

EDITORIAL

Letting fires do the work

Lightning, for all its faults, works cheap.

The federal government didn't need to delve into the Treasury to ignite the fire that started July 14 in Granite Gulch, in the heart of the Eagle Cap Wilderness near the Minam River. Lightning did the job.

Since the fire awakened from its smoldering slumber last week it has done the sorts of work that the Forest Service, through its prescribed fire program, in other places might spend many thousands of dollars to accomplish.

The Granite Gulch fire is the latest in a series of more than 20 lightning blazes that have over the past 25 years, with a few exceptions, burned naturally in the Eagle Cap, Oregon's biggest wilderness at 570 square miles.

It's a wise policy — from the ecological standpoint as well as the financial.

Ample scientific research shows that excluding wildfire from forests — the stated goal of the federal government on public lands for much of the 20th century — can lead to bigger blazes by allowing logs, limbs and other combustible debris to pile up.

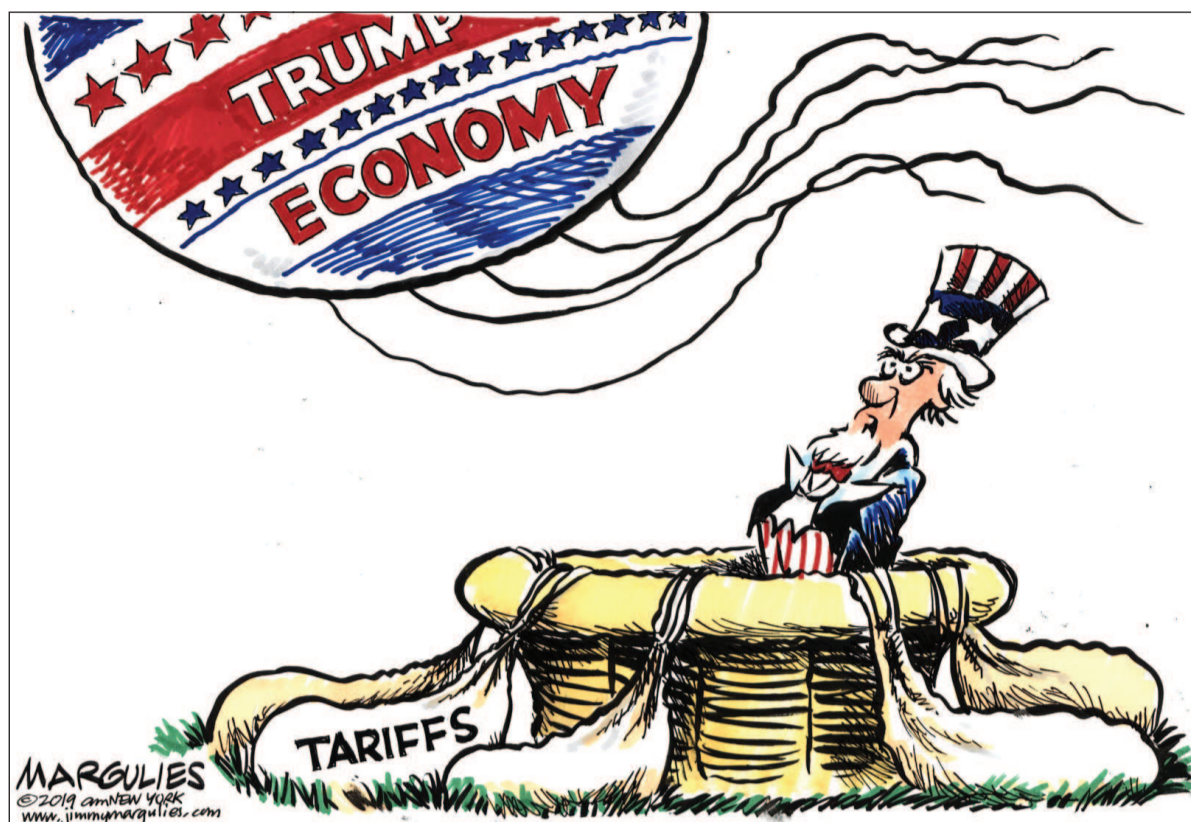
Avoiding such conditions is one reason the Forest Service and other agencies light fires intentionally.

The Eagle Cap, though, is uniquely suited to allowing lightning fires to burn. The wilderness is not only massive, but the terrain and vegetation are situated such that in most cases flames will be confined by natural firebreaks such as wet meadows and rocky slopes where few if any trees grow.

As for those exceptions mentioned earlier, the Forest Service did call in a helicopter this week to drop water on part of the Granite Gulch fire to slow its spread. Had the agency treated the fire as a typical blaze from the start, it likely would have incurred that expense — and more.

Over the past quarter century, lightning fires that the Forest Service monitored rather than fought have burned across more than 5,000 acres in the Eagle Cap Wilderness. These blazes haven't diminished the qualities that make the wilderness a special place. But they have reduced the risk of larger fires in the near future, and without racking up the multimillion-dollar firefighting tabs typical outside the wilderness. That's a bargain.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



OTHER VIEWS

Pass Merkley, Wyden bill

Editorial from The (Bend) Bulletin:

Oregon Sens. Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, both Democrats, are trying to give businesses a needed break.

They want to pass legislation to protect temporarily businesses from a whole new set of laws that would force them to collect retroactive sales taxes.

The trigger for the legislation goes back to 2018 and the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in South Dakota v. Wayfair. That decision made it possible for a state to export its sales tax requirements to other states.

It's probably easiest to understand in an example. When you buy something online, you may have noticed that sometimes the retailer charges a sales tax for another state. That's essentially what South Dakota v. Wayfair decision made legal on a broad scale. It enables states, counties, cities and other taxing jurisdictions to compel sellers on the internet to figure out where you live, collect the appropriate taxes and send them off. If businesses don't comply, out-of-state taxing

entities can come after them legally and hold them accountable. The requirements for many states begin at \$100,000 in sales in their state or 200 transactions.

Figuring out those taxes may be an easy lift for the Amazons of the world. It's not for smaller brick and mortar stores that are trying to compete.

And is it fair at all to allow these taxes to be collected retroactively? No. Imagine being an Oregon business or one in New Hampshire. Neither state has sales taxes. "Integrating sales tax collection will require significant time and labor intensive start-up costs for small businesses," Merkley and Wyden have pointed out. Small businesses at least deserve time to get up to speed.

The proposed bill from Merkley and Wyden would forbid retroactive taxation and puts all these sorts of taxes on hold until 2021. There's extra protection for smaller businesses — defined as having gross receipts of less than \$10 million — until Congress figures out a way to simplify how this all works. Pass it.

Letters to the editor

- The Baker City Herald will not knowingly print false or misleading claims. However, we cannot verify the accuracy of all statements in letters to the editor.
- Letters are limited to 350 words;

longer letters will be edited for length. Writers are limited to one letter every 15 days.

- The writer must sign the letter and include an address and phone number (for verification only). Letters that do not include this information

cannot be published.

- Letters will be edited for brevity, grammar, taste and legal reasons.
- Mail:** To the Editor, Baker City Herald, P.O. Box 807, Baker City, OR 97814
- Email:** news@bakercityherald.com

After 50 years, 'Helter Skelter' still frightening

When I was about 9 I picked up the book that would infect a great many nights to come with a sense of dread, an unsettling feeling that had never been there before.

The book was a paperback copy of "Helter Skelter."

It fulfilled, with a certain awful panache, the titillating warning printed on an otherwise blank page at the start of the book: "The story you are about to read will scare the hell out of you."

Indeed it did. And more than three decades later that story retains for me much of its combination of fear and fascination.

"Helter Skelter," published in 1974 and never out of print since, is the definitive account of the murders committed on successive nights in August 1969 in Los Angeles by followers of Charles Manson.

(The title is derived from Manson's obsession with the song of that name on The Beatles' White Album from 1968. Manson bastardized the term to describe an apocalyptic race war he claimed was imminent and that, so goes the most common theory, he hoped to instigate by trying to blame blacks for the murders of whites.)

The lead author (ably assisted by Curt Gentry) is Vincent Bugliosi, who prosecuted the killers. Bugliosi, who died in 2015, gained convictions against Manson, who didn't inflict any of the wounds on the seven victims, and four of his acolytes in a pair of trials.

All five were sentenced to death, but their sentences were commuted after the California Supreme Court overturned death sentences imposed prior to 1972.



JAYSON JACOBY

None has been released from prison. Manson died in 2017 and one of his killers, Susan Atkins, died in 2009.

The three others — Patricia Krenwinkel, Leslie Van Houten and Charles Watson — remain incarcerated in California.

Thursday and Friday mark the 50th anniversary of the murders, a macabre milestone that generated a fair amount of publicity.

But this horrific crime spree has never truly evaporated from public consciousness, and I don't wonder but that it never will.

The Manson murders, as they came to be known in a perverse alchemy that made a callous killer considerably more famous than any of his victims, likely are eclipsed, in sheer infamy, only by the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

(And, perhaps, by the 1994 killing of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman.)

The lingering interest in the 1969 murders — although in some quarters, including the many websites focusing on anything tangentially related to the case, it's more like an obsession — doesn't surprise me.

I have no doubt that the profound effect "Helter Skelter" had on me is quite a common one.

Terrible tales have always been compelling, of course. From "Bewulf" to "Dracula" we have been entranced by stories so horrible as

to be inexplicable. And our collective fascination is if anything more acute when the story, as with "Helter Skelter," happens to be true.

The more so given the nature of this case — a small-time conman who managed, during the summer of Apollo 11 and Woodstock, to convince a group of people, mostly women younger than 23, to slaughter strangers with dozens of stab wounds.

Although I can't recall my precise age when I first saw the book I know I couldn't have been as old as 10. That's because we went to Disneyland when I was 9 and I remember, while riding a bus to, I think, Universal Studios, the tour guide pointed out Bel Air, where the Manson murders had happened. I knew what he was talking about then, so I had to have seen "Helter Skelter" earlier.

But timeframe aside, I recall, and quite vividly, the setting when I first saw the book.

My parents were having a garage sale and I was sitting on a stool, ready to dicker with anyone who might try to knock half a buck off the posted price for some knick-knack.

(That might be a faulty part of an otherwise clear memory; I suspect my parents would have been mortified had I engaged in anything of the sort.)

I don't know where the book came from. It must have been a sort of consignment item, though, because I hadn't seen it on any of our shelves.

I was intrigued by the "photos inside" teaser on the front cover and immediately leafed to that section. I was especially affected by the pho-

tographs of the victims — not because they were grisly, but because the bodies themselves were, in effect, whited out. It was a powerful example of how something not seen, but which must be conjured in the mind, can be even more disturbing than the reality.

Then I started reading.

And although this memory isn't so crystalline as the setting of the garage sale — the green surface of the ping pong table, the cool of the garage and the squeak of the screen door that led to the utility room — I have a sense that this pleasant and tranquil scene, the epitome of suburban safety, quickly faded and I was thrust inside a Bel Air mansion on a hot August night when knives plunged and blood soaked the carpet.

I was horrified.

But also captivated.

This, of course, is the dichotomy that explains why the true crime section occupies so much space in most bookstores.

I didn't read all, or likely even most of, "Helter Skelter" then.

Perhaps we sold the book. I suppose we must have because it wasn't until a few years later that I checked out a copy from the Stayton Public Library and read the whole thing.

I learned about the victims at the Tate house on Cielo Drive — the actress Sharon Tate, her friends, Jay Sebring, Abigail Folger and Voytek Frykowski, and 18-year-old Steven Parent, who had the incredibly bad timing of visiting the estate's caretaker just before Manson's killers arrived.

I read about the next night, when Manson himself tied up Leno La-

Bianca and his wife, Rosemary, in their Los Feliz home and then sent in Watson, Krenwinkel and Van Houten to stab the couple to death.

I remember the few days when I was reading "Helter Skelter" about as clearly as I remember that day in the garage. It was summer vacation and the nights were warm, as they were back in '69 in Los Angeles. When I switched the light off in my room it was frightfully easy to imagine every creaking wall stud, every whisper as a breeze rustled the rhododendrons, was a creepy-crawler dad in black, filthy with Spahn Ranch dust.

I knew this wasn't so, of course.

I didn't believe there was a boogeyman in my closet any more than I believed a bunch of murderers had escaped their cells hundreds of miles away and chosen my house on a quiet residential street where nothing of much consequence ever happened.

But as I lay there in the soft sultry dark, the words I had recently read and the images they prompted stark in my mind, this certainty seemed not nearly so comforting as when sunshine was streaming through my bedroom window.

Today, more than 30 years after those nights when I fought vainly for the solace of sleep, I know more.

The scary faces in "Helter Skelter" are pathetic wrinkled visages available with a couple of keystrokes.

Manson and Atkins are dead.

And yet those bumps that intrude on every night are not what they once were.

Jayson Jacoby is editor of the Baker City Herald.