

A wilderness proposal gone wild

Residents of Malheur County, Ore., are wise to be suspicious of a plan to designate 43 percent of their county as a wilderness area.

They should continue to resist the proposal any way they can.

It's a tradition among outgoing Democratic presidents to set aside massive swaths of the West as wilderness areas. They do it to make themselves look pretty to the environmental community.

Jimmy Carter holds the record, setting aside 27 million acres of Alaska as wilderness during his single term.

Bill Clinton set aside 9.2 million acres of wilderness as he was heading out the door.

Now it's President Barack Obama's turn.

You'll note that in all of the above cases, the people who live in those areas were steamrolled.

That's why we're concerned about the Owyhee Canyonlands Conservation Proposal, which would designate a little more than 2 million acres as wilderness and 50 miles of rivers as wild and scenic rivers.

Under the Wilderness Act of 1964, "no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport and no structure or installation" is allowed except as a way to meet the minimum requirements of administering the area.

Even using vehicles to take out juniper trees, which ruin greater sage grouse habitat, is banned. A federal judge recently ruled that motorized vehicles couldn't be used to help clear junipers from a wilderness study area near Steens Mountain in south-central Oregon. And note the name of the plaintiff in the lawsuit: the Oregon Natural Desert Association, which is behind the plan for Malheur County.

Though proponents such as ONDA promise that grazing allotments would be grandfathered in, ranchers there find little comfort in the assurance.

Bob Skinner, a rancher,

reminded the 500 people who gathered in the Adrian High School gym recently that proponents of the plan, such as ONDA, are litigators.

"Once this gets to court, all bets are off," he told the crowd.

The irony of the meeting was provided when Brent Fenty, executive director of ONDA, told the crowd he wants to stop mining and oil and gas drilling.

"We all care about the Owyhee and want to keep it the way it is today, we just may disagree on how we do that," he said.

Indeed.

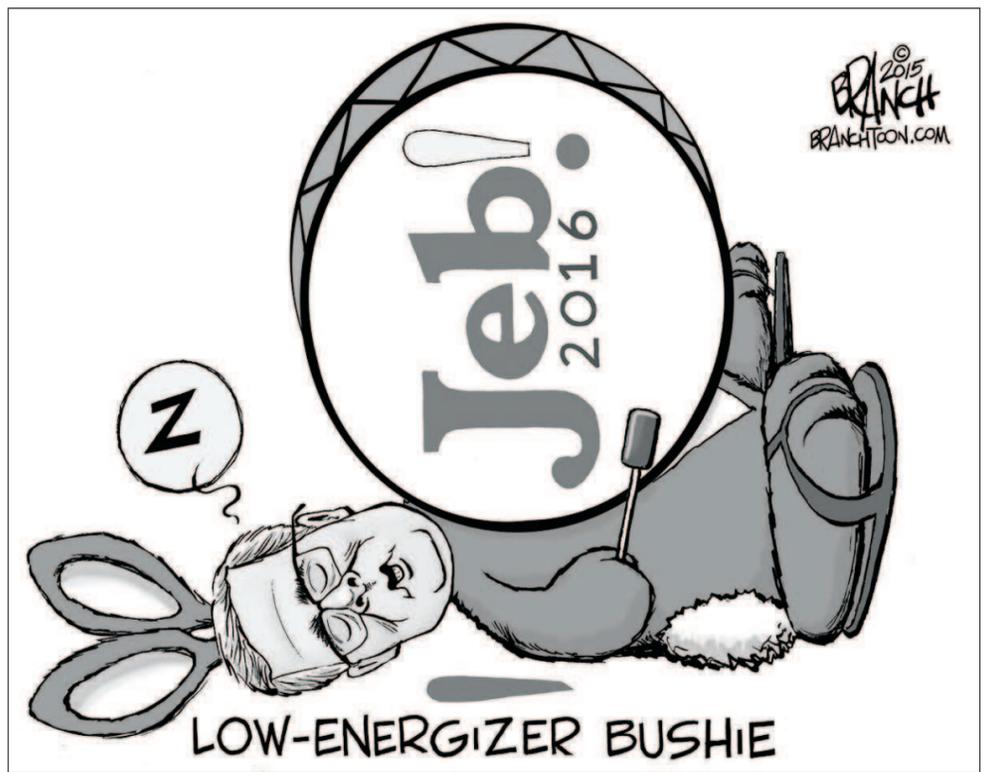
The most troubling aspect of this plan is the Obama administration hiding its intentions from members of Congress. Rep. Greg Walden, R-Ore., represents Malheur County. He says he has asked the administration to tell the truth about the plan, but has thus far received no answer.

State Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario, organized the Adrian meeting and plans to send a video of it to the White House in hopes that members of the administration will understand what's at stake.

We often write about the "urban-rural" divide. This is the perfect example of where it's getting wider. Proponents — nearly all from cities — want to impose wilderness status on rural residents. The urbanites don't care what the rural residents think or that it will ultimately eviscerate the local economy.

There is precious little in the record to show that the Obama administration will listen to the people of Malheur County. The administration has a long track record of imposing regulatory shock and awe on rural parts of the West. The Environmental Protection Agency's Waters of the United States regulations and the Department of Labor's "hot goods" actions against farmers are just two prominent examples of how federal agencies overstep their statutory authority.

And consider this: There is also nothing in the record to indicate that proponents of designating more wilderness in Malheur County care even a tiny bit about the people who live there — or anywhere else in the rural West.



Oregon's veterans continue to serve

Guest editorial by Cameron Smith

Veterans Day is one day to honor the service and sacrifice of all who have raised their right hand, worn the uniform, defended our freedom and stood guard over our peace.

Across our 70-year history, the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs has witnessed generations of service members returning home and then using their hard-earned leadership skills and experience to significantly contribute to our communities.

What many citizens may not know is that one out of every 12 Oregonians is a veteran. While our veterans gain great strength from their service, it is not surprising that many can face challenges as they reintegrate home. For those impacted by their service, we must understand their tenacious spirit and resiliency. They deserve nothing less than the best in care, resources and support.

There is never a doubt, though, that our learned resilience, idealistic pride and unwavering dedication to our families, community and each other is stronger because we served in uniform.

Take the recent examples of young returning veterans from Oregon like Alek Skarlatos and Chris Mintz. Skarlatos captured international headlines



Cameron Smith

for thwarting a terrorist attack while traveling in France after his deployment in Afghanistan with the Oregon Army National Guard. Similarly, Mintz, an Army veteran,

also chose to run toward chaos on the Umpqua Community College campus to help protect fellow students.

He was shot multiple times and, thankfully, continues to recover for his young family and community.

These stories have made the national news, but our local veterans communities are filled with everyday examples of inspiring continued service. Bill Griffith is a former Navy Corpsman who served in Vietnam and is continuing to serve his fellow veterans as an award-winning volunteer Long Term Care Ombudsman. He was recently recognized for his advocacy for our aging veterans at the Oregon Veterans' Home in The Dalles and other skilled nursing facilities, receiving the Governor's Volunteer Award in October.

A recent appointment to ODVA's Advisory Committee, Kim Douthit, is a Coast Guard veteran and continues to serve student veterans in her role as a veterans' coordinator at Portland Community College.

She is a leader for both our fastest growing demographic, women veterans, and for all veterans across Oregon.

While our focus is on our veterans, we also must remember the service and sacrifice of our military and veteran families. Judi Van Cleave of Portland was elected as the National President of Gold Star Wives of America. Her late husband was a disabled Korean War veteran.

Judi's significant service for two decades with Gold Star Wives of America continues to honor our fallen and their families.

Across our team at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs, many of us are veterans and family members of veterans, and we continue to be inspired by our current service members, veterans and their families. We are honored and privileged to serve them — not just on Veterans Day, but throughout the year. It is their individual stories that make up the incredible fabric of our community.

No matter the branch of service, no matter the era, no matter who we are, or where we live, we stand proudly together. We are Oregon veterans.

Cameron Smith served three tours in Iraq as a U.S. Marine captain and is the director of the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Learn from the disaster

Letter to the Editor:

Well, we are about to relocate. We are about to move to Prairie City. As the old saying goes, "It ain't our druthers." It is a forced move brought on by the Canyon Creek Complex Fire, a fire that didn't have to happen. I have developed a goodly bit of bitterness in that regard over the past few weeks.

For several years, I have screamed for the forest service to put the fire out instead of setting around while it burned itself out. A good example was the Berry Creek lightning strike. One or two more helicopter bucket drops of water or retardant, even dirt for that matter, and my house as well as several others up Canyon Creek might well still be here, just one or two bucket drops.

But that didn't happen. I was told that a couple of ground crews were on the scene and they had a trail around the fire and were letting it burn out. Well, it burned out alright. The unex-

pected jumped up and the wind took care of the rest. Just think, a bucket or two more of water prior to that and our houses might still be here. I know, it is too late for our houses, but maybe someone else in some other incident might benefit. Put the fire out!

I hope that in the future a lesson was learned in this disaster. Put the fire out. Maybe somebody else's house can be saved. Just one or two buckets more and maybe we could have avoided the heartache that we didn't deserve.

Dean Elliott
Canyon City

An initiative for vote in 2016

Letter to Editor:

On May 21, 2002, this question was approved by 67 percent of voters: "Shall Grant County Citizens participate in Stewardship of Natural Resources on Public Lands?"

The last sentence of the summary states, "Grant County Citizens

may participate in stewardship of natural resource(s) on public lands within the county, when those resource(s) or use of the resource(s) become detrimental to the health, welfare and safety of the people."

Does anyone have any doubts about the Canyon Creek Complex Fire or the potential flooding as a result of the fire being detrimental to the health, welfare and safety of the people?

The Sheriff responded with a natural resource plan that will be beneficial to citizens of the county. The plan will be introduced as an initiative for a vote in 2016. There is no doubt the plan will be approved by voters. Then it will be up to the people to hold those responsible for the health, welfare and safety of the county to do their sworn duty.

I request the Blue Mountain Eagle to publish a "fair and balanced" report so that citizens can be accurately and honestly informed concerning the huge detrimental effect the fire and future flooding will have on the people of the county.

Jim Sproul
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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