

Spotted owl faces new threat, and it isn't the timber industry

It must be hard to be a scientist these days. The work is often difficult and thankless. Heck, most of the public doesn't even understand the basics of any type of research. They wouldn't know the difference between a chromosome and a chrome bumper on an F-150.

Such ignorance doesn't stop a loud and litigious minority of critics from taking to the Internet or trooping into court every time something they don't understand attracts their attention. It's been seen a lot in agriculture, as semi-informed self-anointed "experts" rail against everything from gluten to genetically modified corn. The horror!

Yet, when they are quizzed, they know next to nothing about the science. In short, they know what they read on the Internet and not much else. We're reminded of the car insurance advertisement on television in which a woman says her new friend that she met through the Internet is a French model. The guy, when he shows up, can't even say "bonjour," but it said on the Internet that he was from France.

Most recently, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was dragged into court over an experiment its scientists have been conducting in an attempt to rescue the northern spotted owl from possible extinction. Though the spotted owl ranges from the Pacific Northwest southward into Mexico, it was declared as "threatened" under the federal Endangered Species Act. That designation has done massive damage to the region's timber industry, because the spotted owl prefers old growth trees as its habitat.

Nowadays, the sight of a logger is not causing the spotted owl problems. Instead, it's a relative. The barred owl has moved into Northern California and Northwest forests in recent years. Compared with the spotted owl, the barred owl is a bully. It is a better hunter and outcompetes with his spotted

cousin in nearly every way.

Wildlife scientists whose job is protecting the spotted owl could do one of two things: nothing, which means the spotted owl would likely succumb to the barred owl; or they could try an experiment to take pressure off the spotted owl by reducing the number of barred owls.

They chose the latter. They came up with an experiment in which barred owls would be killed. Remember: The barred owl is not a protected species but is threatening a protected species.

That experiment was enough to get the Fish and Wildlife Service scientists dragged into court. Friends of Animals and Predator Defense, two animal rights groups, argue that the agency violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to evaluate alternatives to lethal removal of barred owls.

Again, barred owls are not protected, yet in the eyes of these groups, the agency should have come up with another way to get rid of them. Hmm, maybe they could feed the barred owls GMO gluten, if there was such a thing.

So federal scientists were caught in the middle of a quandary only an environmental lawyer could love. They could kill the barred owls and get sued, or they could let barred owls kill spotted owls and get sued. Either way, the environmental lawyers win.

U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken saw through the groups' arguments and has allowed the scientists to continue the experiment that could, if successful, return the population of northern spotted owls to health.

But the story isn't over. The environmental groups say they may appeal the judge's decision to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

That would accomplish exactly nothing, except give these groups something to write about on the Internet, of course.



Sen. Merkley to hold town halls

Town Halls scheduled Aug. 12, 13 in Summerville, Joseph, Long Creek

PORTLAND — Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley will hold town halls in Union, Wallowa and Grant counties next week.

Merkley will update constituents on his work in Washington, DC, answer their questions and invite their suggestions about how to tackle the challenges facing Oregon and America.

"There are huge issues facing Oregonians, and the best way for me

to effectively advocate for Oregon's families and businesses is by getting out on the road and holding a town hall in every county every year to hear directly from Oregonians," said Merkley.

Since joining the Senate in 2009, Merkley has held a town hall in each of Oregon's 36 counties every year. Union, Wallowa and Grant counties will be his 248th, 249th and 250th town halls as a U.S. Senator.

• **Union County Town Hall**
Wednesday, Aug. 12, 12:30 p.m.
Pleasant Grove Grange Hall,
67218 Hunter Road, Summerville

• **Wallowa County Town Hall**
Wednesday, Aug. 12, 4 p.m.
Joseph Charter School cafeteria,
400 E Williams Ave., Joseph

• **Grant County Town Hall**
Thursday, Aug. 13, 9:30 a.m.
Long Creek Community Center,
210 West Second St., Long Creek

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Facts don't jive with opinions expressed

I don't believe that I have ever met Judy Kerr, the author of various letters to the editor. She continues to make statements that she says are facts but that are really her opinions.

Her opinion: The restoration proposal by the Forest Service is an attempt to draw public attention away from a plan to limit motorized use of trails.

Fact: In all of the meetings that I have been to with the Forest Service, I have seen no evidence that they are trying to draw public attention away from plans to limit motorized use of trails.

Her opinion: The plans for toilets on Logan Valley trails are missing.

Partially correct: When one member of the county commission was not in favor of pursuing Logan Valley as a scenic bikeway, I stopped pursuing plans for the bikeway, and we lost our funding source for the toilets.

Her opinion: Cyclists "trash" the forests.

Fact: I have been involved with many large bike-touring trips, and the most common comment is that the area is cleaner than when we came. It is a common practice for all individuals who participate in outdoor activities, not just cyclists, to use the forest in case of "emergencies."

Her opinion: Cyclists don't help the economy.

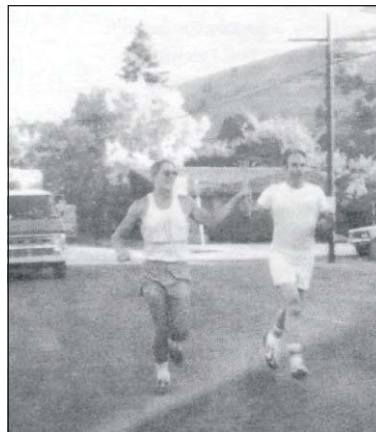
Fact: Last year, our local scenic bikeway provided over \$500,000 in revenue for local businesses in our county. There are many different kinds of cyclists. Cross country cyclists spend little money but touring groups spend big bucks. For example, the Grant Union High School football team made \$11,000 from Cycle Oregon several years ago.

Her opinion: The Logan Valley Scenic Bikeway met with strong opposition.

Fact: One county commissioner voted against the plan while the cities of John Day and Seneca both wrote letters of support.

Since Judy is a former engineer for the Forest Service and participated in the plans to close roads, I would encourage her to separate her opinions from the facts.

Mike Cosgrove
John Day



Contributed photo

Dean Elliott, right, of Canyon City, runs down Canyon Boulevard carrying the Freedom Torch in 1976.

What is happening to freedom in our country?

In 1976, a group of runners ran the Freedom Torch across every state in the union. The Freedom Torch was held high to symbolize what was guaranteed to the people of this great nation by the Constitution — the right to free speech — and, yet, the legislative bodies of our states are butchering this right.

Look at what happened to that poor devil that had his business destroyed and was fined \$135,000 because he refused to bake a wedding cake to a same-sex marriage that he didn't agree with and rightfully so, I might add. He didn't believe in that baloney, and he voiced his opinion in that regard by refusing to fall in line with the request. In other words, he used his right of free speech.

But these people say they have rights, and they destroyed everything that this man and his wife had worked for their whole lives for. Do they have the right to destroy everything a man has worked his whole life for? No, I don't think so. Where are his rights of free speech? These misguided people are using the actions of a misguided legislative body that sanctions this sort of thing, to trample all over the rights that are guaran-

teed by our Constitution.

I was one of the runners that helped carry that torch across Grant County. It was a proud moment at the time, but some of what is being done now makes me hang my head in shame.

What happened to the Freedom Torch? The last time I saw it, I passed it off to another runner, and it disappeared around the old Hudspeth Mill corner headed toward Mt. Vernon. It would sure be nice to see it come back with everything that it stands for.

Dean Elliott
Canyon City

Federal help or hindrance?

I have some observations about a couple of articles on the front page of the Blue Mountain Eagle, July 29th edition. About the time our sheriff was awarded a national sheriff of the year award by self-declared constitutionalists, one of his declarations barred the FBI from having any authority in Grant County.

Now here we are down the road a ways with our sheriff having received a very strange letter, at best, and a deadly one at worst. He seems more than glad to have the FBI here to help him out.

Does this represent a shift in our sheriff's attitude toward the federal government and its agencies, or does that just apply to this event that had him severely frightened?

The other article has a Long Creek rancher objecting to the federal government being involved in the management of Oregon's waters. Why wouldn't she object, for crying out loud? She has to defensively object because ranchers are responsible. There is absolutely nothing that warms our summer streams more than flood irrigation, or dumps more pollutant (cow excrement) into our rivers. All I can say, on the other hand, is that it's about time that something be done about such an extreme and obvious source of pollutants.

Terry Steele
Ritter

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