A second story greeted us: "you have to have been here for four generations to be a local," we were told. With the chutzpah of being 29 and the security of my OSU job, I told the people I met at grange potlucks that I'd just come from the East, where local meant tracing family to the Mayflower, and before that the Middle East, where old meant dirt. One probably couldn't, I thought, be local unless you were Nez Perce. I knew nothing of the Nez Perce, only what I had read in the time between job offer and arrival, but this would begin my longest and deepest

story journey.

Some people are captivated by the landscape, some by fish or game or mountains to climb, but stories, I now know, are what grabbed me and have kept me here. My old boss, County Agent Chuck Gavin, asked me on the first day where I'd grown up. "California, and before that a small town in Minnesota," I said. "How big?" he asked. "About 1500." "You might make it," he said.

From Chuck I learned about rodeo and sheep, WW II and the power of John Barleycorn (wounded in the war, whiskey had almost got him in recovery). He introduced me to the Corvallis community — "the new 'biggest name' in Extension," he bragged. He had a frail California wife he'd met at a USO dance, a son who was a doctor, another a vet, and a third who'd had high fever as a child. Tim hauled garbage, and got as much of his father's pride — and as many stories — as did the doctors.

In those early days we joined a food coop, learned to grow food and keep it, and learned to ski on the old rope tow west of the Lake. After a day of skiing we'd sit in the shack and drink Kirk Hays' home-made wine and listen to ski stories, war stories, and Wallowa County stories.

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10 points about the dam

1. The Wallowa Lake Dam is owned and operated by The Associated Ditch Companies Inc. (ADC).

The Associated Ditch Companies Inc. is a non-profit organization formed in 1919 for the expressed purpose of building, owning and operating the dam at Wallowa Lake. Engineers were hired, plans were developed, land was purchased and the actual construction was done by the farmer/irrigators themselves. They mixed the concrete by hand and used their horses to move the heavy materials required in the construction.

Prior to and after the completion of the dam, major ditches were dug throughout the region north and east of the towns of Joseph and Enterprise to carry the stored water from the lake to the member farms.

2. The Associated Ditch Companies Inc. (ADC) has applied for and been granted "stored water rights" for water stored behind the Wallowa Lake Dam.

The farmer members of the five ditch companies: The Silver Lake Ditch Co., The Farmers Ditch Co., Dobbin Ditch Co., The Creighton Ditch Co., and The Big Bend Ditch Co. all within the ADC organization, have additional water rights to use this stored water for irrigation of their crop lands. Most of these water rights have been in place for generations. In addition to stored water rights, many farmers also have "natural flow water rights."

3. The Wallowa Lake Dam is now almost 100 years old and must be rehabilitated.

Over the years since 1919, The Associated Ditch Companies Inc. (ADC) has

GUEST COLUMN

Tom Butterfield
David Hockett

spent in excess of \$750,000 in repairs keeping the dam in a safe state of repair. As with most structures like this you can only fix them so many times before you must totally rehabilitate them. And so it is with the Wallowa Lake Dam.

The State of Oregon, Water Resources Department and the Army Corps of Engineers have each issued strong letters stating the need to rehabilitate the dam. ADC agrees and has put together a plan for rehabilitation, selecting an engineering company, doing preliminary engineering analysis and design work. ADC has hired attorneys to work on the legal matters. As you can imagine, the costs so far have been enormous. ADC has not even started construction.

4. The cost to rehabilitate the Wallowa Lake Dam today is \$15,000,000.

Why so much, you ask. When working with water related projects like the rehabilitation of the Dam at Wallowa Lake, one is required to deal with societal cost of (1) the Endangered Species Act and (2) the Clean Water Act. ADC is not here to discuss the pros and cons of these laws but to state the facts. The cost of compliance with these two laws has elevated the costs of construction well above the financial reach of the farmer/irrigators. ADC initially looked for funding from the Federal

Government, but with the recession, that did not prove to be a viable option.

Today, ADC is working with the private sector in funding the rehabilitation of the dam. This is proving to be a more efficient use of resources in the rehabilitation of the dam.

5. The Wallowa Lake Dam is structurally safe and safe to operate.

Each year Oregon Water Resources Department, Office of Dam Safety conducts an inspection of the dam to determine if the dam is safe to operate. ADC has also taken concrete core samples of the dam to ensure structural integrity of the dam. To date the dam has been judged safe to operate at reduced storage levels. Until the dam is rehabilitated, ADC must maintain the maximum fill level of the lake at EL 4375 which is 72% of maximum authorized fill.

This is close to 12,000 ac/ft of stored water that is not being stored now, but will be stored once the dam is rehabilitated.

6. The Associated Ditch Companies Inc. (ADC) will use a long term lease arrangement of 4200 ac/ft of water to generate funds to rehabilitate the dam.

It is important to understand that the 4200 ac/ft of water for lease will revert back to ADC once the lease expires. This will allow ADC to rehabilitate the dam without giving up the resource in perpetuity.

7. The release of 4200 ac/ft water will have multiple benefits.

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A break for lake, post-shake

To the Editor:

Not to malign every American's constitutional right to explode incendiary devices while inebriated (Yow! Are we independent yet?), but now that we've given the Lake a good shake, maybe it's time to think about giving it a much needed break.

With Global Warming fast upon us (sorry Deniers ... the jury is in), and gas prices fixed ridiculously low, speedboat/jet ski season grows longer every year — great for marina and state park coffers; not so great for osprey, kokanee, mergansers, swimmers, kayakers, paddle boaters, etc.

Back in the fourth grade, I learned that the flip side of freedom was responsibility. Apparently the drunken

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

teenagers stunt-gunning their skidoos at the swimming beach last week were absent for that lesson.

In a perfect world, people would always pick up their dogs' droppings, broken beer bottles and cigarette butts, and drunken teenagers would not be entrusted with gas-powered conveyances.

But in the meantime, can someone please tell me: WHO'S MINDING THE SHORE?

C.M. Sterbentz
Enterprise

Letters to the Editor are subject to editing and should be limited to 275 words. Writers should also include a phone number with their signature so we can call to verify identity. The Chieftain does not run anonymous letters.

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