

EDITORIAL

Lucky to have a bounty of public land

Most of us probably didn't need a global pandemic to appreciate the bounty of public land in Northeastern Oregon.

But the coronavirus and its myriad restrictions might have burnished our affection for the expanses of forest and rangeland open to all.

In Baker County, for instance, almost half of the 2 million acres belong to all of us, managed by either the Forest Service or the BLM.

And even in our era of social distancing and restrictions on public gatherings, almost all of that land remains available if we want to take a sightseeing drive or go for a hike or limber up a mountain bike that's been languishing in the garage for months.

Public lands haven't been completely exempt from the effects of coronavirus.

Last week the Forest Service and BLM closed developed recreation sites in the region, including campgrounds, picnic areas, trailheads that have outhouses or other facilities, and boat ramps

These restrictions are sensible because those sites are where groups of people are more likely to gather, making social distancing more difficult to comply with, and where agency employees could be put at risk if they had to clean and maintain the facilities.

But the closures don't pose a great impediment to our ability to enjoy our public land — an invaluable opportunity at a time when so many of us have been spending much of our days in our homes.

Developed recreation sites comprise a minuscule percentage of public land. All the rest — including roads and trails — remain open. (In the case of trailheads that are closed, hikers can still park and head out on the trail, but the outhouse or other facilities will be locked.)

With millions of acres available, you're not likely to see many — if any — other people. And if you do, it's not terribly difficult, except perhaps on a narrow stretch of trail, to adhere to social distancing.

The campground closures, at least for now, don't represent an inconvenience because the majority wouldn't be open, pandemic or not, due to lingering snow.

If you have the means, this is an ideal time to visit public land. As always, make sure someone knows where you're going and when you plan to return. One thing none of us wants to do during this challenging period is to get into trouble that might divert attention from our already stressed medical system.

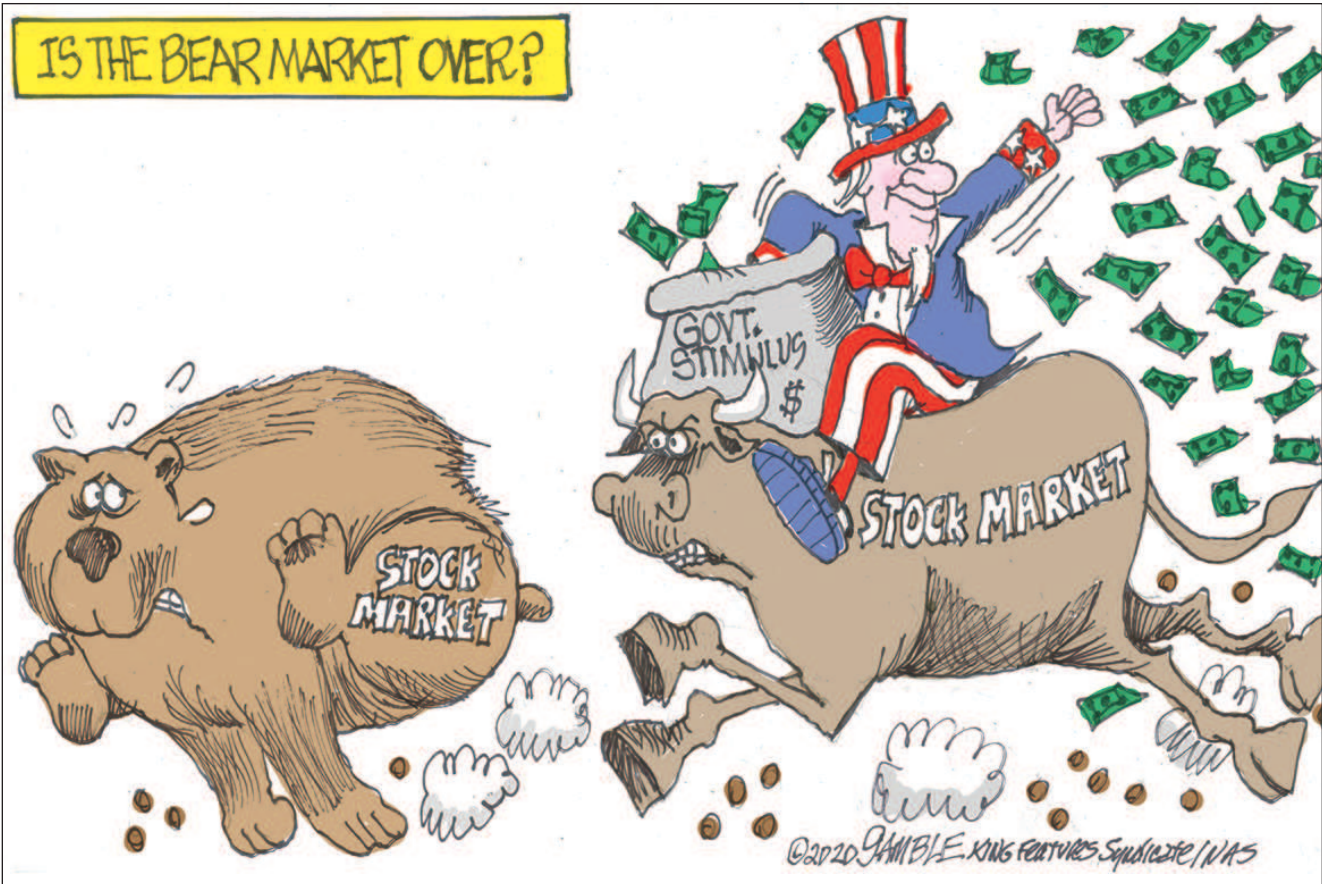
— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor

Letters to the editor

- We welcome letters on any issue of public interest. Customer complaints about specific businesses will not be printed.
- 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.

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Firearms safety tips reworked to address coronavirus spread

Editor's Note: Dick Haines, a Baker Valley resident and hunter education instructor, has revised the 10 Commandments of Firearm Safety to address the coronavirus pandemic.

1. Treat every human as positive for COVID-19. Regardless of who they are. And remember some humans are asymptomatic carriers. Do not let down one's guard for those we are most familiar with or care about for your and their protection. The most common statement in the accidental firearm discharge statistics is "but I didn't know the gun was loaded."
2. Always point your face in a safe direction. Do so when approaching others or being approached by someone. This protects against germ spore transmission via eyes, mouth, nose and contamination of the face.
3. Control the direction of your sneeze or cough discharge. Turn away and direct sneeze or cough into one's elbow. Never one's hand. In addition to humans turn away from areas of common use such as counters, desks, food, dishes, phones, computers, door and appliance handles, vehicle steering wheel and driving controls, keys, radios, TV controls and stereo players. And more.

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4. Wash your hands frequently, and thoroughly. Particularly after touching people, surfaces, objects. Key times include when shopping, receiving mail and packages, and when using common surfaces used by the public such as doors, restrooms, ATMs, credit card machines, and shopping carts.
- Wash before preparing or eating food, following the use of a toilet, changing a diaper, treating a wound, blowing your nose or coughing or sneezing, feeding pets food or treats and handling garbage. Washing involves soap and water, at least 20 seconds of washing, Maintain a clean towel for drying. In a public restroom open the door via an elbow or towel where possible.
5. Always keep a safe distance of 6 to 10 feet from other humans when in public areas — outside the normal range of human germ spore trajectory.
6. Walk defensively, on the lookout for others who approach you violating your safe distance. Or who may sneeze or cough in your direction.
7. Avoid spending time in areas of small confining public space used by

- others. Examples include commercial aircraft, buses, general public transit, shared vehicle travel, offices, small businesses, post offices, doctor's offices and hospital waiting rooms.
8. Invest in a face mask and gloves and use them when in public places to reduce risk. Sanitize for reuse if a supply is not readily available. People may stare at you but healthcare workers and doctors wear them for a reason. This is a parallel to wearing hearing and eye protection when on range amidst live fire.
 9. Avoid people and places of greater risk to COVID-19. This is the elderly over 60, young children and infants, and those of us with health complications that compromise our immune system and its ability to protect against disease germs.
 10. Get plenty of rest, eat healthy foods, exercise daily and be thoughtful about reducing stress on a daily basis. These things help lead to a healthy immune system that makes us less susceptible to illness. Use the time to read and become better informed about how to strengthen our immune system. Seek joy, compassion for others and their needs, and gratitude for what we have, and positive uplifting news on a daily basis.

If workers are essential they also deserve to make a living wage

My first trip to Trader Joe's since the start of California's coronavirus lockdown had all the trappings of order and security. A polite line formed out front, with everyone keeping a respectful and socially distant 6 feet apart. No more than 50 people were allowed in the store at the same time. A worker squirted a dollop of sanitizer into the hands of each and every shopper entering the store. Another wiped down the handles of each shopping cart before use.

Inside, however, despite workers' best efforts, there was only so much that could be done to stay safe. The aisles were narrow, the shoppers nervous.

It felt like a vector for disease. And, frankly, it probably was. Grocery stores are one of the only places where people are still allowed to congregate. If you're going to be exposed to the coronavirus, it will most likely be there.

Aware of this danger, my 15 minutes inside the store were stressful, to say the least. But my fears were undoubtedly nothing compared with those of the workers stuck in the middle of it all.

Shelves needed to be stocked. Groceries bagged. Cash handled. The flow of customers — any one of them with the potential to spread the virus — was nonstop.

"You guys deserve a serious raise," I told the worker who bagged my groceries. "Did you get one?"

She didn't look up.

"We got a onetime bonus," she eventually answered, her eyes still lowered. "It

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was a couple of hundred bucks."

A couple of hundred bucks to put her life on the line to prevent mass upheaval and panic.

Deservedly, much praise has gone to the health care professionals who are battling COVID-19, many of them without sufficient safety gear. But there are other "essential" workers in harm's way too. And for their heroics, they are, by and large, paid next to nothing. They have limited access to affordable health care. And paid sick leave, where it exists, is still often frowned upon due to inadequate staffing.

And it isn't just grocery workers. Amazon warehouse workers in Staten Island, New York, were planning to walk off their jobs Monday in pursuit of more protections from coronavirus and fairer pay. Instacart workers nationwide are doing the same.

Good for them.

If you're "essential" enough to work through a coronavirus pandemic, you're essential enough to be paid a living wage and to have access to paid sick leave and affordable health care.

Here's the thing: Working conditions for these employees are always dangerous. Coronavirus has heightened that danger, but it was always present. Seasonal influenza alone still kills

anywhere from 10,000 to 50,000 Americans a year. We've internalized those deaths as the cost of doing business. But that's absurd.

We pay millions of workers poorly, and if we offer them health insurance, the deductibles and co-payments are often high enough to render the coverage useless. To keep costs down, stores are intentionally understaffed, so that when a worker stays home sick, his or her already overworked colleagues have to pick up the slack. And so people come in when they shouldn't.

Workers suffer. Their families suffer. And we all suffer when they give us whatever contagious disease they picked up on the job. It's outrageous.

All so that Jeff Bezos can have the resources to build himself a floating space pod when all goes to hell on Earth.

Inequality puts everyone at risk. That risk now is certainly heightened with the emergency of COVID-19. But it was always present.

If your work is important enough that society will collapse into chaos without you, you deserve to be paid accordingly. You deserve to be able to stay home when you're sick. And you deserve access to affordable health care if you need it. We shouldn't have needed a deadly coronavirus epidemic to show us that, but it's blindingly obvious now.

Matthew Fleischer is a senior digital editor in the Los Angeles Times Opinion section.