

Once again, it's time to fix the ESA

A federal judge has dismissed a third lawsuit filed by an environmental group to stop the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from shooting barred owls in an experimental attempt to boost numbers of the endangered spotted owl.

At the same time, the service is struggling to explain if the program made any difference.

Northern spotted owls were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1990. Environmental groups blamed its dwindling numbers on the logging of old growth forests, the owl's preferred habitat. As a result, logging in the Northwest, particularly on federal lands, was greatly reduced.

While this had a devastating impact on local economies built on the timber industry, it didn't seem to do much for spotted owl populations. Wildlife managers say that's because another species, the barred owl, moved into the territory.

The barred owl is native to the Eastern United States, though for more than a century it's been making its way farther west. It's bigger and more aggressive than the spotted owl, pushing its little cousin out of its territory. It also is more adaptable, preying on a variety of small animals, birds and reptiles where the spotted owl has a more limited diet.

Five years ago, the Fish and Wildlife Service began an experimental program of shooting barred owls in selected locations to reduce pressure on spotted owls. The project is controversial, even within the service, because it involves killing one protected, although plentiful, species to revive

another.

Enter the Friends of Animals, which has filed three separate lawsuits to block the service from shooting barred owls. Each has been dismissed. Last month, U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken ruled the nonprofit lacked the legal standing to file its third complaint in federal court. The group plans an appeal.

For its part, the government has not been able to show the program has done anything to boost spotted owl populations. It has markedly reduced barred owl populations. Since the experiment began, the agency has removed 2,086 barred owls through the end of 2018, up from 1,148 at the end of 2017.

The service hopes to have enough data compiled this month to have a more conclusive analysis of the program by mid year.

So, the saga of the spotted owl continues.

All of this would be somewhat amusing if farmers, ranchers and loggers in the Pacific Northwest didn't have a stake in the Endangered Species Act and wildlife restoration projects undertaken by government agencies.

One of the most vexing aspects of the ESA is the lawsuits that it generates. Farmers and ranchers too often find themselves the defendants. But the government — i.e. taxpayers — isn't immune to lawsuits.

Any time the government kills one species — sea lions, cormorants, barred owls — in an attempt to save another, someone sues. Who could foresee that?

We love a good farce, but this whole affair is just one example of how the ESA is fundamentally broken. Congress must fix it.



"YOUR TURN."

Where are the protections for ranchers?

By Robyn H. Smith
To the Blue Mountain Eagle

It seems a weekly routine, reading about new depredations on livestock in the Capital Press, hearing neighbors talk about sightings over breakfast at the local café and finding ourselves in heated conversations about the "wolf problem." Ranchers are restless without answers on this habitual issue, a terror in many rural communities. When I share an article about wolf attacks on OCA's Facebook page, the comment "What is the Oregon Cattlemen's Association doing to fix this problem?" becomes ever more prevalent.

The Oregon Wolf Plan revision was due in 2015, but stakeholders including OCA, ODFW, Defenders of Wildlife, Oregon Wild, OFB, Oregon Hunter's Association and Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation have failed to find middle ground on this plan, and here we are, 2019, with no answers for the hardworking citizens of this state.

The Cattlemen's Association continues to put ranchers first and refuses to ignore these shattering attacks on cattle producers by compromising on a plan that brushes concerns under the table. Roger Huffman, OCA's Wolf Task Force Committee chair from Union, calls the current situation "chronic depredation" because multiple attacks are occurring with no response or resolution from ODFW, and so the problem continues to amplify.

Many of you may have read the Capital Press article about Ted Birdseye in Jackson County, who awoke on New Year's Day to find an injured, 5-month old calf with 2 feet of intestines hanging out of its backside. This has become "just another day at the office" for Birdseye as he has suffered at least five calf kills and one guard dog kill in

2018. If Birdseye's situation is not "chronic depredation," then what is?

Birdseye is not permitted to take lethal action against the wolves who are scarfing down his property for supper. The wolves are still federally protected under the Endangered Species Act west of highways 395, 78 and 95. This is the story for ranchers across the state, some of whom may face \$20,000 or more in losses from wolves in a given year. So, the question returns to stakeholders, what are you doing to protect the ranchers of Oregon?

The Governor's Office has failed to answer that question, and the monthly stakeholder meetings have only been a means to delay the response further. On Jan. 8, a stakeholder meeting was planned in Portland, a draft of the revamped Wolf Plan from ODFW was sent out before Christmas, and there was much to discuss in the new year. However, in true fashion, the day before the stakeholder meeting, an article on Oregon-Live detailed that The Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands would be pulling out of the stakeholder process due to the lack of their recommendations being accepted.

Mark Bennett, a stakeholder representative for the Oregon Farm Bureau and Baker County commissioner, says there is a 33 percent average growth rate per year in the wolf population, but even with this growth, the management strategies remain stagnant. The Oregon Cattlemen's Association and other like-minded groups such as Oregon Farm Bureau, Oregon Hunter's and Rocky Mountain Elk refuse to ignore the need for a new system to handle the rapidly growing population of wolves.

Todd Nash, OCA treasurer, has been a vocal representative for OCA throughout this stakeholder process, and he says there are three points cattlemen will not compromise on in this negotiation: 1) all wolves should be collared or tracked; 2) clear management zones should be created; 3) local biologists should have control of lethal take circumstances. Likewise, OCA is pushing for all non-lethal measurements to be paid for by the government because farmers and ranchers should not be responsible for those exorbitant costs on top of their suffered losses. Where is the accountability for farmers and ranchers? Where is the governmental protection for state citizens? It has been made clear, through the years, those rights and protections are not valued when it comes to wolves.

With environmental groups refusing to come to the table, it's unclear how ODFW will proceed with stakeholder recommendations. On Jan. 8, the stakeholder meeting went on as planned, and the groups that participated gave their final opinions on ODFW's proposal, which may be adopted in March. The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is now focusing on bringing this conversation to Washington, D.C., with the help of members from across the state.

If you have suffered property loss or distress as a result of wolves, please write a letter to Oregon Cattlemen's or email me at robyn.smith@orcattle.com. Personal statements are encouraged because those who have power over the fate of the Wolf Plan need to hear directly from the people with the most at stake.

Robyn H. Smith is the communications director for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

City overreaches to complete fire hall

To the Editor:

I attended two meetings Jan. 8, one for the rural fire district and one for John Day City Council. On the agenda, two resolutions raised my eyebrows, and I needed to investigate.

This involved a \$306,000 loan from the city's water fund to the general fund for the completion of the fire hall. And then a \$169,000 loan from the city to the rural fire district so the district could pay for about half of the tenant improvements at the fire hall.

So, now, not only do we owe for a bond to construct the fire hall, but an additional \$300,000 over and above. It is deceiving to the taxpayers involved. This amount was accrued on cost overruns. All sorts of excuses were given.

The bottom line is it was incompetency on all parties involved before and after construction. They didn't have enough money to finish the south end of the building. The selling point on this part of the building

when asking for the bond was a training area.

The city and fire chief went off on another spending spree and thought they needed to expand city hall. In turn, the idea was sent to the fire districts and approved in a sales pitch.

First off, board members are elected to be responsible for our money. They chose to follow the sheep over the cliff.

I brought this up to the city council. Their solution was to ignore the situation with a shrug of their shoulders, and they went through with it anyway, as their belligerent attitude has been since hiring this city manager. Again, following the sheep over the cliff.

The city of John Day is once again in an overreach era. While the present goals are nice, the long-term goals are catastrophic. Taxpayers from all of Grant County should be concerned and especially those in the city. After the dust settles, you and you alone will either have to file bankruptcy or pass another bond to pay your creditors.

Bob Pereira
John Day

A day of service

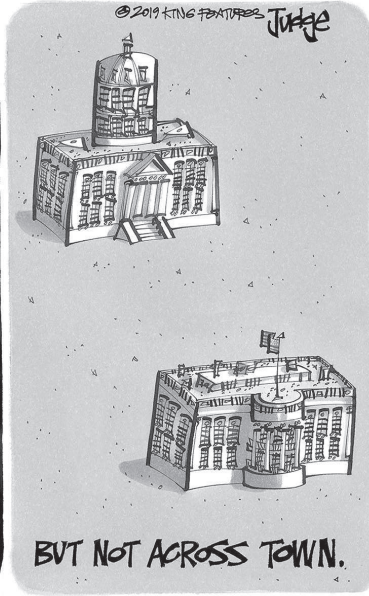
To the Editor:

In 1993, Congress declared the Martin Luther King Jr. federal holiday as a "National Day of Service." The Corporation for National and Community Service (AmeriCorps and other services corps) is charged with coordinating efforts to carry out this mission. I know of no organized plan here in Grant County.

Hopefully next year there will be one. This coming Monday, Jan. 21, folks can help an elderly neighbor with a chore, take a meal to a shut-in, call the senior center and commit to be a volunteer to deliver meals (541-575-2949) or perform any other kind of service that they feel fit and moved to perform.

In 1967, King said, "I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear." By commemorating King's birthday with service to others, his legacy will be honored, not in song, but in action.

Nancy Nickel
John Day



WHERE TO WRITE

GRANT COUNTY

• **Grant County Courthouse** — 201 S. Humbolt St., Suite 280, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0059. Fax: 541-575-2248.
• **Canyon City** — P.O. Box 276, Canyon City 97820. Phone: 541-575-0509. Fax: 541-575-0515. Email: toccc1862@centurylink.net.

centurylink.net.

• **Dayville** — P.O. Box 321, Dayville 97825. Phone: 541-987-2188. Fax: 541-987-2187. Email: dville@ortelco.net
• **John Day** — 450 E. Main St, John Day, 97845. Phone: 541-575-0028. Fax: 541-575-1721. Email: cityjd@centurytel.net.



Grant County's Weekly Newspaper

Publisher.....Chris Rush, crush@eomediagroup.com
Editor & General Manager.....Sean Hart, editor@bmeagle.com
Reporter.....Richard Hanners, rick@bmeagle.com
Community News.....Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Sports.....Angel Carpenter, angel@bmeagle.com
Marketing Rep.....Kim Kell, ads@bmeagle.com
Administrative Assistant.....Makenna Adair, office@bmeagle.com
Office Assistant.....Alexandra Hand, office@bmeagle.com

1 YEAR SUBSCRIPTION RATES (including online access)

Grant County\$40
Everywhere else in U.S.....\$51
Outside Continental U.S.....\$60

Subscriptions must be paid prior to delivery

Periodicals Postage Paid at John Day and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER send address changes to: Blue Mountain Eagle 195 N. Canyon Blvd. John Day, OR 97845-1187
USPS 226-340

Copyright © 2019 Blue Mountain Eagle

All rights reserved. No part of this publication covered by the copyright hereon may be reproduced or copied in any form or by any means — graphic, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, taping or information storage and retrieval systems — without written permission of the publisher.