

# Downward spiral of wildfires

The time has come for Congress to provide the legal and financial tools the U.S. Forest Service needs to better manage the 188.4 million acres of national forests.

For decades the Forest Service did a world-class job of managing national forests under the multiple-use doctrine.

Then, under the Clinton administration and now under the Obama administration, management of the national forests shifted to a doctrine of benign neglect, as timber sales and grazing tapered off and catastrophic wildfires multiplied.

**EDITORIAL**

*Voice of the Chieftain*

This year 54,493 wildfires burned 9.1 million acres of national forests — including 110,000 acres in Grant County — and the Forest Service spent \$1.7 billion fighting them.

As the understory became clogged with brush, logging slowed to a crawl and grazing was reduced, the forests became overstocked with fuels.

Here's the problem. The nation's taxpayers are not only stuck with the bill for putting out the fires, but the money is taken out of the budget used for clearing brush and treating areas that are vulnerable to wildfires.

The result has been a cycle of bigger wildfires and smaller budgets aimed at preventing them.

A proposal in the U.S. House offers a starting point for breaking this cycle of neglect.

The Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2015, HR 2647, would allow the Forest Service to get money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency to fight wildfires.

The bill also eases the yoke of environmental overkill that the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management struggle with as they try to manage forests to prevent wildfires, insect infestations and disease.

The agencies currently are hobbled by federal laws that require expensive environmental reviews. HR 2647 would exclude from National Environmental Policy Act review parts of projects in areas up to 15,000 acres, allowing them to proceed without unnecessary and expensive delays.

"Depending on funding, it can take a couple of years to complete projects and they can take up to 250 pages of environmental review," said Nick Smith, executive director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities. The Forest Service alone spends \$356 million a year to jump through NEPA-induced hoops.

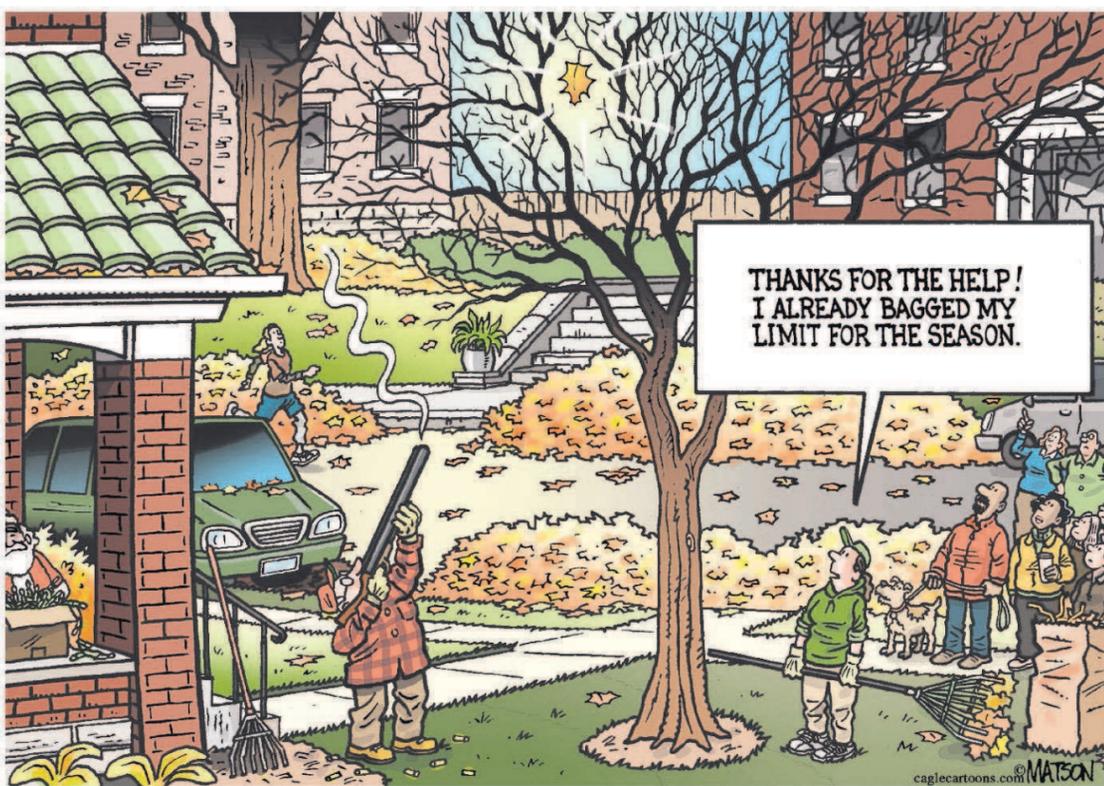
"This isn't about taking away environmental protections, but making them faster and more efficient," said Travis Joseph, president of the American Forest Resources Council, one of 170 organizations that support the legislation.

When it comes to reducing wildfire threats, timber harvests are part of the picture. About 2.5 billion board feet are logged each year in national forests. That's down from 8 billion to 12 billion board feet in the 1960s and 1970s.

Though the bill has passed the House, its future in the Senate is less than certain. The current thinking is that it can be included in other legislation that Congress needs to pass before adjourning at the end of the year.

Congress has a choice. It can either pass this legislation, or a variation of it, or it can do nothing. If it chooses to pass the legislation and President Obama signs it, the Forest Service can more effectively manage the national forests.

If Congress chooses not to pass the bill, you can count on finding more signs similar to one seen recently in the Northwest: "Public lands. Log it, graze it or watch it burn."



## Thanksgiving without travel terror

By Jon Rombach  
For The Chieftain



**AND FURTHERMORE**

Jon Rombach

Driving out of Wallowa County to the greater Portland-Gotham City area for Thanksgiving last week, my reflections on what to be thankful for kept getting interrupted by radio announcers saying not to travel over the Blue Mountains that day if it could be avoided. I kept turning the channel to get a better outlook, but radio announcers were unanimous from all over the region, telling listeners to stay off the roads if possible. My list of nominees for things to be thankful for began to focus mainly on studded tires, snowplows, the travel website tripcheck.com and Dick Tracy smartphone technology that makes it possible to pull over next to the Opera House in Elgin to see which route is less terrible — up and over Cabbage Hill, or the sneak route via Tollgate.

Years ago I drove a Jeep CJ7 for the six-hour trip to the west side, which is just a horrible idea all on its own. This trip was in winter, which made it an even worse terrible idea. That journey over Cabbage Hill accelerated my aging process an average of one-and-a-half years for every terrifying mile. Visibility was somewhere between half to three-quarters of an inch. It was snowing so hard it just seemed like the weather was angry

for no good reason and the snowflakes coming down were the size of insurance claims. The road surface was a sloppy mixture of ice, packed snow, bad manners, loose marbles, used Band-Aids, worst nightmares and just a sliver of hope I might make it to see Pendleton. The parade of semi trucks blasting by my little Jeep created tsunamis of slush off their tires each time they shouldered by, pushing the Jeep around with waves of chunky ice, pieces of gravel and what sounded like sections of broken tire chains. It was not relaxing. I did make it across OK, but was not able to undo my grip on that steering wheel for several weeks. Had to unbolt it and carry it around with me that whole time.

This year the road conditions over Cabbage Hill sounded awfully similar to that Worst Trip Ever, so I was tempted to go Tollgate. But then again, I've been lured in before by a cheerful, reassuring winter road report for Highway 204, only to get up there and find mayhem, looking

like they'd never heard of a snowplow, cars and trucks in the ditches like a shuffleboard game and it looked like they were filming a winter scene for a new Mad Max movie.

It's great, being tucked away up here in the far-right corner of civilization. Not so great when you need to venture out with crappy roads. Sure, I-84 gets the most attention from road crews, sanders and plows. But you also have to consider the number of crazy people in the world and how most of them are in the next lane every time I try to go over Cabbage Hill in poor driving conditions. Tollgate puts you out in the hinterlands, but there seems to be less shenanigans from other drivers. Then again, if Tollgate gets plugged up, it's probably real plugged up. It can be a real toss-up.

This year I went Tollgate and it was great. Only one hay trailer sitting abandoned in the road. Other than that, smooth sailing. So this Thanksgiving, amid all the good vibes about what we're most thankful for, I was just happy to not have my fingers permanently gripped to a steering wheel and when it was my turn to make a toast, I had to go ahead and raise a glass of sparkling cider to Tollgate cutoff. Here's to you.

Jon Rombach is a local columnist for the Chieftain.

## Passing of the 'greatest' generation

By Rich Wandschneider  
For The Chieftain



**MAIN STREET**

Rich Wandschneider

I once asked World War II veteran Alvin Josephy about Tom Brokaw's book "The Greatest Generation."

"Well," he said, "the guys who wrote the Constitution weren't bad."

Alvin was born in 1915 and entered the Big War as a combat correspondent when he was almost 30; for him, and for many, it was the signature event in their lives. A couple of years ago we celebrated vets of that war and the women who stayed home, ran businesses and farms, welded in shipyards and waited for sons, brothers, friends and husbands, with an exhibit at the Josephy Center. Alvin had passed on, but we had a photo of him receiving the Bronze Star and a recording he made on the invasion of Guam. Van Vanblaricom came with medals and memorabilia from the Marines, Biden Tippett with a ship's log and Agnes Roberts with stories and pictures of husband Ivan and of Enterprise during the War. Barney Locke brought in a uniform and flag that his father, Gardner, had brought back from the Pacific, and Dan Deboie a journal of his postings in the Pacific.

There is no need to argue about "greatest" to say that the men and women who fought, died, guided, supported and pulled us through that awful confrontation rose to the occasion and shut down some of the most heinous actions and actors in human history. And here my mind

goes to old friend Jack McClaran, who as a 19-year-old tanker liberated the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald. Fortunately for the 100-plus who gathered at the Oddfellows Hall in Enterprise one night, he told that story, as fresh in his mind 60-odd years later as it was when he lived it. He did so in part because his friend Alvin convinced him that telling it to new generations of Americans, too young to have been there, some with parents or grandparents still too traumatized by it to talk, deserved the truth. Jack's descriptions of camp inmates and the signs of their terrible deaths remain vivid in my mind.

It's been 10 years since Alvin left us, a couple since Gardner Locke, Jack McClaran and Harold Klages died. In recent months we lost Dan Deboie and Malcolm Dawson. As I recall, Malcolm served as a flying instructor during the war, but it is not war service that strikes me now; it is the values and the gifts that this generation left us — and that I sometimes fear we are squandering.

Looking at a picture of a bunch of vets and their families in Hollywood after the war, the daughter of a Marine Corps friend of Alvin's told me that they

"worked hard and partied hard. They had beat the emperor of Japan and the fuhrer in Germany, and they were convinced they could make America better."

After the war, vets, courtesy of the GI Bill, and the women of their generation created a new middle class. They built highways, suburbs, schools and colleges and brought the country to a position of world power. African American vets began pushing back at Jim Crow laws. Women, who had stepped up to work in factories and fly bombers to Europe during the war, built the League of Women's Voters and set the stage for the women's movement. Some in that generation took on national leadership roles, most notably former general Ike Eisenhower as president. And our own Alvin Josephy became a national leader in the fight for recognition and rights for American Indians.

Most importantly, the men and women of this generation built communities. When I moved to Wallowa County, Dan Deboie loaned me tools from his hardware store rather than sell them to me so I could keep my Volkswagen going and house warm. He, Kirk Hays, Harold Klages, Clyde Hayes and others kept that old motor and rope tow going and guided me and dozens more on our first runs down the ski hill. They supported the hospital, Masons, rodeo and 4-H groups, too.

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## More about the plan than the pipes

**LETTERS to the EDITOR**

A reader of the Nov. 11 article about the proposed pipe shop could be left with the impression that a bunch of small-minded rednecks went down to the city Planning Commission to harass the neighborhood hippy.

Not so. What actually happened is that the applicant submitted a site plan that showed customer parking that doesn't exist, using the neighbor's property for access without their consent or even knowledge.

It was an exasperated but courteous group that showed up to explain this — and other concerns — to the Planning

Commission.

The petition also states that "a much more appropriate place for this retail shop is in the downtown shopping area."

**Andi Mitchell**  
Enterprise

### Please share stories about Leon Lee

We are the parents of our beloved Leon E. Lee, who passed away April 27, 2007. We are writing a book of memories for our family and are in hopes that some of you can help to fill his memory book.

Lee worked at Hubbard Ranch for several years, later starting his own business called "Lee's Excavation." His slogan was "We dig Wallowa County." He

also was a volunteer fireman and helped several neighbors in Imnaha by purchasing an old fire truck that he refurbished. He also helped battle several forest fires, cutting firebreaks with his bulldozer.

If you knew Lee and can remember a story or an experience that you could share with us, we would greatly appreciate your help.

His memorial at the Joseph Church was "standing room only". Lee certainly was well thought of by numerous friends, neighbors and business associates.

Thank you for all the help in sharing your memories of Leon E. Lee. Please send your stories to carolgeeck@gmail.com or by mail to 1467 Siskiyou Blvd., #282, Ashland, OR 97520.

**Edward and Carol Lee-Geeck**  
Ashland

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