

OTHER VIEWS

Lawsuit poses risks to forests and communities

Six anti-forestry groups are suing to block a new policy that would make it a little easier for the U.S. Forest Service to reduce wildfire risks and restore forest health on national forest lands in Eastern Oregon and Washington. In doing so, their lawsuit affects several projects that would conduct hazardous fuel reduction on at least 209,000 acres of land that's vulnerable to severe fire.

The lawsuit aims to preserve an outdated and unscientific rule from the Clinton era, known as the "Eastside Screens." It originally imposed a temporary rule prohibiting the removal of trees larger than 21 inches in diameter on national forests east of the Cascades, including the Malheur, Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Deschutes, Ochoco, Fremont-Winema.



Nick Smith

With little public involvement and no scientific justification, this temporary and arbitrary rule became permanent when it was amended into the management plans as standards for these federally owned forests.

In theory the rule was intended to protect and improve forest conditions associated with late-seral or old growth habitat. But in practice, it made it harder for the Forest Service to remove tree species that compete with native pine and are less resilient to fire such as grand fir or white fir. This compelled the national forests in Eastern Oregon to pursue dozens of project-specific amendments to the 21-inch rule over the past 20 years in order to meet their desired forest conditions.

This arbitrary rule created an expensive and time-consuming process, and as a result, the Forest Service has struggled to keep pace with the growing risks and restoration needs of these forests, which places a variety of forest values and uses at risk.

During the 30 years of this temporary rule, anti-forestry groups enjoyed the status quo because it tied the hands of our public lands managers. They could also use it to block restoration projects they did not like, even if the science-based treatments were supported by collaboratives with diverse interests.

Rather than accelerate the trajectory of forests toward a late-seral structure, as sound forest management would help accomplish, this temporary, arbitrary and unscientific rule created forest conditions that are unnaturally dense and exacerbate risk to wildfire, insect and disease infestations, and drought.

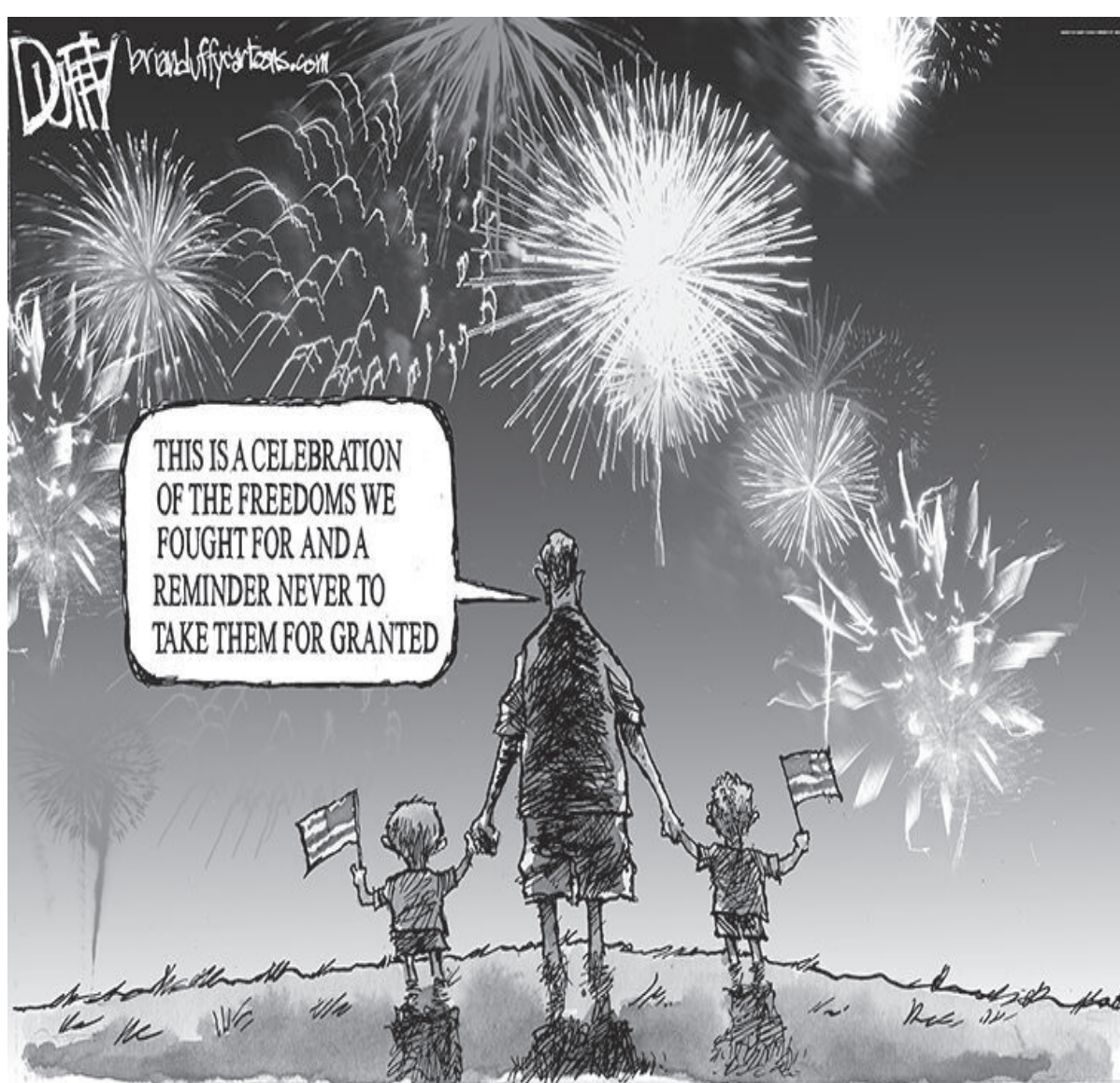
Rather than lifting this rule completely, the Forest Service only made modest changes to its policy. In January 2021, the agency adopted the "Old Tree and Large Tree Guidelines," which includes diameter limits for tree removal ranging from 21 inches to 30 inches, depending on tree species, and an overarching age limit on tree removal of 150 years.

In announcing their lawsuit, anti-forestry groups labeled this modest change a "Trump-era" rule allowing wholesale "logging of old growth." Yet the new guideline has given our public lands managers some flexibility to restore unhealthy forests by implementing science-based treatments that are appropriate to the landscape.

The Forest Service is using this new guideline to develop several projects on six national forests. One thing all of these projects have in common is their primary objective is not necessarily timber harvest, but hazardous fuels reduction and forest resiliency. Some projects are located in areas identified as wildland urban interface (WUI) where the wildfire threat to communities is heightened.

It's unfortunate these groups would sue to block projects that would improve the health of our forests and reduce the risks to our public lands and nearby communities. As climate change continues to impact our forests, the Forest Service should be doing everything possible to prevent large-scale, carbon-emitting wildfires, while maximizing the ability of our forests to sequester more carbon and store more carbon in both healthy trees and wood products.

Nick Smith is executive director of Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization supporting active forest management on federal lands. He also serves as public affairs director for the American Forest Resource Council, a trade association representing wood products companies.



OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Celebrate America on the Fourth

"Why do we have the Fourth of July holiday?" I asked a child.

"To celebrate America," she replied.

Great answer. I marvel that George Washington, with his beleaguered band of soldiers, defeated King George III's trained troops under the leadership of Gen. Cornwallis.

July 4, 1776 — the day celebrated for the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the document proclaiming our independence from Great Britain.

A friend speculated what would have happened if we had lost the war.

"We'd be driving on the wrong side of the road," she said, "and eating bubble and squeak instead of barbecued foods."

Bubble and squeak — a British national dish made from leftovers including cabbage, potatoes, whatever veggies are found in the fridge, all mashed together with optional chopped egg and fried with dollop of butter and a dab of goose grease. The recipe varies from household to household.

America won the war, so back to the July Fourth celebration. A parade makes a great spot to kick off the festivities. Some parades in cities become extravaganzas with marching bands, floats, columns of honored servicemen and -women, and



Jean Ann Moultrie

accompanied by a flyover of screaming jets. The crowd cheers and tots plug their ears.

I've enjoyed modest parades every bit as patriotic in small towns and villages. Music

from a school band or from recordings played over loudspeakers adds to the atmosphere. Flags fly. Kids join as parade participants — their bikes, trikes and wagons decorated with posters and crepe paper. I get a lump in my throat when the flag-bearers march past and I hear a brass band play the familiar patriotic songs of freedom: "America! America! God shed his grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea."

When the children were young and the town didn't hold a parade, we held our own parade ... in the back yard.

After the excitement of a parade has stirred my soul (and appetite), I head to the barbecue and food. Sometimes we enjoy eating in a park. When I was a child, my father grilled burgers in the back yard. Even when he charred the edges of the meat to a crispy black, we thought the food delicious. Corn on the cob, potato salad, fresh sliced tomatoes, chocolate cake — all staples. Later years, we worked on des-

sert with a theme, which meant baking a sheet cake, frosting it with cream cheese frosting, and then designing a flag topping with the Stars and Stripes fashioned from strawberries and blueberries.

In time I was introduced to the culinary delights of barbecue chicken, ribs, etc. Fourth of July chow became a whole new eating adventure.

After the meal, time for a nap (toddlers), backyard games (croquet), short rest to clear up food (adults and older kids), then gather items to take to a swimming hole (sunscreens, life jackets, etc.).

By dusk, preparation for the cherry topping of the day, so to speak — the fireworks. One of my biggest thrills as a kid: sparklers in our driveway. Some towns hosted a fireworks display. We'd spread out blankets on the lawn and ooh and aah at the explosion of colors. "Did you see that one?!"

In town at the end of the festivities, pink-cheeked, sweaty, and sticky children check on dogs cowering under the bed and the cat hiding in a closet.

As I head home, I sing: "And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave o'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!"

Jean Ann Moultrie is a Grant County writer. She wishes everyone a fun, festive, and safe Fourth of July.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Council kowtows to city manager

To the Editor:

None of the criticism and emotion directed at the John Day city manager is really his fault. I am wrong to hold Nick Green responsible for anything in our city that I find objectionable. Green is just an employee — an employee who has been elevated to the status of local monarch by an elected governing body.

In my view, the mayor and councilors have made assumptions about the intelligence, integrity, competencies, and intentions of the city manager which have resulted in a growing dependency and false sense of security to such a degree that the informed conscience that should exist within the body of the City Council

has been surrendered to the will of one individual — the city manager.

The real power of an informed group conscience and directive leadership should exist with the mayor and within the council. Instead, they have reduced themselves to a committee of "yes men."

The mayor and council seem to exist as little more than formality, their function hardly more than ceremonial and their accomplishments amount to little more than an illusion of a democratic process, and it is this illusion of democratic process that provides the cover and legitimacy for the ongoing initiatives, goals and ambitions of one man — the city manager.

How did we end up with our elected officials allied with a city employee waging a war of

utter disrespect upon the people who elected them? Where is our representation?

If I were mayor or a council member, I would be embarrassed for having placed myself in a position where I could not exist nor function without the ongoing presence, input and guidance of the individual I supposedly employ. It is no wonder there are plans in place to continue using taxpayer dollars to keep Nick Green in an advisory capacity even after he steps away from the city manager role. I suspect the mayor and City Council have very little if any comprehension of the behind-the-curtain workings and manipulations of the man they employ, and I believe they know that they will be unable to keep these schemes in motion without him.

Paul Sweany
John Day

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