

Manage forests, or watch them burn

For those who have not witnessed the blast-furnace heat and the eye-stinging smoke of a wildfire along with the mass destruction of timber, homes, businesses and wildlife, the recent fires should be a learning experience.

Nearly every corner of the West was on fire. From Arizona to Washington state and from California to Montana, 65 active fires were burning 2.83 million acres. Those numbers include only the fires that were 10,000 acres or larger. The average size of those fires was 43,556 acres.

In some areas, including Portland and Los Angeles, the fires got too close for comfort. Drivers on Los Angeles expressways could see flames racing up the hillsides, and Interstate 84 east of Portland was closed as firefighters valiantly worked to keep the wind-driven flames at bay.

For many Western city dwellers, wildfires just got personal. They were no longer something they watched from afar, watching video snippets from the safety of their homes and apartments. The stench of smoke could be smelled and the raging flames could be seen up close.

Firefighters were forced to prioritize which blazes to fight and which to let go. They hoped to save the lodge at Multnomah Falls in the Columbia Gorge and the lodge at McDonald Lake in Glacier National Park. They battled to keep fires away from Yosemite and Yellowstone national parks.

Among politicians, the chatter was about how to fund firefighters — talk about fiddling while the West burns. They want to make sure the money for firefighters doesn't come out of the U.S. Forest Service budget but from the money set aside for disasters.

This chatter has been going on for years now, and any effective member of Congress would have gotten it passed and signed by the president. But we haven't really seen much in the way of effectiveness coming out of Congress recently, have we?

What they need to talk about — and take action on — is the absolutely irresponsible and short-sighted way public lands in the West are managed.

Let's start with forests, shall we?

At some point the Obama administration decided nearly all federal forests were off-limits to logging, the best and only way to manage forests. For decades, foresters have been warning that letting forests go unmanaged will only mean bigger and badder wildfires in the future.

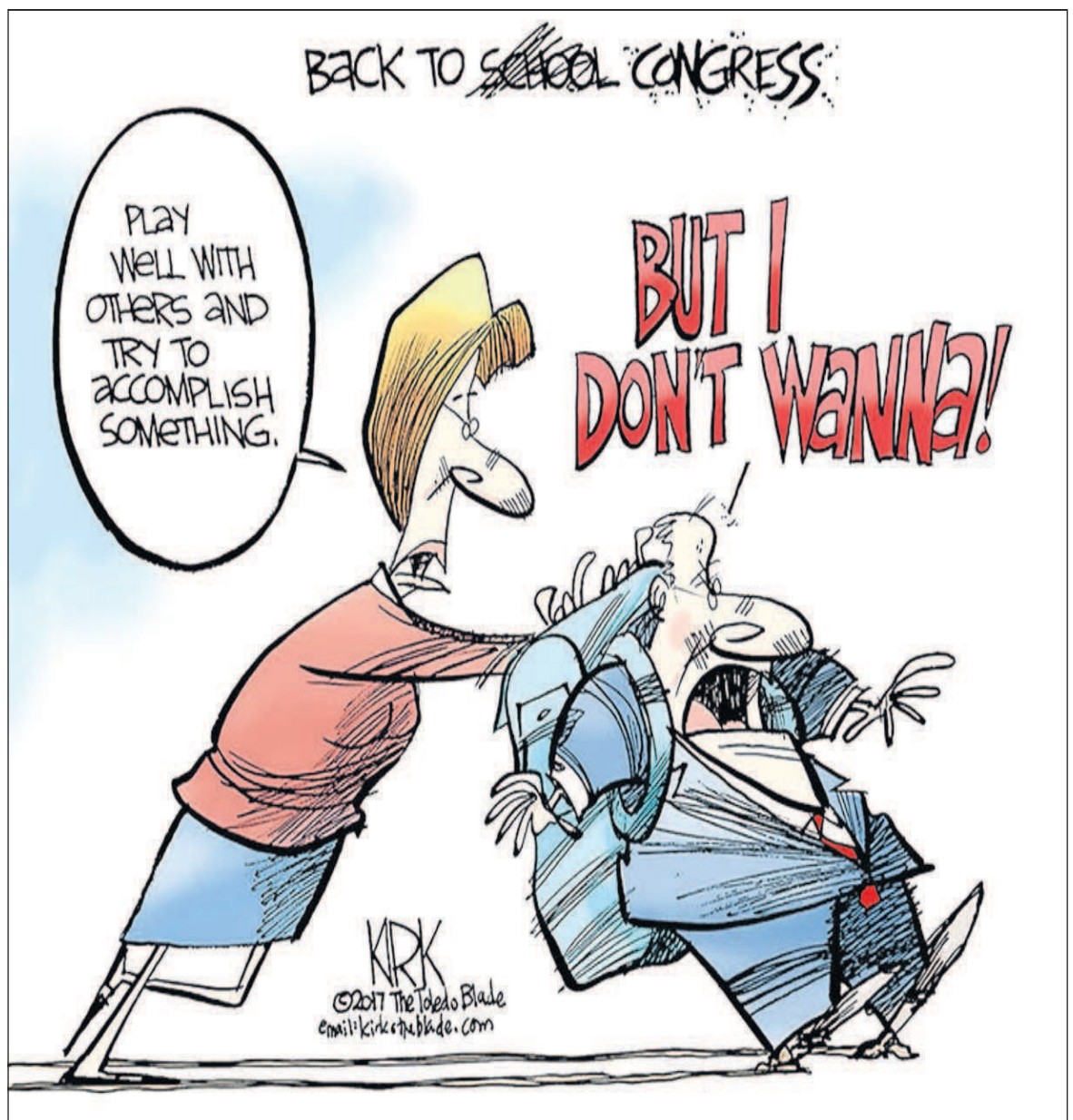
We need federal managers who are allowed to effectively manage publicly owned forests. Instead of taking out roads from national forests, they need to leave them in place. They need to sell timber in strategic ways that will make fighting the next wildfire easier.

In the vast open spaces of the West they need to allow more cattle grazing, which has been shown to be an effective way to keep down cheatgrass and other weeds that burn hot and kill the ecosystem. Juniper trees need to be taken out of all areas, including wilderness, where they are destroying the countryside and hindering the recovery of the greater sage grouse and other important species.

The people who know the West best are those who live there. Federal managers need to listen when people tell them that they are setting up the region for disastrous fires. That has happened time and time again, especially in Oregon and Washington state.

And don't listen to critics who holler that people just want to clearcut the West. In decades past, federal land was actively managed — logged — and the forests are still a beautiful resource. Those who say they don't want one tree cut down are simply denying the fact that forests need to be managed, or they will eventually be destroyed by wildfire, bark beetles or disease.

Managing forests and open spaces will not put an end to wildfires, but it will reduce their size and number.



FARMER'S FATE

The eighth day of the week

By Brianna Walker
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

Have you ever reached the end of your week, barely making it halfway on your "to do" list? Starting out the week on last week's list seems a bit like combining with a hopper that never fully empties.

To keep the hopper emptied and the "to do" list short, one seems to have to ignite the midnight petroleum frequently, and then suddenly you find that "spontaneous napping" has somehow found its way to the top of your list. I finally got my eight hours of sleep in — took four days, but who's counting?

Summertime seems to be the worst for uncompleted lists: always trying to squeeze an extra hour or two out of each day. Each morning we juggle the harvest balls of hay, wheat and watermelons between us and the crew. If we are lucky we keep those balls bouncing between us long enough to eat breakfast —

before noon!

Recently, sitting in the freshly cut hay, drinking a warm Gatorade, looking into a swather header that obviously felt it had put in its eight hours and wanted to go home, I had an epiphany. Our lists aren't too long — our weeks are too short. We need an eight-day week. And I have the perfect name for it: Someday. Just think what we could get done!

How many times have you asked your spouse about building that extra room on your house? Or having a yard sale to clear out the clutter? Or maybe building that tree house for the kids? Yeah, you'll get to that "Someday."

How wonderful would that be to have Someday roll around every week? I could finally get my sewing

room completed. My husband could finally fix his old Trans Am that has held down the same piece of ground for close to six years now — OK, so that one might take "a month of Somedays." But just think of the things you've been needing to finish that would suddenly happen. I might actually get my Christmas tree taken down — but then again, if I just wait a few more months I'll be ahead of the game. Someday, I'll be on top of my housework. Someday, I'll learn that foreign language. Someday. ...

My husband interrupted my thoughts, "I got the header fixed, when do you want to finish swathing?"

"Someday," I smirked at him. They say every day is a gift. Well, if that's true, then I'd like a receipt for Monday. I'd like to exchange it for "Someday."

Brianna Walker occasionally writes about the Farmer's Fate for the Blue Mountain Eagle.

GUEST COMMENT

Social Security for those who served

By Kimberly Hermann
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

The men and women who served our country in the military can count on Social Security to be there for them throughout their lives.

Active duty military members earn credits toward Social Security retirement benefits. Wounded Warriors can receive expedited handling of their claims to receive disability benefits. We also provide survivor benefits for young children and spouses of veterans who have died.

You can learn more about how Social Security helps our veterans build a secure financial future for themselves and their families at socialsecurity.gov/people/veterans.

Our newest initiative, Journey to Success: Employment Tools for Veterans with Disabilities, is a five-part online guide that helps certain disabled veterans return to fulfilling employment in the American workforce.

The guide highlights resources, such as career counseling, job training and employment services. You can access Journey to Suc-

cess at ssa.gov/people/veterans.

We know some veterans suffered injuries so severe they cannot return to their previous work. However, for those veterans who are interested in testing their ability to find and maintain gainful employment, these resources can help. We thank all members of our military and veterans for their service and sacrifice.

To learn more about our programs and benefits, visit socialsecurity.gov.

Kimberly Hermann is a Social Security public affairs specialist.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'The deer are now a remnant herd'

To the Editor:

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologist Ryan Torland discredits himself in the eyes of old-timers in Grant County when he asserts that the local deer herds are "chugging along just fine." Talk to just about any old-time rancher or Grant County hunter, and they will tell you the truth: "The deer are just

a remnant herd of what they used to be." We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the deer herd is not "chugging along just fine"; the remnant is barely "chugging" at all. This kind of "misdirection" is why so many hold ODFW in contempt; we don't like to be lied to. We hold our nose and buy our license, buy deer hunt applications and, if successful, know that 85 percent of us will just be buying the right to take our rifles for a walk in the woods.

Oh, we enjoy the camping trip, the camaraderie, the stories from the good old days, but what we would really like is a reasonable chance at success for our dollars. Mr. Torland may respond with numbers and statistics, but those of us who have been there and done that know the truth. The deer are now a remnant herd.

Reg LeQuieu
Mt. Vernon

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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