

Forest plan hatched in secrecy, without solid legal basis

Coordination among various levels of government is a good concept when it comes to managing public land. But Sheriff Glenn Palmer has gone about it the wrong way in his reckless effort to create his own forest plan. The result is not in the best interests of Grant County.

Palmer has not only exceeded his authority as sheriff, he contradicted his public calls for openness in the way he presented his plan to county commissioners. Rather than going through an open public process, Palmer deputized a handpicked band of deputies to develop a natural resource plan. So much for collaboration and cooperation.

What would this band of deputies and Sheriff Palmer have done had the U.S. Forest Service dropped its own forest plan at the end of a meeting with no public input, no notice of action and no chance to participate? There would be outrage. So why are Sheriff Palmer's actions different?

Looking over the regulations provided by Sheriff Palmer in his Natural Resource Plan he quotes 36 CFR 219.4 which states, "The responsible official shall coordinate land management planning with the equivalent and related planning efforts of federally recognized Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments." It goes on to say "... For plan development or revision, the responsible official shall review the planning and land use policies of ... these same entities including local governments."

The regulations constantly refer to "Local Governments" as the entity the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are supposed to coordinate with. So who is "Local Government"? Oregon law (ORS 203) clearly designates the county court as the "governing body" required to develop and revise all land plans. ORS 215 spells out the public process for developing and revising these plans. Land-use planning is not one of the listed duties of a sheriff within the state of Oregon (ORS 206).

It seems Sheriff Palmer and his deputies rile against collaboration. Yet collaboration appears to follow many of the

concepts of coordination being called for by Sheriff Palmer and is achieving results.

The collaboration is taking place with the Blue Mountains Forest Partners. This group of volunteers is composed of local people. Included are loggers, ranchers, sawmill representatives, business owners, contractors, local government representatives and, yes, even some non-local environmental groups.

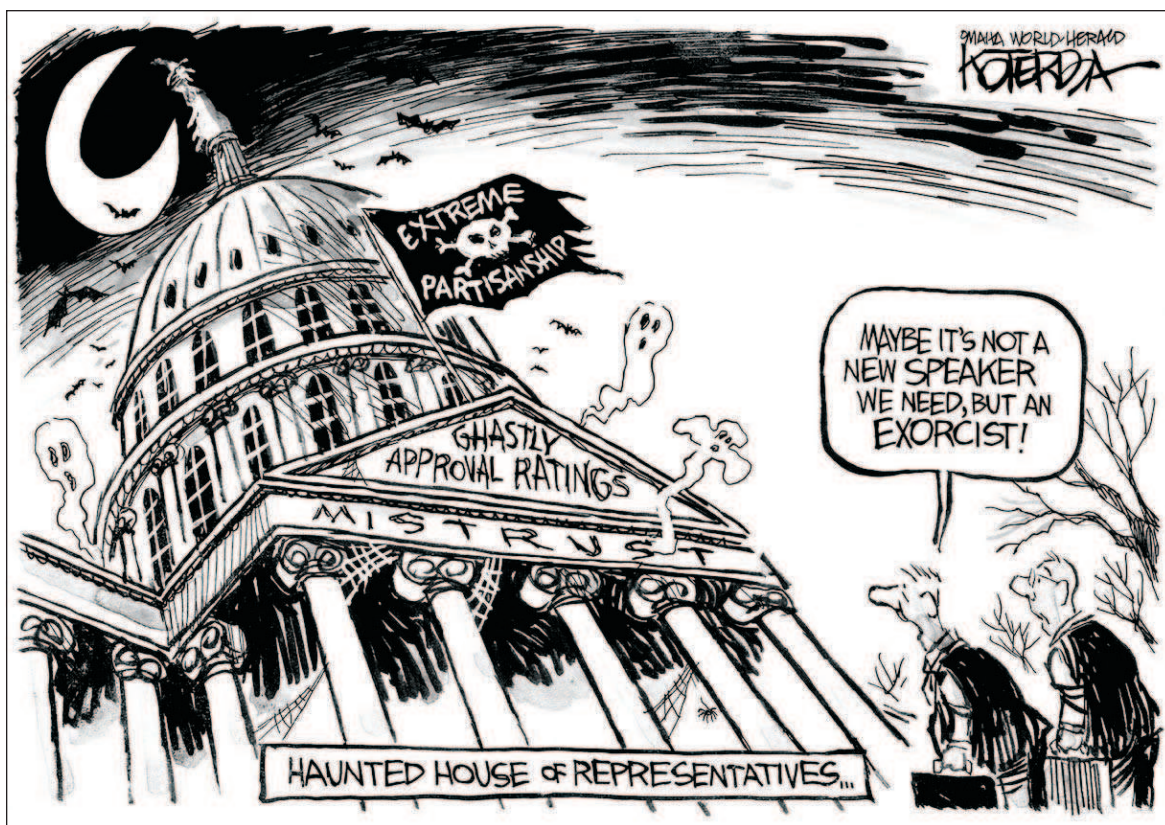
The Forest Partners is a diverse group — one that has already achieved considerable success. It has moved our forest from selling very small quantities of timber and treating few acres, to selling more timber, treating tens of thousands of acres each year and putting people back to work in the forest to keep our local economy from failing.

The citizens of Grant County have tried and failed in the past to get the Forest Service to cut more timber and build more roads. The effort was appropriately called the "timber wars" and we lost. We lost because almost every timber sale was litigated by environmental groups who now work with local people to move the forest and the communities forward.

Collaboration may not be perfect, and it may be painful for some who remember the days when a dozen mills populated our county and there was no need to sit at a table with the "enemy" and collaborate. But the fact is we are moving in the right direction with forest management without litigation since 2006.

We want a natural resources plan, but we don't want plans developed illegally or secretly. The County Court is charged with handling plan development, revisions and coordination with the Forest Service. Let's encourage continued coordination between these two institutions. If we see issues that need addressing, bring them to the County Court. Better yet, participate in the current collaboration of forest management.

We applaud those who are passionate about what they believe in. But we draw the line with arguments that are not supported by facts and efforts that attempt to circumvent an open public process.



OP-ED: A meaningful seat at the negotiating table on forest plan

By Frances M. Preston

So the debate begins over our forest plan and the meaning of "coordination or collaboration."

Our county commissioners tell us they were being cooperating and collaborating. Now it is time for citizens to educate themselves on the differences of the meaning of the words and be involved in the process.

The "coordination process," as directed by Congress, is simply a process by which local government and federal agencies are to meet in government-to-government dialogue in order to reach consistency between federal plans and actions and local plans, ordinances and policies.

Congress has directed every federal agency to engage in this process with locally elected governments. Congress requires that federal agencies engage in the "coordination" process, providing local government with a meaningful seat at the negotiating table with federal and state agencies that receive federal funding.

The meaning of three words — coordinate, consistency and collaboration — is important when considering the debate going on regarding the use of the national forest and people's public lands around us. Coordinate is defined as being "equal in rank, quality, or significance" and "to work jointly with others or together ... to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected."

Consistency means "steadfast adherence to the principles, course, etc." and "agreement between parts or things."

The definition of collaboration clearly points out that while one is "working jointly with others," "one is not immediately connected." In other

Committee members

Members of Grant County Coordination Committee are:

Dave Traylor: A veteran of the Vietnam War, well known for his public support of natural resource management.

Brooks Smith: Retired district ranger on the Malheur National Forest.

Jim Sproul: A native of Grant County, raised on the family ranch and actively involved in ranching, currently a real estate agent in the county.

Mike and Elaine Smith: Long-time citizens of the county, retired ranchers, 29 years owners and managers of U.S. Forest Service grazing allotments.

Frances Preston: Retired U.S. Forest Service administrator.

Terry and Billie Jo George: Retired retail lumber sales and advocates for public access of our national forest.

Todd Smith: Independent general contractor.

Roger McKinley: Business owner, RJ Trucking and RJ Post and Pole.

Judy Kerr: Retired Forest Service, public affairs and road engineering.

words, those who take part in collaboration may or may not be affected by their actions.

The U.S. Forest Service is charged with coordinating the management of forest lands with those affected by their actions. We are to be equal in rank, quality, or significance.

There are many parties affected by federal forests. Among them are those who use forest livestock allotments for summer grazing, family logging jobs

and the mills and businesses in the community who are supported by the ranching and logging industries.

We suffer the impact of arbitrary road closures and various projects that limit our use and enjoyment of the forest surrounding our community.

The current group collaborating in the county — Blue Mountains Forest Partners — is talking with and making agreements with the Forest Service and groups that don't have a vested interest in our local families and our community. The decisions they have made, implemented by the heavy hand of the federal government, have affected the local people who use the forest for business or recreation, and the local economy in general.

With consistency in mind, through coordination we could hold together a steadfast adherence to the principles while retaining the customs and culture of the county as defined by the Grant County Custom and Culture Document.

The Grant County Coordination Committee is composed of citizen volunteers with a wide range of cultural and historic experience in natural resource management (see adjacent list). Their mission is to assist Sheriff Glenn Palmer, local governments and public agencies to utilize the coordination process to bring federal and state regulations into consistency with local laws and policies.

Sheriff Palmer and five of these members participated in a Coordination 101 Seminar given by Attorney Fred Kelly Grant. Since 1990 Grant has helped local governments and landowners defend their interests against autocratic federal agencies.

The information presented during the seminar motivated Sheriff Palmer to act and invoke coordination. Please support our efforts.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Articles were unprofessional, manipulate

Letter to the Editor:

Two items in last week's issue (Sheriff's Deputies and the Blue Mountains Forest Partners) were unprofessional attempts to manipulate the public with misinformation and failure to include interviews given by involved parties who do not support the paper's family views.

The Grant County Public Land Resources Plan Committee is only a representative of itself and as an advisory committee to the Sheriff. They are a diverse group of county citizens who voluntarily came together to create a resource plan to provide a means of support for county interests, health, and safety. The County Court has independently created many committees at their discretion so why is the Sheriff, an equal official, criticized for the same action?

The Resources Plan is a "living document" which means it can and is expected to be amended through additions and explanations of policies. It does not need an attorney's perusal or approval. It does not sup-

port environmental or collaborative groups or any government agencies but strives to provide the people of Grant County a means to exercise control over their public lands.

The Plan did not need prior review from the Court. Sheriff Palmer, an elected official and lead law enforcement officer, is not subservient to the County Court, has equal authority, and does not depend upon approval to act in support of the county citizens. Sheriff Palmer strove to provide a plan for the citizens of Grant County as a guide for all government agencies so that they know what Grant County expects for their Natural Resources Management.

Other County ordinances or plans that are "not working" is because of lack of coordination with agencies on equal footing. "Coordination" is the law.

The only evidence of true coordination claimed by the Forest Service is with their Blue Mountains Forest Partners collaboratives. Only with extreme arrogance and vanity do they assume they are the only agency of substance within Grant County.

Judy Kerr
Canyon City

Cooperation needed from ODFW

Letter to the Editor:

I am writing this letter in hopes it will reach the eyes and ears of our city manager Peggy Gray, Senator Ted Ferrioli, Greg Walden, Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden, because of the devastation caused by the Canyon Creek Complex fire, and the flooding we are told to expect, not only this year, but at least the next five years.

Several agencies are working hard to ease the effect it will have on us, but we are going to need the cooperation from the local Fish and Wildlife Department to allow extra time to work in Canyon Creek to help relieve the worry and in some cases damage and loss of property. The Fish and Wildlife Department has 320 days of the year to baby-sit the salmon and we only get 45 days. We don't need the worry and anxiety this is causing.

To those who will be affected both directly and indirectly, exercise your voice and write to our representatives today.

Denny Wise
John Day

See LETTER, Page A5

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