

Clearing the trail along the urban-rural divide

VOICE of the CHIEFTAIN

For the Wallowa Mountains Hells Canyon Trails Association and their partners, clearing trails of downed trees and encroaching brush is an arduous task, and also a labor of love. It's time devoted to giving back, and paying forward. And importantly, a time to engage deeply with forest, river, wildlife, and each other.

Around 4 p.m. on Saturday, the trail crew and mules headed back to Red's Horse Ranch after removing big trees that lay across the trail, clearing rocks and trimming prickly underbrush. We were sweaty and tired, thirsty and hot. But we were happy. More than 60 trees cleared from the trail, along with innumerable rocks, sticks and debris cast aside.

A young woman ran up the trail toward us, phone in hand, white cords leading to a set of earbuds. We

moved off the trail for her. She smiled, slowed a tad, and asked crew member Jan Keil, who was carrying a hand-saw and a pair of large pruning shears "Catch anything?" And then she was gone.

We wondered, silently at first and then in collective amazement, how she could have mistaken Jan's tools for fishing gear. Perhaps, like many of us, she simply saw what she expected, regardless of the reality. And we also wondered whether she had an inkling of why the trail was now perfectly manicured for running—no logs to leap, rocks to twist ankles, or underbrush to scratch legs.

The larger question is: How connected was she to the landscape? Did she see grand firs and Doug firs and Ponderosa pines? Or just "pine trees." Did she witness two generations of fire-scarred trunks or even wonder whether this forest, a place choked with ladder fuels, was fire-prone? Was it a run through an ecosystem? Or was

it just a jaunt through a recreational template that might as easily have been a holodeck on the Starship Enterprise. We'll never know. We didn't have a chance to ask.

This, of course, conjures up the all-too familiar problems of the urban-rural divide and the supreme difficulty of getting increasingly urban (though not urbane) legislators at all levels to see and to understand, let alone fund, the urgent needs of rural America. Because it's not just us who need the forests and the river and the Minam Trail. It's also the folks with earbuds and Nikes.

At dinner our conversation turned toward the work of the day, then the forest, then preserving historic Red's Horse Ranch. Our small cadre of volunteers ran the political gamut from staunch conservative to woolly-minded liberal in their lives at home. But here we were unified by the needs of the landscape, and the hard, fulfilling work of clearing trail. Where land-

scape is the heart of the community, and a part of your life and family, then keeping it safe is paramount.

The New York Times printed a column this week titled "Hey, college graduates: don't miss rural America." Its author, Samuel Abrams, is a visiting scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. The gist of the piece was simply that "Americans in rural areas are meaningfully connected to their communities," and in fact more so than most urban locales. Those strong community connections bridge political divides that are not as wide or as unfathomable as many urban people believe. It's why we clear trails together. It's why we have a successful opioid treatment program. It's what we are. "Rural America is not 'flyover country'" for the young and the urban, Abrams concludes. "It is a dynamic part of our nation." And it has some lessons that our more urban, earbudded and Nike-shod friends might find useful.

A holiday expedition with four Marys

Occasionally, some of the women who are about my age from our family back in Boston embark on a "cousins' holiday." This year, their sense of adventure brought them outside New England all the way to our bed & breakfast here in Wallowa County.

The four travelers were my sister and three cousins, who all happen to share the name Mary, in one form or another. So to keep everything straight, they add middle names. My sister Mary Kate was accompanied by cousins Mary Beth, Mary Anne, and Eileen Marie — who now calls herself Mary Eileen sometimes, just for fun!

They all arrived in Portland on a Saturday amidst a considerable brouhaha regarding Mary Anne's missing checked luggage — which the airline eventually agreed to compensate her handsomely for on a daily basis until it arrived (four days into their trip.) But Mary Anne made the best of it by buying some new clothes on airline dollars in Portland and later here in Joseph.

On Sunday, the ladies drove east through the Columbia Gorge, and they marveled at the scenery, especially in the canyon along the Wallowa River, before they pulled into La Laguna for a tasty dinner that evening in Enterprise. Contentedly fed, they arrived at their home away from home at our house in Joseph, which is also known as Belle Pepper's Bed & Breakfast. Mary Kate and Mary Beth already knew my wife Pepper from various trips back east or out here, but Mary Anne and Eileen were meeting her for the first time, and everyone hit it off immediately.

We plotted a little itinerary that evening, but we amended it the next morning when clouds settled in. So the ladies' adventures started with a walking survey of Joseph before the eye-opening foundry tour at Valley Bronze. I joined the cousins for an excursion to Imnaha right after that, and they were struck by the change from mountains and pastures to rugged canyon landscape in a mere thirty mile drive.



POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

John McColgan

Our hearty lunch at the Imnaha Tavern prompted curiosity from my inquisitive cousin Mary Anne regarding all the dollar bills on the ceiling and how they got there. She received detailed directions from Cody, one of the new owners — who seemed intrigued by Mary Anne's accent but skeptical of her ability to follow instructions — describing exactly how to wrap and throw her combination of a dollar bill, quarter, and thumbtack in order to make the little missile fly and stick. Darned if that eager student didn't gobble up Cody's every word and stick the ceiling on her very first launch — which delighted Mary Anne, and stunned the rest of us!

As we began our drive back to Joseph, we were surprised yet again to find a tree blown down halfway across the road near the Imnaha school where no tree had been an hour before, so we doubled back to the tavern to suggest that someone call 911. A guy who was having lunch with Cody said quietly, "I have a chain saw," and we left the solution to them.

We altered our course and decided to drive a few miles up the Imnaha River road as far as Skip and Pam Royes' cabin so we could get a taste of that canyon, then we turned around and headed back through Imnaha. I bet my cousins a nickel that the fellow from the tavern would already be at work helping to take care of the downed tree. As we passed by, sure enough, there he was, helpfully clearing the road for his rural community.

We all shared great meals each morning, thanks to Pepper's wonderful cooking, and the main dishes included cheese quiche,

baked blintz, breakfast burritos, and blueberry pancakes, along with all sorts of nutritious side dishes, fruits, juices, and coffee or tea. On Monday evening, we devoured lasagna, again courtesy of Pepper, and the ladies also savored the adventures of the day.

Tuesday brought more favorable weather for a ride up the tram to Mount Howard, and despite our admonitions to the contrary, my impish relatives still chose to feed the ground squirrels at the top, because the little critters were just so cute! That afternoon featured more exploration of the shops in Joseph, and later a delicious shepherd's pie baked by my sister Mary Kate.

Wednesday morning, the cousins visited the county museum before joining me at St. Katherine's hall for the weekly Rotary Club meeting and lunch, which included an informative program by Angela Bombaci about the Tamkaliks celebration in Wallowa. That afternoon, the four Marys dropped by the Stein Distillery, where Dan was gracious enough to give them a little tour. Then they strolled across the street to visit the Joseph Center and Rich Wandschneider, our new Rotary Club president this year — which served as another reminder of what a small, interconnected world Wallowa County can be. The ladies' last full day in Joseph concluded with a lovely dinner for all six of us at Vali's, capped off by samplers of their mouth-watering desserts.

The four cousins from Boston were amazed that there was such a variety of things to see and do here in a rural county. They had a fantastic time on their adventure, and they accepted one of the well-intended but backhanded compliments of a local shopkeeper — that "they seemed so nice and friendly, for people from back east" — with grace, and a wry Irish sense of humor.

I hope this account of their visit can help remind the rest of us of just a few of the treats that we have around here, if only we open our eyes and our hearts to enjoy them!

John McColgan and his wife Pepper own Belle Pepper's Bed & Breakfast in Joseph.

LETTERS to the EDITOR

Tool article RE McKee Big Sheep campground misleading

The news article by Steve Tool, "McKee withdraws Big Sheep campground application", in the Chieftain's July 17 edition is misleading and disingenuous. Mr. Tool states there were "about one dozen had filed letters in opposition" when in fact there were in excess of 50 letters in opposition; Mr. Tool says that McKee purchased about 825 acres of land but McKee only purchased 262 acres of that total; Mr. Tool further states "McKee withdrew that application when faced with opposition at the June Planning Commission meeting" it was the May 28 meeting (not June) and McKee couldn't have faced any opposition because he did not attend the May 28 meeting, instead McKee sent an email to the Planning Department at 8:50 am that morning requesting a postponement and asking that his email be read at the meeting that night; and finally Mr. Tool states "The plan called for initial development of six sites with additional sites being added as market conditions indicated" however McKee's April 15 CUP application states "Our intent is to test out 6 spots initially ... and slowly and methodically add spaces in a calculated way" but when McKee was asked by the Planning Department to provide more details in his April 15 plot map McKee's updated May 16 plot map showed a total of 31 potential campsite locations. If Mr. Tool had taken the time and initiative to visit the Planning Department to read all of their documents associated with this CUP he could have avoided these errors.

Rodney and Linda Botts
Joseph

Firearms storage measure planned for 2020 ballot

Jonathan Levinson
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon-based gun safety group State of Safety Action filed an initiative petition Thursday to put a safe firearms storage law on the November 2020 ballot.

The group got a late start in 2018 and missed a deadline to get its initiative on the 2018 ballot. During this year's legislative session safe storage legislation was part of the omnibus gun bill that was bargained away by Gov. Kate Brown in order to coax Republican Senators back to work and vote on an education funding bill.

The safe storage law would require gun owners to lock up their firearms when not in use and report stolen guns within 24 hours or be held liable for any damages.

State of Safety Action president Henry Wessinger said the group is preparing for a ballot initiative but is still optimistic the legislation will be taken up in the 2020 legislative session.

Oregon Republicans begin effort to recall Gov. Brown

Dirk VanderHart
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — In response to the recent legislative session, Oregon Democrats have cheered a wide array of policy proposals they were able to muscle through with supermajorities in the state House and Senate.

Republicans, meanwhile, want to recall the governor.

The head of the Oregon Republican Party on Monday took a first step toward forcing a recall election of Gov. Kate Brown, whose term expires at the end of 2022.

In a prospective petition filing with the Oregon Secretary of State, Oregon GOP Chair Bill Currier listed Brown's support for a cap-and-trade program to curb greenhouse gas emissions and a bill granting undocumented immigrants driving privileges among his reasons for beginning a recall.

Oregon voters overturned a law to give undocumented immigrants driver's cards in 2014.

"The people of Oregon deserve and expect a Governor that honors the will of the voters and works for the good of all citizens, not just special interests and politically-motivated agendas," Currier wrote.

The document is one of two recall efforts filed with elections officials Monday — the first possible day to file a recall petition against Brown. The other was made by Michael Cross, a Salem resident who is behind a website dedicated to recalling the governor.

In his filing, Cross suggests Brown "raised taxes mercilessly and spends OUR money recklessly." Like Currier, he cites driving privileges for undocumented immigrants and concerns about the public employees retirement system as reasons for a recall.

Forcing a recall election is not easy in Oregon. To do so, supporters of the two efforts would need to collect 280,050 valid signatures from Oregon voters — nearly twice the amount required to force a vote on amending the state constitution.

Under Oregon rules, the two groups have 90 days to collect those signatures, assuming documents initiating a petition are "complete and correct."

"I would describe it as a tall order," Currier told OPB. "A very challenging task."

If either effort were successful, Brown would have five days to file a statement of justification. A recall election would be held within 35 days after that.

Currier said his party had made the deci-

sion just recently to pursue a recall. He believes that a number of contentious issues supported by the governor and other Democrats this year have created the potential for a coalition that could bounce her from office.

"The political landscape changed dramatically toward the end of the session," Currier said. "All of these groups, even though there's not much overlap between them, combine to represent well over a half million voters. And there's an incredible opportunity to harness that energy and direct it toward the change that they want."

In the document initiating the recall effort, Currier also made explicit mention of Brown's threat, after the failure of the cap-and-trade bill, to implement new greenhouse gas regulations via executive order.

"She has threatened to usurp legislative power with executive orders to implement her failed legislation, deciding single-handedly what is best for Oregon," Currier wrote. "This is not the Oregon way."

The governor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Local legislators, Rep. Greg Barreto (R-Cove) and Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena), also did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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