

Opinion

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EDITORIAL

Research shows value of forest work

The benefits of thinning crowded forests and igniting prescribed fires to get rid of the combustible debris that's left hardly qualify as newly discovered truths.

But recent research led by scientists from the College of Forestry at Oregon State University, besides adding to the evidence that such work helps protect forests from catastrophic wildfires by reducing the fuel load, also shows that in some cases thinning alone can yield tangible advantages even before the managed flames are kindled.

James Johnston, a research associate at OSU, and his colleagues published their findings in *Forest Ecology and Management*. The study, which looked at years of data from areas in ponderosa pine forests in Northeastern Oregon, "shows that mechanical thinning can moderate fire behavior even in the absence of prescribed fire," Johnston said.

Johnston and the other researchers, including Julia Olszewski, Becky Miller and Micah Schmidt from the College of Forestry, Lisa Ellsworth from OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences, and Michael Vernon of Blue Mountains Forest Partners, used computer modeling to predict how fire would behave in areas that were thinned, as well as forest parcels that weren't.

Their research showed that although fuel on the ground increases for a year or two after thinning, the amount declines thereafter, as does the amount of litter and duff on the forest floor.

The researchers' findings are important not because they diminish the importance of prescribed fire.

Indeed, Johnston notes that prescribed burning "is still a key tool for meeting fuel reduction and fire management objectives in the ponderosa pine forests of the southern Blue Mountains and elsewhere."

But Johnston also points out that prescribed burning, for a variety of reasons, can take longer to be approved compared with thinning.

"Less than one-fifth of the area treated with mechanical thinning in the southern Blues has also been treated with prescribed fire," he said. "Prescribed fire has been significantly slowed by budget constraints, local opposition to fire use, and restrictions imposed by COVID-19 response measures."

Weather can be an impediment, too. Prescribed burning usually is done during spring and fall, but in some seasons it's either too wet for effective fires, or too dry to light them without the risk of flames getting out of control.

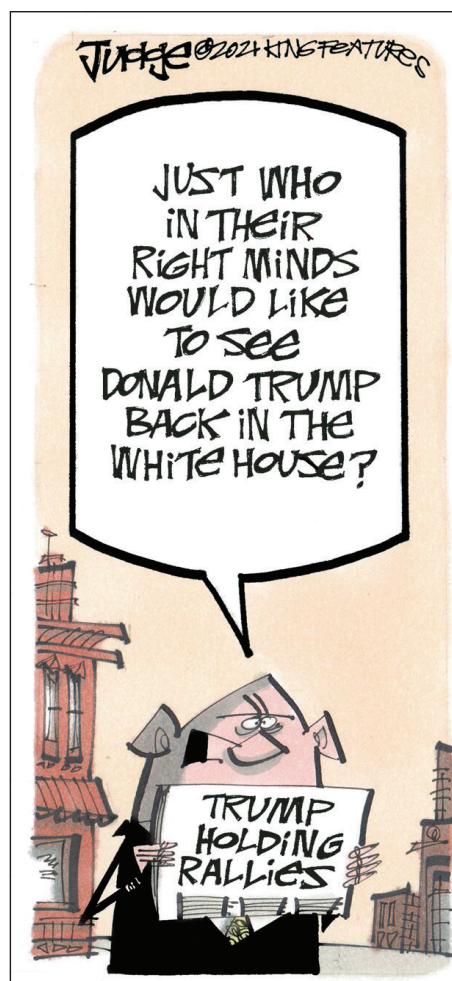
Congress has over the past decade or so allocated more money for projects, including thinning and prescribed burning, in Eastern Oregon and elsewhere. An example is the East Face project, which includes about 48,000 acres of public land from the Anthony Lakes Highway north to the Ladd Canyon area. The East Face project includes thinning — some of which involves trees large enough to be sold to mills — and prescribed burning. Much of the work is along roads and ridgelines and is designed to create fuelbreaks, places where firefighters would have a better chance of stopping a wildfire. In all, Congress has spent more than \$17 million between 2012 and 2020 to thin about 215,000 acres in the southern Blues.

The research from Johnston and his colleagues shows that this public money is being well-spent, and that lawmakers should seek to accelerate the effort.

With climate change leading to longer and often more severe fire seasons, thinning and prescribed burning are more vital than ever.

It's gratifying to see scientific proof that thinning by itself helps protect forests.

— Jayson Jacoby, Baker City Herald editor



Your views

Let's work together to solve poverty, global warming

We live together on our beautiful Mother Earth, but we are recklessly destroying both it and our society. Relationships are becoming ever more polarized and chaotic as we adopt partisan sets of opposing facts about reality, increasingly resist coming together to solve our most basic problems, and continue to allow big money to control things.

Today, we face two overarching threats: Widespread poverty and global warming. The fallout from our thoughts and actions — or inaction — is becoming ever more stark and ominous. It's past time for deep and meaningful change, well beyond what's left of the Build Back Better bill.

Poverty is closest to home. Many, if not most, Americans are deeply anxious and depressed about their economic condition, based largely on our 45-year history of lost jobs and stagnant, low wages due to computer automation and off-shoring.

Quiet desperation can provoke blind trust and misplaced loyalty. We may well be headed toward a loss of social norms and toward the acceptance of a right-wing, totalitarian society. The January 6th "Save America" insurrection at the U.S. Capitol offers a preview.

Big and bold innovation and open-minded collaboration are urgently needed. For example, a Universal Basic Income (UBI) of, say, \$1,000 per citizen per month would benefit everyone, as shown by the numerous UBI pilot projects.

Similarly, a refundable carbon tax would shift consumer demand away from fossil fuels, while carbon tax monies would be recycled to consumers (say, \$2,000 per family annually) to prevent economic hardship. Top economists support it.

Workable answers lie within reach. Can we develop the community spirit to adopt and implement them?

Do we have the political will to heavily tax the income and wealth handed to the very few who profit from our low, stagnant wages? Can we surmount our knee-jerk aversion to new taxes, even if they are refundable?

Let us avoid disaster on this small, blue planet, and transform ourselves and our society by treating each other with respect and understanding.

Let us firmly reject chaos, sit down together, vigorously engage, and allow our heartfelt, mutual desires and longings to be fully realized.

Marshall McComb
Baker City

Baker City Council should appoint Randy Daugherty

Editor's note: The author is the brother of Baker City Council member Shane Alderson.

Mayor Kerry McQuisten and Councilors Joanna Dixon and Johnny Waggoner Sr. need to get it together and move on with conducting city business. It's time to have a full city council again. I don't know what personal, political or other axes the mayor and Councilors Dixon and Waggoner have to grind with Randy Daugherty but it's

clear he is the candidate most qualified to fill the open position.

He has dedicated many years to serving Baker City in positions too numerous to mention here, including a previous stint as a city councilor. He is certainly more qualified than Mr. Hughes, an individual who in my 50+ years here I have never even heard of. Or the most recent candidate who was either completely unprepared, was not serious or incapable/unwilling of following through on his application. Baker City has many issues currently and ahead that need to be addressed with a full council, so I urge Mayor McQuisten and Councilors Dixon and Waggoner Sr. to vote to appoint Randy Daugherty.

Mark Alderson
Baker City

Anthony Lakes would be a great visitor center operator

As a business owner/employer that depends on tourism, and therefore tourism planning, marketing and coordination, I was disappointed when Anthony Lakes Outdoor Recreation Association withdrew their bid for the Visitors Services contract.

However, I was not surprised.

I participated in city council meetings, communicated with each of our county commissioners and attended the horrifying "work sessions" where it was obvious that Mayor McQuisten had no intention of doing what was best for our community. McQuisten has made it clear since before being sworn into office this year that she wanted to fight over the dedicated room tax monies and control of TLT. She has undermined volunteers and public servants that have successfully worked together for the past 15+ years making tourism options in Baker County something that people around the Northwest, and in fact, around the world, are aware of.

There has been conflict concerning the contract for many years. I was not alone in my excitement that ALORA was submitting a proposal. The efforts of the dedicated volunteer board at ALORA have been incredibly successful, expanding tourism options while providing extraordinary service to local residents.

After reviewing all proposals, the TLT committee recommended that the contract be awarded to ALORA last year. The commissioners put off the decision, even though the TLT board volunteers tasked with making the referral had done their work.

The TLT committee recommended that the contract be awarded to ALORA again this year, even after the Request for Proposals was changed to suit McQuisten.

McQuisten has made inflammatory accusations against community volunteers, as well as successful entrepreneurs that create jobs and public servants. McQuisten is a bully and is relentless — at the expense of all that teamwork has built to create. Her publicly stated barbs take a toll on us all and make our work more difficult.

Even with the support of the TLT committee and most of the businesses with a vested interest in tourism, it

is no surprise that the board members of ALORA could see the writing on the wall. We all have work to do. The opportunities that our gorgeous county offers to residents and visitors is a calling that never lets up. We are able to thrive by working together but constantly having to defend your work, your staff and your mission is not something that is efficient, effective nor healthy.

The fact that Anthony Lakes Mountain Resort even exists today, a precious and tangible benefit to Baker County, is due to those volunteers. They saw an opportunity and created a nonprofit organization to operate an asset that would have been lost without their vision and perseverance.

Working together has always worked for Baker County.

Does McQuisten even know that history? Does she care?

Beverly Calder
Baker City

Feeling confident among vaccinated mask-wearers

My beautiful wife and I recently made our first trip to heaven. We had never been to Hawaii. It was not easy, the protocols were strict. Proof of vaccination, online forms, all of it requiring computer skills (accomplished by my more technically advanced spouse). My generous sister and brother-in-law invited us, having secured a free room at a premier resort (something about accumulated points). This was their fourth or fifth visit, they were excited to have us share the experience.

From the second we stepped on the plane I knew this trip would be special. Every person on the plane had been vaccinated or had proof of COVID negativity. All persons wore masks covering both mouth and nose. There was no selfish whining. I felt completely safe for the first time in a long while. These feelings were reinforced on arrival.

No one protesting, no unvaccinated idiot crisis at the hospitals, everyone respectfully wore masks when around others. There was peaceful compliance with all mandates, suggested or otherwise. The most noticeable thing? Everyone was happy, every tourist, every local! No angry marching crybabies, no teachers, parents, health professionals, police, firefighters carrying ridiculous signs claiming some fabricated constitutional right enabling them to disrespect and infect others.

We traveled most of the Big Island and saw not one racist Confederate flag, not one disgusting idolization of Trump, not one Trump anything! Not only were these people happy but also intelligent. We heard no ridiculous anti-science or voter fraud conspiracy theories, no silly outrage. We saw no disgruntled loser frowns. We heard no incessant "me, me, me" "my rights, my rights ..." We witnessed no meaningless unfruitful rallies. There was no suffering through redface, fist pumping maniacs shouting about anything and everything they just didn't like. A true paradise, only happy smiling "healthy" people, so refreshing.

Mike Meyer
Baker City