

OTHER VIEWS

Far too many unknowns remain with River Act

Editor's note: Do you have a point you'd like to make or an issue you feel strongly about? Submit a letter to the editor or a guest column.

Some things from 2021 are still lingering in 2022, like the River Democracy Act that Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley are pushing. They are trying to amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. For several months I've been following this issue and still there are no answers to many revolving questions. Like why are some of the designated streams not streams at all, but dry washes? Why are the stream buffers increased from a quarter-mile to a half-mile? The act has pages of coordinates of the streams, rivers and dry gulches to be protected, but not one map.



Matt McElligott

In May, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association asked for the maps and then they asked again in November. As of this writing, we still don't have the maps from Wyden's office. I know of two counties in Eastern Oregon that have, at their own expense, hired an engineering firm to map the coordinates in the act in order to have a visual map of the affected streams. These visual maps give the county a picture of how this act will impact them.

It is unconscionable that any county government should have to spend money from its general fund to map these streams when information should be available upon request from Wyden or Merkley. Yet they continue to ignore the requests. How will this affect livestock grazing and other natural resource users?

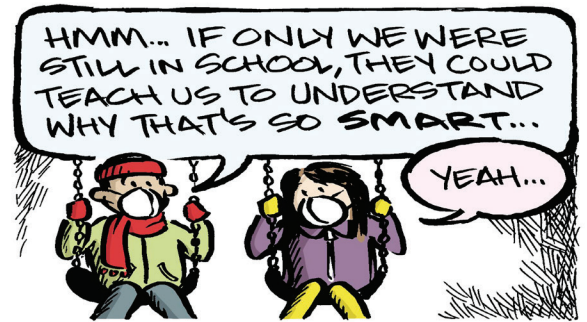
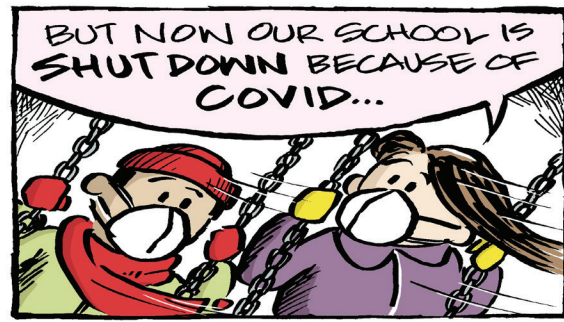
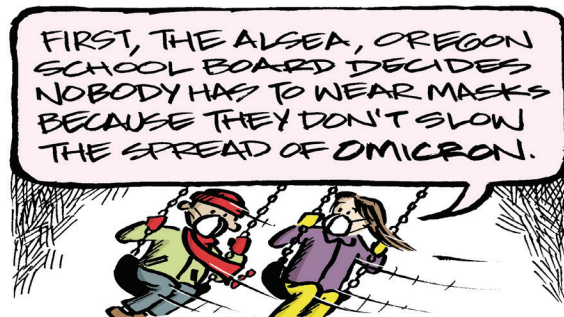
This act talks a lot about fire resiliency but supplies no details as to how locking up 3.1 million acres of federal land will reduce threat of fire to land, lumber, and lives. What will the long-term economic effect of this bill be on rural Oregon? Wyden and his team expound on the great benefits of tourism and the dollars spent on recreation. "Money will flow like manna from the gods to rural Oregon."

That's the well-polished sales pitch and talking points pounded into their heads at staff meetings. When hikers, bikers and ATVers visit rural Oregon, most of them bring their own tents, campers, or RVs. They fill their coolers and gas tanks at home and don't spend much in the small towns they drive through. Wyden's bill has a \$30 million price tag. Not just for the first year but every year — forever. Only \$5 million of that is earmarked; what is the other \$25 million for? They haven't answered that one either.

The original intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was to preserve certain rivers with "outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition." This act as presented is a vast departure from the original Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. If this act passes into law, it will set grave precedent that will enable lawmakers to circumvent protocol and procedures. Our senators were elected to represent all Oregonians, not a select demographic.

Please take the time to look up SB 192. If you don't like what you see, if you don't want another 4,700 miles of streams and 3.1 million acres of Oregon locked up, reach out to Oregon's senators and let them know.

Matt McElligott is the Oregon Cattlemen's Association president-elect and public lands council committee chair.



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

The wonder of train whistles

Your grandpa was a railroad man," my mother said. Grandpa wore a pocket watch, walked from his home into town to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad in Ogden, a train hub, and was never late for work. Mother wore a dainty Bulova wristwatch, and being the daughter of a railroad man, was never late for anything ever in her life. The trains hauled sheep and sugar beets.

When our father drove out on dusty country roads in our Kelly green, two-door 1953 Plymouth and spotted a train coming, he'd speed up to keep pace with the locomotive. With his hair tousled from the open windows, he'd wave to the conductor. In the back seat, my two younger brothers and I crowded at the windows to wave and shout. When the conductor spotted us, he blew his whistle.

If we were stopped at a railroad crossing for an oncoming train, we'd climb out and stand next to our car. Waving turned to windmilling with our arms and we jumped up and down as the engine approached.

Mom watched from the car. "You kids stay back now."

The conductor usually rewarded us with several blasts from the train whistle. A powerful skill for a child to have — the ability to wave and shout and the shriek of a train whistle answers back.

As the engine lumbered past, we watched for the "empty" boxcar, the door partly ajar.



Jean Ann Moultrie

It seemed to me that in those brief moments, the men stood little taller.

Later, I learned trains hauled more than harvested crops and critters. Our family, moving to another state, rode the train. Leaving cousins, aunts, uncles, and a gray-haired, balding grandpa behind left no reason for cheering.

Through the next few years, the train engineers seemed less inclined to blow the whistle except at crossings or designated areas. No passengers in boxcars — only in passenger cars.

Occasionally I'd hear the whistle from trains that had left Eastern Oregon, now chugging to the Portland/Vancouver area, a hub where travelers could then head north or south. Trains hauled lumber, grain, new vehicles. When I'd hear a train whistle in the distance, I'd think of prosperity.

By my early teens, I paid little attention to the train whistles, especially at night, like background noises that in time go unnoticed.

Levi, a friend and date for the school dance, arranged for us to double-date with his friend, Sam, who

would drive. That wasn't unusual for kids to get rides, or have parents drop off kids at an activity. Most classmates didn't have cars and belonged to one-car families.

After the dance, Sam and his date wanted to cruise around town. Levi and I wanted to be home by curfew. Sam dropped us off at Levi's home. My date's dad seemed more tired than peeved. He grabbed his car keys as Levi and I climbed into the backseat of their car.

Silence while we drove towards my home.

Out of the darkness, a train whistle sounded.

"A nighttime train whistle sounds sad and lonely," said the father.

Levi's father had no more said those words than I recalled a comment a classmate once made at school. "That tattoo on Levi's dad ... from a World War II concentration camp."

I recalled what had been my biggest concern the morning of the dance — what dress to wear.

A smack-in-the-head thought came: I live a shallow life. My latest train whistle experience — boarding a steam engine at McEwen Depot and taking the Sumpter Valley Railroad to Sumpter. A simulated train robbery — cheers, shouts, laughter, lots of train whistle blasts. A happy ending, and no one died.

Jean Ann Moultrie misses the times as a kid when she and her brothers pushed back furniture, laid out train tracks, and sent toy electric trains zooming around the tracks.



MARGULIES

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Green's resignation a loss for John Day

To the Editor:
Nick Green resigns: Why? First of all, he is highly trained in everything needed to revive a slowly dying town like John Day. A master's degree in public administration with focus on rural economic development and local government.

Where are we going to find another soul even close to such experience and education and personal commitment to John Day's well-being?

And why is he the one that was being attacked?

He only came up with the information and possibilities and proposals. It is up to the mayor and council to OK them, which they did on many and not on some. Many of which have been on the agenda for 40 years and more, which he figured out how to finally get done.

At the bimonthly meetings, it was the 1% of deniers the council and Mr. Green had to contend with on most every issue.

Where is the other 99% that agree with very much, if not all, of what has been proposed? The 99% that see and know that most everything finished, begun or in the pipeline will most very likely be a good thing for the city and county? (Fact! What is good for John Day will be good for the county as a whole.)

Not everything can be exactly what you, the individual, may want. Those few other items you are not crazy about may be just the ticket for most everyone else or at least the big picture in the long run.

This is not 1960. It is 2022 and times have changed, and if we do not ride the horse in the direction it

is going, we will be bucked off. A little patience and trust in the knowledge that our administrators, in this very good town, really are doing their best for all of us is overdue and much needed.

Thank you, Nick Green and Ron Lundbom and the John Day City Council.

Jim Bay
John Day

Stewardship may harm private timber

To the Editor:
Looks like some more fire and destruction could be on the horizon for private forestland managers in Grant County.

As the current stewardship contract on the Malheur National Forest, proven to improve conditions on public forest lands, expires in 2023, there are a few things I would suggest negotiators and policy writers should consider.

The value of private forestland has been adversely impacted by these large contracts. A steady supply of commercial pine from lands that have professional foresters, planners and ecologists (paid with public money) outperforms what private forest managers can do.

I agree that Forest Service lands need a lot more fuels reduction and commercial thinning to maximize values. Benefits for humans and improved resiliency of natural systems is good for all.

Here are a couple of actions that I think might make another long-term stewardship project more palatable for taxpayers and citizens in the region.

Local log buyers in John Day and Burns should be required to purchase at least 25 percent of their logs from private lands. This may encourage private timber owners in the region to continue to manage their timber for sustainable, long-term production.

I do want to acknowledge that the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service provides significant forest management cost-share opportunities to private landowners ... if the land qualifies and owners can show federally approved uses (agricultural use).

Current forest stand improvement programs administered by NRCS only support removing junipers and thinning of pine smaller than 10 inches. Does the current stewardship contract on public lands include thinning trees larger than 10 inches? Seems the government-subsidized thinning of larger non-merchantable trees on public lands puts private forestland managers at an unfair disadvantage.

If public planners can't figure out how to support private timber harvest in an equitable way, the Forest Service should focus all public lands fuels reduction, pre-commercial and commercial harvests immediately adjacent to private timberlands. This will provide improved wildfire protection from overstocked public lands.

Smart long-term and balanced management of the natural resources of the region will ensure the long-term viability of communities in the region.

Jeffrey Kee
Portland

Editor's note: Kee owns forest land in Crook, Wheeler and Grant counties.

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