

# Western governors offer prudent ESA proposal

Since it was passed in 1973, the Endangered Species Act has been all but untouchable by members of Congress, who consider amendments to the law with the same trepidation they would if they were climbing over an electric fence.

It's not that the ESA is perfect — far from it. Rather it's fear of retribution from environmental groups who see the law as their meal ticket and a weapon they use against anyone who doesn't share their enthusiasm for shutting down economic activities across the West to "save" local populations of various species.

That's why an effort by the Western Governors' Association is so interesting. The top elected officials in the western-most 21 states and three Pacific territories — Republicans and Democrats — took on the challenge of studying the ESA to determine how they could make it work better.

Headed by Wyoming Gov. Matt Mead, the association first invited people from around the West to talk about the law. The governors' recommendations are the result of those initial conversations and "drilling down" to develop ideas for addressing the law's shortcomings.

It was not easy. The ESA is complicated and riddled with strict deadlines. In fact, the deadlines are part of the problem, the governors found. They were added in 1982 and have provided environmental groups with the hammer they wanted to force the federal agencies to pay them whenever

they miss a deadline.

The governors recommended that the deadlines be made more realistic. They also recommended the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service be allowed to prioritize petitions for species of concern. Those species that are already the subject of on-the-ground conservation efforts would be a lower priority than other species that are not being helped. This would allow time to determine how any conservation efforts are working before the USFWS jumped in.

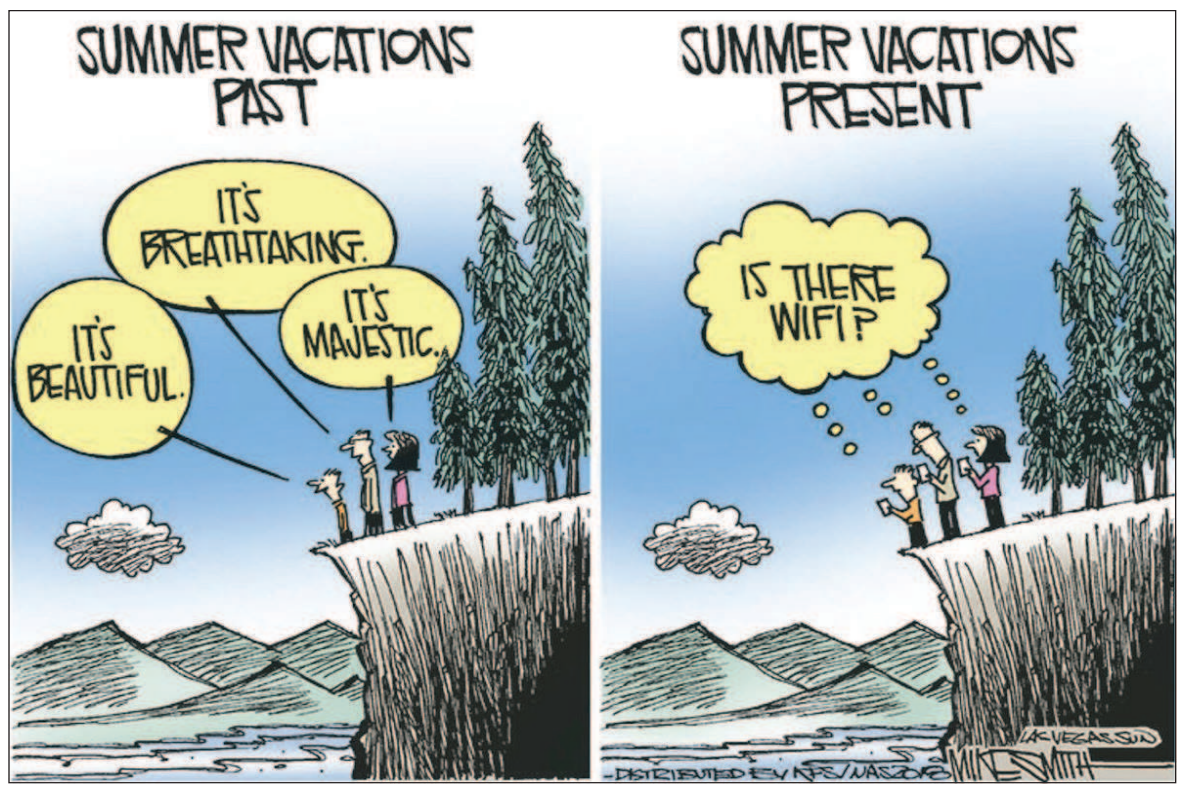
Such recommendations represent a well-thought-out starting point for making the ESA better and more effective.

They "would require agencies to consider conservation efforts and give them time to work," David Willms, a policy adviser to the Wyoming governor, recently told the Idaho Water Users Association's water law conference.

Regardless of its intentions, the ESA overloads federal agencies, exposes them to needless lawsuits and prevents wildlife and land managers from using all the tools at their disposal to do their jobs.

Getting rid of the ESA, however, is probably not realistic, since every environmental group would most likely hit the panic button at the mention of repeal.

But the case the Western governors make for judiciously modifying the ESA to make it more effective — and ultimately save more species in need of help — is difficult for even the most ardent environmentalist to resist.



## FARMER'S FATE

# Crazy 'two-canoe' ideas

By Brianna Walker  
To the Blue Mountain Eagle



Brianna Walker

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." I couldn't help but think of the epigram of Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr while reading with my son one afternoon.

The story was one of a young boy and his family traveling from Tennessee to Texas in 1852. The challenges they faced often made my son stop and wonder. Why would they conserve gun powder — couldn't they just buy more? Why did they eat everything they shot — even when it was gristly, fatty meat like raccoon? Why didn't they heat up the water after every person took a bath? What was a flint, and why didn't they just use matches? In these ways, the story seemed far removed from us — that is, until they got to a crossing at St. Francis River.

There was a ferry to take the wagons across. People were swimming children and animals across. There was also a trapper who was taking people across in his canoe. As he was charging much less, he was doing much more business than the ferry driver.

"Too bad you can't haul wagons in them canoes," said one man from Kentucky.

"Who says I can't?" the trapper replied.

And so it was that, while the wife protested, the man from Kentucky made a deal with the trapper

to take his canoe for less than half of what the ferryman was charging. Two canoes were lashed to the wagon — and somehow they managed to get one under the left set of wheels and the other under the right — then the wagon started across the river.

The ferryman, having just lost a \$3 fare, started stomping on his hat and cursing, while the rest of the people stared in amazement and laughter at the wagon crossing the river on two canoes. About halfway across, the canoes seemed to go down a hair in front. Then in the back.

"Paddle faster," the Kentucky man pleaded.

But it was to no avail. A full 30 feet from the shore, water poured over the sides of a those canoes, and they sank like rocks. The trapper began swimming for his life — not afraid of drowning, but powerfully alarmed at the rifle the wife of the Kentucky man was aiming in his direction.

My son could no longer contain his laughter. He let the book fall to his chest as he laughed and coughed and snorted. "What a silly thing to do," he giggled. "All to save \$2. Couldn't he tell it was a bad idea?"

"Well, my son, someday you will understand: It's a guy thing. And most wives will be able to relate to

the rifle-armed lady on the shore." He looked at me with confusion. I began telling him a story that happened when he was just a year old.

My husband and I had flown back east to drive home two pickups. My husband rented a trailer, and we were planning on driving one and hauling the other. But to save a few bucks, he rented the "\$1 canoe." The trailer wasn't long enough or wide enough so he used boards, and ramps, a hi-lift jack and a lot of ratchets to get the pickup on it. When it was finally on, it looked precariously like I imagine that wagon did on those two canoes.

We drove just a few painful miles — that trailer fishtailing like crazy. I didn't know if I should be more afraid for us, the cars passing us or the pickup whose back tires were overhanging the trailer on long boards. I could empathize with Kentuckian's wife. I wished I would have had a rifle!

"So what happened?" my son asked.

"Thankfully we stopped before the 'canoes' sank. Then you and I drove one pickup home, and Daddy drove the other along with his cheap trailer. The moral of the story is that shortcuts don't often work out in the long run."

"Maybe not," he grinned, "but they sure are funnier to talk about."

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

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Happy to see Hammonds pardoned

To the Editor:

I appreciate the work of Rep. Greg Walden, persevering until justice was accomplished in the case of Dwight and Steven Hammond. I am grateful to President Trump for reviewing this case and seeing his way clear to right a terrible injustice. Hopefully these Eastern Oregon families can put their lives back together and once again enjoy the unique life of the high desert. I trust their experience will not be in vain and all involved will have learned from what has transpired and save other ranchers from such a fate. Government has its place but not when it overreaches to "shock the conscience" as was stated by federal Judge Michael Hogan, who presided over the case and used his discretion in sentencing. These men have more than served their time, and I am so happy to see this ridiculous decision overruled and the Hammonds pardoned.

Cheryl Cruson  
Ontario

presidential pardon for Dwight and Steven Hammond of Harney County.

Walden did the right thing. Those of us in Congressional District 2, who can actually vote for Walden and really know the issues, are grateful for his help.

Those who are familiar with the case and issues are fully aware the pardon was justified. The Hammond family is a ranching family in Eastern Oregon who help feed the world. They are not domestic terrorists.

Now, in comparison, President Obama pardoned over 600 individuals. Most were hardened criminals dealing in hard drugs, theft and other crimes, which are a threat to society. He let these types out on society. Where was the hue and cry about these pardons? Congressman Walden did the right thing!

Suzan Ellis Jones  
Bridgeport

### Righting a wrongful situation

To the Editor:

In the 1800s, brave and independent individuals suffered hardships and trials to reach Oregon. These founders of our state had strongly held beliefs about their God, their county and their Constitution. Having strongly held beliefs is still the backbone of Oregon.

It was a black eye for those strongly held beliefs when the notion of federal control for public lands exploded into a confrontation at the Malheur refuge. The situation soon became fodder for late night TV hosts and wild stories circulated the na-

tion about a "terrorist" activity loose in Oregon. Steve and Dwight Hammond went to prison. Twice. Both of these men served their allotted time for allowing a controlled burn to spread beyond their land. In 2016, under the Obama Administration, Chief Judge Aiken ruled that these men must go back to prison in order to serve a mandatory minimum specially designed for terrorists.

What started all this? Steve Hammond started several back fires after lightning started a blaze that threatened his winter feed for his cattle. It's amusing to note that our government does similar things for similar reasons. They have controlled burns that have migrated on to private lands. When that happens, the government does not brand itself as a terrorist, nor does it call for its own arrest, conviction and imprisonment. However, Dwight and Steven Hammond were sentenced to prison. The entire situation was made of many wrongs. I appreciate President Trump for his pardon of the Hammonds. He righted a very wrongful situation. Congressman Greg Walden has put forth the legislation H.R. 983 that would ensure that farmers and ranchers would never again be prosecuted as terrorists for range management fires.

This isn't a political letter. This is an Oregonian letter. It is applauding people who do the right thing. One of Oregon's strongly held values concerns the larger issue of federal control of public lands. May Oregon always be home to brave and independent individuals with strongly held beliefs.

Zee Koza  
La Grande



## WHERE TO WRITE

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• **Gov. Kate Brown, D** — 254 State Capitol, Salem 97310. Phone: 503-378-3111. Fax: 503-378-6827. Website: www.governor.state.or.us/governor.html.

• **Oregon Legislature** — State Capitol, Salem, 97310. Phone: (503) 986-1180. Website: www.leg.state.or.us (includes Oregon Constitution and Oregon Revised Statutes).

• **Oregon Legislative Information** — (For updates on bills, services, capitol or messages for legislators) — 800-332-2313.

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