

OTHER VIEWS

Adam Bronstein



Wolf management in Oregon is a train wreck

I recently received another email update from Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife's Wolf and Livestock Updates list. I opened the message and clicked the link anticipating bad news.

Another wolf had been killed by the department in Northeastern Oregon. A 2-year old male trapped, tranquilized and then euthanized by the state. His crime? Being a member of a community of native carnivores trying to make a living on a landscape overrun with domestic livestock that have displaced their traditional food sources, mainly elk and deer.

This young wolf was a member of the Chesnimnus Pack, near the town of Joseph, whose range encompasses many active federally managed grazing allotments on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. Reports of depredations — wolves killing livestock — attributed to the Chesnimnus Pack began rolling in this April, which resulted in fish and wildlife officials issuing an order to kill two wolves before the end of April.

In June, an additional four wolves were marked for death. As of today, three of those six wolves have been wiped out by the state. Not included in this tally is the additional wolf lost at the hands of a poacher in January. This onslaught of death comes on the heels of a bloody 2021 for Oregon, where 26 wolves were documented killed, up from 10 in 2020.

Killing wolves is counterproductive to many of the wildlife management and habitat conservation programs administered by the ODFW and undermines the benefits that having wolves on the landscape brings to all of us. After wolves were reintroduced into Yellowstone National Park, the ecology of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem began to reset itself.

Riparian areas — biodiversity hotspots — soon recovered from overgrazing by deer and elk because wolves began keeping them constantly on the move. This dispersed movement allowed plant communities to reestablish themselves, providing home and sustenance to a host of species. Trout, juvenile salmon and steelhead are provided with cooler water refuges, more insects to eat and more cover from predators because of the shade and habitat provided by streamside vegetation.

Birds and land animals also rely on riparian areas for food, shelter and breeding habitat. Promoting biodiversity helps ward off extinction where one species' existence is dependent on another's. We are now in the throes of the sixth mass extinction and we humans depend on a functioning biosphere for our own survival.

As wolves rightfully return to their native range across Northeastern Oregon and the rest of the state, livestock producers will experience more losses unless they change the way they operate. Based on past and current responses, department officials seem primed to continue slaughtering wolves at an increasing rate in lockstep with the wolf recovery.

These dead livestock, however, are mostly due to mismanagement. The vast majority of livestock taken by wolves are calves, which are tender, small-bodied and easy prey. If livestock operators wanted to cut their losses to wolf predation by wide margins, they could leave their young-of-the-year at the home ranch with their mothers to nurse until they are ready to fend for themselves before releasing them.

Perhaps the most maddening aspect to this ongoing saga is the agency's disregard for the best available science. We know now that when managers kill wolves and deplete a pack, the remaining wolves target livestock with more vigor, because livestock are the easiest prey. It is a vicious cycle of death until an entire pack is extirpated.

Take for example the Lookout Pack, also from Northeastern Oregon. Eight wolves were lethally removed for killing livestock in the fall of 2021, decimating the pack to the point where no breeding pair remained. Killing off entire packs of wolves simply cannot be the answer.

The influence peddled by the livestock industry must no longer reign supreme over wildlife management here in Oregon and across the West. This largely unchecked hegemony has resulted in untold slaughter of wolves — and myriad other creatures ranging from beavers to prairie dogs — over the centuries. Times must change.

We should demand better of our wildlife managers who are supposed to safeguard all of our wildlife in the public trust for all Oregonians.

Adam Bronstein is the Nevada-Oregon director for Western Watersheds Project, a nonprofit conservation group dedicated to protecting and restoring wildlife and watersheds throughout the American West. This column originally appeared on the Oregon Capital Chronicle website.



Making the 'People's House' safe

OTHER VIEWS

Dick Hughes



The gold man atop the Oregon State Capitol has gone dark. A cavernous hole has arisen at the building basement; another is on its way. The governor, secretary of state and state treasurer have been ousted from their offices. Guided tours of the Capitol are gone until 2025.

Those development are purposeful. Such is the price — half a billion dollars plus a few years of temporary inconvenience — for finally making the "People's House" safe for the people.

The Capitol was in such sad shape seismically that in 2015, state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, told my colleagues and me: "Given what we know, we should close the Capitol down today. At least we should protect kids from coming in," referring to school field trips.

There's more. The plumbing is so bad that the drinking fountains are unusable. The HVAC system could run hot in summer, cold in winter, with creaky ventilation. Parts of the building lacked fire sprinklers and other safety devices, including safe exits and sufficient staircases. The building was inhospitable to anyone using a wheelchair, scooter or stroller.

The first phases of the renovation and reconstruction corrected some deficiencies, especially in the 1977 legislative wings. The final, most expensive phase centers on the largest, oldest portion — the Capitol completed in 1938. So that work can be done, that area has been closed to the public, officeholders and legislative employees since July 1.

Staff have relocated. If you're looking for the governor's office, go to the nearby State Library across the Capitol Mall.

History buffs will recall that the previous capitol burned to the ground on April 25, 1935. A young Mark Hatfield was among the Salem residents who came out to witness the inferno. Though long ago, that experience illustrates the relevance of the safety improvements underway.

The construction almost didn't happen and was delayed for years by bipartisan opposition. Courtney was the cheerleader for what in 2015 was a \$337 million project. At crunch time, House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, and House Majority Leader Val Hoyle, D-Eugene, said the seismic improvements were needed but the time wasn't right.

Joining them in voting "no" on a committee vote that effectively stopped the

Courtney was not happy: "When the magnitude 9 quake hits, the loss of life and property across our state will be tremendous. The decision not to complete this project ensures that those losses will include the Oregon State Capitol and the people inside it."

He persevered instead of knocking heads to get his way that year. The Legislature embraced a much smaller, \$59.9 million project the next year as the first phase of the Capitol Accessibility, Maintenance and Safety project. The 2020 Legislature added phase 2 at \$70.8 million. With new leadership in the Oregon House this year and Courtney finishing his final term as Senate president, the 2022 Legislature approved the big phase 3: \$375 million.

Lawmakers are used to conducting meetings and public hearings virtually, so restricted access to committee rooms no longer was an impediment.

The construction schedule was reconfigured so the House and Senate could use their chambers during the legislative sessions. Work should wrap up in late 2025.

The big hole on the north side of the Capitol and one that will emerge farther west are so workers can get under the building, gut the lower level, hook up additional water and sewer lines, put in temporary shoring, remove the existing cement columns and place new columns and devices to keep the structure stable during the quake.

As for the Oregon Pioneer atop the Capitol — colloquially known as the gold man — Capitol Accessibility, Maintenance and Safety Director Jodie Jones told me that crews will seek a workarround to again illuminate the statue at night.

By the way, some Oregonians love the Capitol's design. Some despise it, complaining the top looks like a cake ornament or a bowling trophy. What say you?

Dick Hughes has been covering the Oregon political scene since 1976.

"HISTORY BUFFS WILL RECALL THAT THE PREVIOUS CAPITOL BURNED TO THE GROUND ON APRIL 25, 1935. A YOUNG MARK HATFIELD WAS AMONG THE SALEM RESIDENTS WHO CAME OUT TO WITNESS THE INFERNO. THOUGH LONG AGO, THAT EXPERIENCE ILLUSTRATES THE RELEVANCE OF THE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS UNDERWAY."

project from moving ahead were Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton; Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner; and Sen. Fred Girod, R-Lyons. Siding with Courtney were Rep. John Huffman, R-The Dalles, and Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin.

The price tag, uncertain public support and inconvenience bothered some lawmakers. During construction, the Legislature and other officials would have had to vacate the Capitol and use the renovated Public Utility Commission building — a former Sears store near the Capitol Mall — as their temporary capitol.

As a result, initial project staff were let go; \$25 million already had been spent.

VA shows pitfalls of government health care

OTHER VIEWS

Sally C. Pipes



In the fall of 2020, a patient in Augusta, Georgia, went to the local Veterans Affairs medical center for a minimally invasive urologic surgery, according to a new report from the VA's Office of Inspector General.

Less than two weeks later, the OIG reports, he was dead. The Inspector General concluded that there had been "multiple deficiencies" in the patient's care. Among them, his doctor allegedly failed to account for his history of chest infections and alcoholism.

Sadly, this is just one of countless examples of the VA's failure to provide adequate care. And it shows why proposals to nationalize U.S. health care — like Sen. Bernie Sanders' bill to establish Medicare for All, which he reintroduced in May — are bad news.

Every six months, the VA's Inspector General submits a report to Congress on

the agency's performance. And every six months, the story is the same: gross incompetence, fraud, long wait times and substandard care.

The OIG's most recent report, which covered October 2021 to March 2022, identified more than \$4 billion in "monetary impact" — waste, questionable spending, fraud and the like. Investigations into offending behavior led to more than 100 arrests for crimes that included wire fraud and bribery. One Louisiana doctor had received more than \$650,000 in kickbacks from a medical supply company.

But while the waste and criminality are galling, the patient stories are worse.

A veteran who sought treatment and eventually died at a VA center in New Mexico waited 175 days for a CT scan for possible lung cancer, according to the OIG. Then, even though the results showed signs of cancer, the patient did not receive a follow-up biopsy. The patient eventually received a conclusive cancer diagnosis at a non-VA hospital.

The OIG also reported on a patient who died 17 days after being discharged from a VA medical center in Gainesville, Florida, after a 33-day hospital stay. The Inspector General concluded that the facility "failed to develop a discharge plan that adequately

ensured patient safety and continuity of care."

Even patients not in imminent danger face the stress of extremely long waits. At the VA clinic in Anaheim, California, at the beginning of June, new patients could expect to wait 29 days for an appointment. At the three clinics in Jacksonville, Florida, the average wait in early June was 52 days. And at one clinic in Fayetteville, North Carolina, earlier this month, it was 96 days.

None of this should be especially surprising. Long waits and sloppy care characterize single-payer health care all over the world.

Canadians face a median wait of more than 25 weeks for treatment from a specialist following referral by their general practitioner, according to the Fraser Institute, a Canadian think tank. Such delays have serious consequences. FoundStreet.org, another Canadian think tank, found that over 11,500 Canadian patients died while waiting for surgeries, procedures or diagnostic scans between 2020 and 2021.

Canada and the VA offer a glimpse of the subpar treatment, needless suffering and rampant fraud and abuse we can expect under Medicare for All.

Sally C. Pipes is president, chief executive officer and Thomas W. Smith Fellow in Health Care Policy at the Pacific Research Institute.