

Sage grouse decision: New paradigm

While some critics question whether ranchers who enter into voluntary conservation plans to aid the greater sage grouse have given up too much, a listing of the bird under the Endangered Species Act would have been a disaster.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service decided not to add the greater sage grouse to the endangered species list.

That's good news for ranchers and others in the western natural resources community.

In making the announcement, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell credited voluntary and collaborative measures to protect and improve greater sage grouse habitat on public and private land across the West.

But with Oregon ranchers providing a key early model, producers, private landowners and public agencies adopted agreements most believe will protect sage grouse habitat while still allowing work on the land.

More than 100 Oregon ranchers signed voluntary conservation agreements with USFWS in which they took steps to improve habitat in exchange for 30 years protection from additional regulation even if the bird had been listed. Private landowners in other states followed suit, and public agencies such as the BLM revised their management plans.

Those revisions added restrictions on everyone who use public lands. On the whole, we think these new restrictions are less intrusive than what would have happened if the sage grouse were listed.

Some environmental groups say the sage grouse can't survive without the more stringent protections provided by the Endangered Species Act.

Oil and gas interests say the voluntary conservation plans on private lands and mandatory

efforts on public lands are too restrictive for energy production. At the same time, there are carve outs for a proposed transmission line for electricity produced by wind generators, a resource favored by the administration.

Though for different ends, both sides have threatened litigation.

It should be noted that it was a lawsuit brought by environmentalists to force the government to make a decision on a sage grouse listing that provided the impetus for the collaborative efforts and reworked land use plans now at issue.

Some members of Congress say the Obama administration has successfully put even private lands under the government's thumb, what some believe was the goal from the start.

Litigation is an inevitable byproduct of any decision on an environmental issue. Congressional displeasure is also a near certainty. All of this will play out over time.

We would not suggest that voluntary conservation plans and the government efforts have not changed the West. Clearly, there is a new paradigm.

But ranchers and other natural resource advocates need to remember that they have more options under the current conditions than they would had the sage grouse been listed. That would change the West in ways that would make grazing and other productive use of public and private lands all but impossible in many cases.

The challenge now is to ensure measures taken thus far maintain sage grouse habitat and lead to an increase in the population. The only way to thwart litigation or renewed political pressure for a listing — and thus more onerous restrictions — is to actually save the sage grouse.



BPA reduces rebates for upgrading windows

By Susie Snyder
For EO Media Group

For over a decade Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's (OTEC) Energy Services team (ES) has enthusiastically helped members lower their electric bills and conserve energy by upgrading from old, leaky windows to high efficiency models with a u-value of .30 or better. OTEC members who took advantage of BPA's financial incentives satisfied the program criteria by proving their primary installed heat source was electric and they were purchasing new windows that with low u-value ratings.

So, what is a u-value? Windows are rated according to the degree of heat loss measured from the middle of the pane going outward; hence, the lower the U-factor, the better the window insulates the building. The U.S. government standardized the rating method and now requires this information to be posted on all new window products. High efficiency windows can be double or triple pane, argon gas or air filled, or a myriad of other types that meet new efficiency ratings, but the key is to check and compare u-values.

Unfortunately, BPA recently announced the window program will be changing as of October 2015 and the rebate will be greatly reduced, almost half of what it has been. This decision came following a study performed by the Regional Technical Forum (RTF), a committee formed by the NW Power and Conservation Council, and only



Susie Snyder

after years of monitoring the actual savings derived from retrofitting windows as compared to what was originally projected. The RTF's primary job is to develop standards to verify and evaluate conservation savings. This group of experts keeps the Council and Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) updated on whether changes need to be made to any conservation program, so the funding is put to best use. Unfortunately, this one did not live up to the expectation, so future rebates will be cut in half of what they have been, with the likelihood the program will be phased out altogether in the near future.

Although, the change may lower participation for the future, many of OTEC's members have already benefited from the program. And,

Although, the change may lower participation for the future, many of OTEC's members have already benefited from the program. And, regardless, it's still a good idea to remove leaky windows and replace them with higher efficient models.

regardless, it's still a good idea to remove leaky windows and replace them with higher efficient models. OTEC's ES team will continue to be enthusiastic about helping members make smart energy choices and find ways to make the member's project affordable. Call us for more information about other rebates that help you to conserve.

"Enthusiasm is the electricity of life." — Gordon Parks

Susie Snyder is a 15-year employee of OTEC, has a B.A. in Business and is a NWPPA certified Home Energy Auditor/Inspector. She has been helping OTEC members find ways to conserve energy for over 6 years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Wood use has increased

Dear Editor:

The Grant County Public Forest Commission working with the Forest Service has seen an increase from ten cords to sixteen cords of firewood per household and being able to utilize ATV's in retrieving wood. Equipment to load wood has also been authorized.

A recent addition to citizens' use of the abundant dead wood on the Malheur Forest is a "personal use wood permit." Dead trees can now be hauled in longer lengths than eight feet and sawn into lumber for personal use.

Recognizing the need for people to have building material for struc-

tures, fences, bridges, etc., one may apply for a personal use wood permit from the ranger on the district where the wood is located. The cost is the same as firewood and limited to sixteen cords or 8,000 board feet and must have personal use tags affixed to the load.

Forest Service personnel from small sales may be required to inspect the trees prior to the removal. It is imperative anyone that wants to use the personal use wood permit contact a Forest Service Ranger and be thoroughly familiar with the "terms and conditions" of the permit before participating in the program.

Dave Traylor
John Day

Forest Service: Take Sierra Club to court

To the Editor:

Perhaps I'm being too sensitive, but it's just too bad to see all those trees become smoke in the sky and not a resource sold in timber sales going to a local mill.

Now, you know, before this salvage log sale can reach a mill, they must pass the roadblock of the Californians from Club Sierra.

My suggestion to the Forest Service is, group your lawyers together, and take Club Sierra to court to pay a part of the forest fire expense.

W. Toop
Canyon City

Letters policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for Blue Mountain Eagle readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters will be asked to be contained to 350 words. No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. No thank-you letters. Submissions to this page become property of the Eagle. The Eagle reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content. Letters must be original and signed by the writer. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. We must limit all contributors to one letter per person per month. Deadline is 5 p.m. Friday. Send letters to editor@bmeagle.com, or Blue Mountain Eagle, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day, OR 97845; or fax to 541-575-1244.

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