

OUR VIEW

The next steps for addressing nitrate problems

The existence of nitrates in groundwater is common in many parts of the world. It's when the concentration exceeds the level considered safe by the Environmental Protection Agency that there's a problem.

Nitrates can occur naturally or they can come from over-applying nitrogen fertilizers, wastewater, manure and other sources of nitrogen. Crops greatly benefit from the boost nitrogen provides, but they can take up only so much. After that, the nitrogen can travel downward through the soil until reaches groundwater. There it lingers as nitrates. Nitrates found today in groundwater can be from fertilizer that was overapplied decades ago — called a "legacy pollutant."

Too much nitrate in drinking water can lead to cancer, thyroid problems, miscarriages, respiratory infections and "blue baby syndrome," in which a child has difficulty taking in oxygen.

Where there's a problem, there also needs to be a game plan for solving it.

First, there needs to be monitoring to determine the scope. In many parts of the country, landowners test their well water annually to determine nitrate levels and any trends. That is a good practice for anyone with a well.

Then, reverse osmosis or ion exchange filters need to be installed as a stopgap wherever the nitrate concentration exceeds healthful levels. Water can also be distilled, a simple and low-cost method of ridding it of nitrates.

Scientists also need to pin down the sources of nitrates. Often, several sources are responsible.

Then comes the hard part. Researchers need to look for effective, affordable and doable means of reducing nitrate levels in the groundwater and preventing more nitrates from getting into it.

That is where the folks in the area surrounding Boardman are. They know there's a problem in parts of the region. They know the sources of the nitrates.

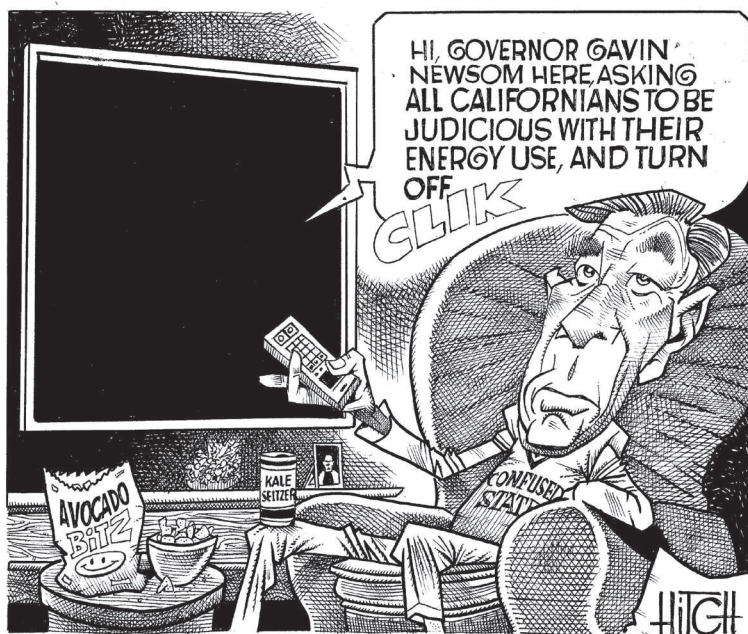
And they're more than willing to do what they can to address it, but no game plan is in place to provide farmers and food processors with best practices. They also need to determine the best and most cost-effective means of reducing nitrate levels in the groundwater.

"To date, there's been a ton of time and resources spent pointing the finger at whose fault this is," said J.R. Cook, founder and director of the Northeast Oregon Water Association. "We're all at fault. Now, what's the solution?"

It's been 32 years since the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality designated the Lower Umatilla Basin Groundwater Management Area. About 44% of the test wells in the area have nitrate levels higher than the EPA limit of 10 milligrams per liter. Some are more than six times the limit.

The time has come to determine what other parts of the world have done to address nitrate problems and how successful they were. Surely, researchers have come up with a way to address this problem.

Then they need to act.



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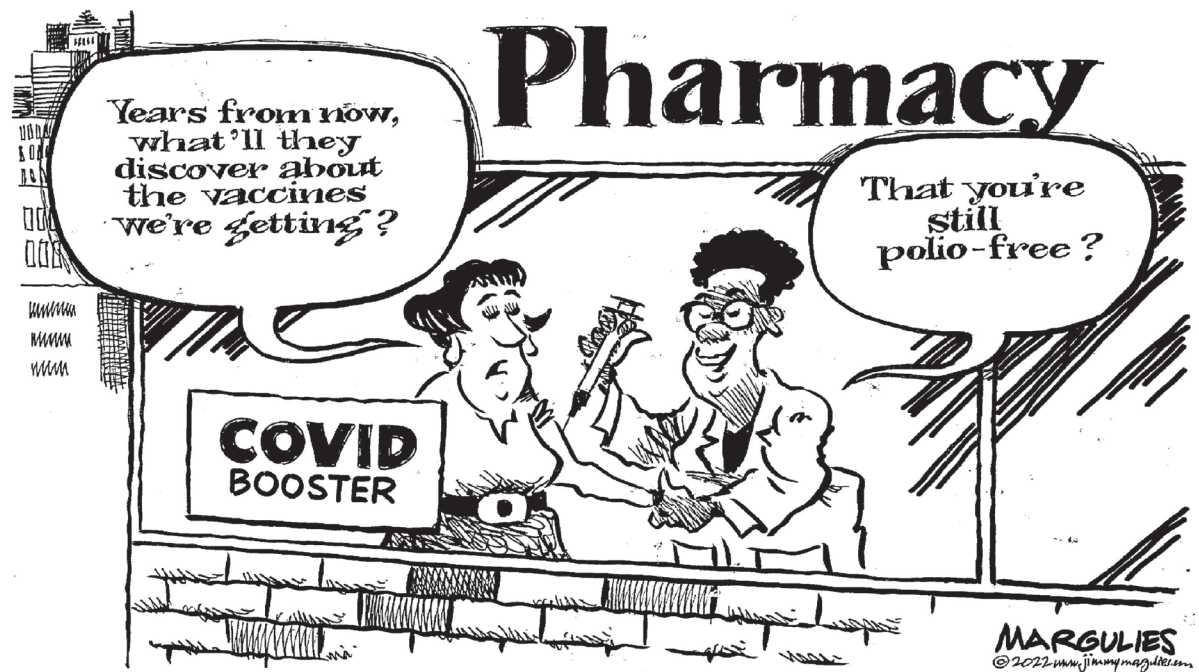
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OFF THE BEATEN PATH

On feeding hungry hunters

When I was a child, my father loved to hunt — primarily pheasants. He and a friend would head out on a pleasant morning, shotguns in hand, dogs in tow. Dad's friend owned a sweet little cocker spaniel trained to fetch game birds. Our family claimed Sport, a mutt with questionable parentage and a setter-like build who could have been named Doofus or Dweeb — the dog likable, inept, and a goof-off.

Our end of the county seemed to be ground zero for pheasant fertility, with pheasants thick in the brush. With the flat hunting area, and plentiful pheasants, we could hear them squawking from our backyard. A hunter challenge: be patient enough to drive a short distance to legal hunting ground as per regs for the hunting license.

One fall day, Dad polished off a bowl of cold cereal, then headed out with his hunting buddy. The hunters returned before lunchtime with a nice harvest of ring-necked pheasants. Hungry hunters? Not really. Dad tinkered at his workbench before Mom served up his noon sandwich.

Years later, the hunting party composition changed. "Big game" hunting (deer) became the goal for a family member, Pete, and his novice cousin, Irvine. The area, long on pheasants but short on deer, meant a long drive to hunting grounds. The two planned a deer hunt that would last most of a day, counting travel time. From what



Jean Moultrie

from their rifle scopes and turkey buzzards would circle overhead.

Since I wasn't up on the nuances of feeding "big game" hunters, I listened in as the Ratwurst boys, jokers from the feed store, recounted to Pete and Irvine a hunting trip when hunger drove the Ratwursts to boil their shoelaces for soup seasoned with cascara tree bark.

I determined to prepare proper fix-in's for the family hunters.

On D-day (deer), the hunters rose in the early morning darkness to the hearty breakfast I'd cooked. If my kitchen had been a café, the breakfast special would have been labeled "#1 The Works ... and Then Some."

Next, the scramble to load supplies. I carried the hunters' lunch I'd fixed, which consisted of two brown, heaping grocery sacks, out to their vehicle, and stuck them up front for handy access. The fried chicken pieces I'd tucked in individual sandwich bags for ease in eating. With their salad bowls, I'd included plastic forks. The strawberry shortcake nestled neatly next to the brownies. Homemade buttered rolls

in plastic wrap sat atop the veggie relish tray. Midday snacks included jerky, assorted chips, and trail mix. Fruit slices, cheeses and crackers topped off the meal.

The hunters' plan: drive to a promising spot, park, and hike into the wilderness. Visions of venison for winter.

Meanwhile, I'm home thinking of the hunters — cold and hungry. I start dinner.

The hunters returned home after dark.

"How was the hunt?" I asked. "Didn't see anything."

I put the roast beef, carrots and potatoes on the table along with a salad and side dishes.

"Dinner's ready." I pulled two pies out of the oven.

"We're not hungry," says a hunter.

I asked about the challenging hike while looking for game.

"Actually, we didn't get out of the vehicle."

A recounting of the day's activities: "Yep, all we did was drive around all day and eat," Pete said.

"We finished up the brownies the last five miles driving here," Irvine added.

So much for exhausted, emaciated hunters.

Visions of venison shattered.

Jean Ann Moultrie is a Grant County writer. A friend of the author's reminds that women also go out hunting and family helps with meals.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The end does not justify the means

To the Editor:

I moved to John Day four years ago not having spent one day of my life as an activist. The same might be true today had I not witnessed the show of dishonesty, disregard, and disrespect to the citizens of John Day and Grant County via the Project Turnkey/Dreamers Lodge initiative last year.

That initiative gave me my first glimpse into how things get done by our so-called public servants. I now understand that the behavior demonstrated by CCS, the city of John Day, Families First of Grant County as well as other nonprofit and public entities that supported this cause by loaning out their staff to serve on a hand-picked and irrevocable Project Turnkey steering committee was not isolated behavior. Now I understand that behavior to represent a modus operandi; a methodology; a way of doing business that permeates the governmental leadership of John Day, Grant County, local nonprofits and a sprinkling of prominent, local private enterprises.

None of my objections, not one, has to do with whether or not we have a pool, bike path, greenhouses, transitional housing, or positive and worthwhile progress of any kind. I believe everyone loves their children and wants the absolute best for their families and their community.

The main reason I and others are frustrated, and contrary; out conducting research and asking questions is that I and others don't like to be deceived, marginalized, and lied to. People don't feel respected or valued when deliberately excluded from a decision-making process that directly affects them. For me, this isn't even an issue of politics or partisanship because I don't believe anyone appreciates being misled.

I want a pool in our community, but I don't want it rammed down my throat through an insider's game of smoke and mirrors and sleight-of-hand. When and if an aquatic center comes to fruition in our community, I want it to be the result of a clean, transparent, informed and collective process.

My protestations are not about not wanting good things for our community. I simply reject the idea and belief that "the end justifies the means."

Paul Sweany
 John Day

Please vote yes on pool bond

To the Editor:

Please join me in voting yes on bond 12-85!

I am excited about the prospect of an updated, up-to-code pool that all residents can enjoy. Our community lacks recreational activities to serve all ages. The new pool will be an essential facility providing a safe and healthy place for residents. It will be a place where kids can learn to swim, youth of all ages can take part in swim team and compete at swim meets, adults can swim laps and recreate, and seniors can get low-impact exercise.

We are far too remote of a county to have to drive over an hour to access a community pool. An unsupervised swimming hole in the river is not an acceptable alternative to a public pool staffed with trained lifeguards and swim instructors. The risk of drowning is real. Let's not wait for a tragedy to drive home the need for a safe place to swim.

Certain groups have complained about a lack of transparency. This is inaccurate. Formal public meetings regarding a pool replacement plan have been held since 2017, but discussions have been ongoing for 25-plus years. Yes, revisions have been made along the way but all included public involvement. Reports were published in 1997 and 2009 that recognized the need for a new location and the clear winner from a planning standpoint was Seventh Street. Since the 1997 report, all but two potential pool locations were eliminated from consideration by FEMA floodplain revisions.

The point has also been raised that the costs will go up. That could be true! The longer we bicker about misinformation or personal conflicts, the more inflation will affect costs, and the more likely we are as a community to

lose \$2 million and end up paying the entire construction cost without grant funding. Seventh Street is the right location and now is the right time to move forward.

Please vote "yes" so the children in our community can have access to a safe place to swim, just like previous generations have had access to theirs! Vote yes on 12-85!

Ashley Armichard
 John Day

Give credit where credit is due

To the Editor:

There are many attacks on President Biden for matters that he, as president, can't quickly and directly control, like gas prices. (Nor can any other leader of any other country magically reduce the inflation that their countries are experiencing.) It is important to remember that when it comes to international relations, the president has a very significant and timely role to play.

Bret Stephens is a conservative columnist for The New York Times and on Sept. 13 he wrote, "This column is rarely short of criticism of the Biden administration. So let me loudly cheer the fact that the staggering gains Ukrainian forces have made against Russia are a victory for Joe Biden, too." Stephens notes that it isn't just that the U.S. has supplied many essential weapons to Ukraine, "It's that we are providing Ukrainians with the kind of battlefield intelligence that enables them to maneuver, target, strike and evade in ways they otherwise couldn't."

Stephens concludes, "As the war enters a new phase, it will inevitably bring new dangers. No danger is graver than failing to prevail. Full credit to Biden for getting, and acting on, the point."

The embattled, heroic people of Ukraine should understand that Americans do appreciate that their president is doing everything in his legal power to assist them. When blame is due, blame, and when credit is due, give credit. That is what an informed electorate does.

Nancy Nickel
 Prairie City