

New water rule just bad policy

Let's just cut to the chase. The new rule on the Waters of the U.S. needs to be rewritten. The sooner the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers do that, the better.

The 73-page rule, which was supposed to clarify certain aspects of the Clean Water Act, doesn't do that. If anything, it raises more questions than it clarifies. Most troubling is the fact that any determinations over WOTUS are left to agency staff members. Landowners have no means of appealing those determinations.

This is among the many shortcomings pointed out in the 12 lawsuits filed against the EPA and the Corps over the rule. The plaintiffs are 28 states, ranchers, farmers, and environmentalists. Pretty soon you'll see a bumper sticker reading, "Honk if you're sued over WOTUS." Such complaints and reservations were voiced all through the public comment period for the rule. If EPA and Corps officials read the comments, they sure didn't do enough about them.

Other agencies listen to the public. When the Food and Drug Administration jumped the tracks writing the regulation for the Food Safety Modernization Act on irrigation water for onions and handling spent distillers' grains, its bigwigs at least went to farmers and others who were impacted and listened to them.

Not the EPA and Corps, which apparently seek to establish a facade of infallibility for themselves. The EPA and Corps are telling all farmers, ranchers and other landowners, "trust us." That's not good enough. Trust is earned, and the EPA and Corps

have a long way to go.

Considering the EPA's track record in such matters, that would require a massive leap of faith. After all, this is the agency whose bigwigs maintained off-the-record email accounts that served as hotlines to their friends in environmental groups. This was the agency that insisted on closed-door meetings about rules on dust. Yes, dust. Apparently, even the most mundane issue is worthy of secrecy and intrigue for the EPA.

We assume that not everyone at the EPA is secretive and has a personal agenda. But we also understand that such an assumption does not derive from some past activities.

Last spring, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy characterized the problem with the WOTUS rule as being primarily public relations.

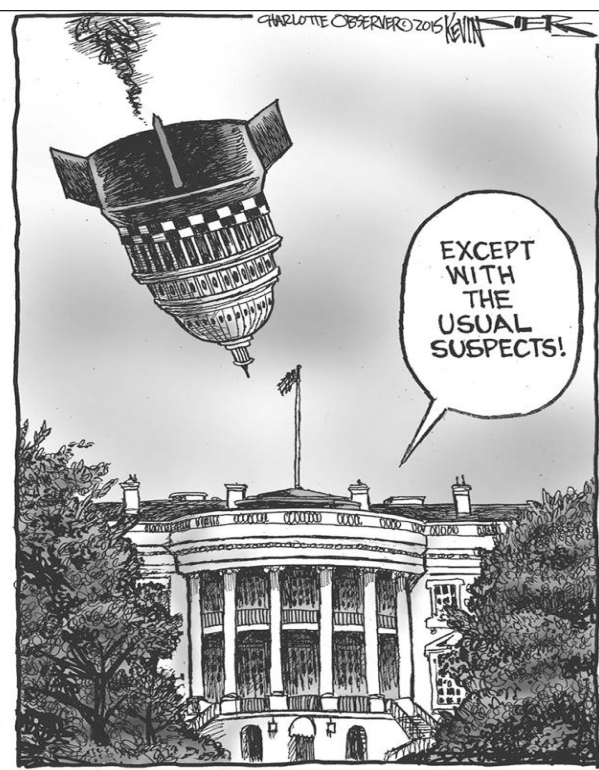
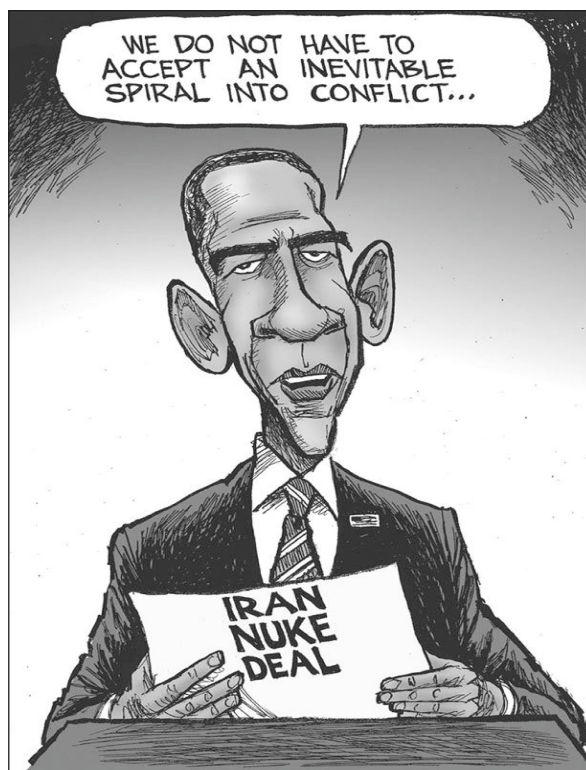
"I want to tell you up front that I wish we had done a better job of rolling out our Clean Water Rule, from calling it WOTUS instead of the Clean Water Rule, to not being more crystal clear out of the gate about what we were and were not proposing, to not talking to all of you and others before we put out the interpretive rule," she told the National Farmers Union.

But this battle is not about public relations. It's about good public policy.

That's what WOTUS or the Clean Water Rule lacks.

So the EPA and Corps can do the right thing. They can go back and consider the more than 1 million public comments that flooded into their offices suggesting improvements to the WOTUS rule.

Or they can wait until a judge orders them to fix the mess they created.



Senate Republicans reflect on 2015 legislative session

Oregon's middle class will pay the price for Democrat partisan priorities

SALEM — Reflecting on the recently concluded 2015 Legislative Session, Senate Republicans characterized the session as one of the most partisan and harmful to working families and small businesses in Oregon history.

"Sadly, Oregon's middle class will pay the price for the Democrat majority's partisan priorities," said Senator Tim Knopp (R-Bend). "The policies passed by Democrats this session will hurt families and businesses across Oregon, especially in rural areas. Oregon is already the second-worst state in the nation to make a living, and it's only going to get harder for families and small businesses to survive and thrive."

Throughout the session, Senate Republicans advocated tirelessly for

new jobs, full funding for K-12 education, and protections for Oregon's small businesses. In contrast, Senate Democrats rejected 50 pro-jobs bills that would have created new family-wage jobs and strengthened the economy in both rural and urban communities. They also intentionally underfunded K-12 education, leading to fewer school days, larger class sizes and cuts to programs like art and PE.

"Recent studies show Oregon kids and families are struggling, and our poverty rates haven't improved since the start of the Great Recession," said Senator Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River). "We can't leave our kids and families in the dust. Democrats refused to put kids first, and now school districts will have to cut class days and lay off teachers. This has to stop."

In their 2015 Legislative Session Summary, Senate Republicans outlined key initiatives proposed and pushed for by Republican members, including programs to create jobs and expand job training; protections

for small businesses against harmful Portland-style mandates; full funding for K-12 education and community colleges; blocking an attempt to steal the constitutionally-mandated "kicker" from Oregon families; funding for infrastructure investment in rural communities; preservation of Second Amendment rights; the modernization of privacy laws and expanded statutes of limitations for rape cases; and stronger ethics laws to protect Oregon citizens from misconduct by elected officials.

"While Democrats intentionally underfunded K-12 schools and increased transportation costs for working families, Republicans worked hard to improve the quality of life for all Oregonians," explained Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day). "If this is the new modus operandi for the Democrat majority, Oregonians need to know their elected leaders are looking out for themselves and their own partisan agenda, not for kids, working families and small businesses."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WOTUS has far reaching implications

In case you don't know, WOTUS stands for Waters of the United States. It is a word and an issue citizens of Grant County and especially anyone engaged in agriculture should research. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under Director Gina McCarthy, has issued new regulations to govern all the water in the U.S., including that which should be under the purview of Oregon State.

WOTUS has far-reaching emphasis and will affect the use of all water. There are numerous websites that discuss the matter; in addition, several livestock publications have good articles about it. As of my last notice, 28 states and also various agricultural related associations have signed on in litigation against EPA and also the Corps of Engineers.

Watching C-Span with Director McCarthy present testifying before a D.C. legislative committee was especially informative. She definitely is not what would be considered an advocate for agriculture. At this time, I've heard nothing about the State of Oregon becoming involved, and being the liberal state that it is, I doubt it will be included in any objection to WOTUS. Incidentally, as an aside, did you know 92 percent of the water in Oregon stays instream, and agriculture only uses 4 percent of it, yet constantly there is the push to keep more instream and off ag lands!

Sharon Livingston
Long Creek

Request for recusal

I formally request that Boyd Britton recuse himself from voting, deliberating, discussing, or representing Grant County on any Forest Service business. I would ultimately ask for Mr. Britton to resign his position as well.

Mr. Britton has a strong appearance of a conflict of interest in dealing with or discussing Forest Service business being brought to the County Court. His business dealings as the sole proprietor of Boyd Britton Welding Inc. with the Malheur National Forest leads to that conflict of interest. While Mr. Britton claims what he is doing is "legal," it does not pass the high moral/ethical standards that an elected official should be held to. When a commissioner as an individual or a business financially benefits from an entity that brings business in front of the court, it gives the appearance of impropriety.

Technically, yes, Mr. Britton is within the "law," or lack thereof, but just remember, a man or woman that cheats on their significant other is within the law, but not

morally or ethically within the constraints of the bond they made to their partner — much like the commitment an elected official makes with the voters.

Mr. Britton has a misplaced allegiance to an outside interest through his business dealings.

I again call for Mr. Britton to recuse himself from voting, deliberating, discussing, or representing Grant County on any Forest Service business from here on out and I encourage others to do the same.

John D. George
Bates

Forest Service 'restoration' project needs scrutiny

More recently the primary focus of the Forest Service (FS) has been landscape restoration, but this time they are deviating from vegetation and riparian restoration. The FS presented a draft plan for the Summit Creek Landscape Restoration to the Blue Mountain Forest Partners (BMFP) environmental group for fine-tuning before publishing an environmental assessment to the public for another attempted public land take over. This restoration proposal is an attempt to draw public attention away from their intent to turn large areas of our forest roads and byways into non-motorized and some non-equestrian trails for cyclists.

Missing from this plan are provisions for trash receptacles/disposal and toilet facilities along what appears to be 132 miles of proposed bicycle routes. What part does this plan play in "restoration" when you will likely see piles of cyclists' granola-laden waste, toilet paper, and trash decorating the landscape? Encouraging concentrated masses of cyclists to invade our forest lends little credence to the generic over-used FS excuse for access closures to restrict wildlife harassment and enhance watershed protection. Support for this "restoration" project is reportedly coming from questionable bicycle-oriented outside funding sources and environmental groups that obviously have no concept what "restoration" actually means for Grant County's unique historical characteristics.

We need to be reminded that a previous plan to promote bicycle paths using historical railroad grades in Summit and Logan valleys met with defeat and strong opposition because of cyclists' arrogant disrespect for motorists and private property. Other than groceries and campground rent, it is questionable whether cyclists contribute significantly to the general local economy.

I suggest Grant County residents and private property owners in the project area prepare to address this issue in the near future and watch the Blue Mountain Eagle for the scoping notice the Forest Service promised.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

Do not take away one's self-respect

We all know someone that has made some bad choices in life and had to pay for them, whether a family member, a friend, or a friend of a friend. They have paid for their mistakes through our judicial system.

It has been brought to my attention that several of our citizens that paid for their mistakes (although still on probation) have now become productive in the community. We live in an area where the unemployment rate is high and jobs are few. Still, these citizens have struggled through the obstacle of returning to civilian life and obtained gainful employment. They want to work and not use the system for handouts. My congratulations and respect goes out to them!


I have now learned that some of them that work for a reputable business here in Grant County are not allowed to perform their duties as productive citizens in the field of work they have obtained due to the Grant County parole and probation department. These men and women have chosen the heroic profession of firefighting (saving lives and land from the destructive and devastating results of wildfires.) God bless them!

Grant County is one of the few counties in Oregon that will not let people leave the state to perform their duties of being responsible and productive members of the community. I believe that if these people were going to break the law they would not have shown the responsibility of getting jobs, paying bills and trying to get their lives together. My request to our probation department is please do not take away the self-respect or incentive to make their lives better. These people have earned the right to travel as required by their employer.

Also, please remember that these men and women are highly trained professionals at their jobs. They may be protecting your son, daughter, niece, nephew or grandchild that just started in this profession. Wouldn't you want someone that knew what they were doing next to them? I sure would. How many of our Grant County children are out there and could use these men and women to help them through the next fire?

Cheryl Neault
Prairie City

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