

OUR VIEW

Large forest fires show the need for action

The time for allowing vast tracts of forest on state and federal lands to remain untouched from management is long over. Now, elected leaders and state and federal officials need to develop a comprehensive, actionable plan before every summer provides voters with a blaze such as the Bootleg Fire now scorching lands in Southern Oregon.

Thankfully there already is some progress being made to find a way to manage our forests, so they do not become massive tinderboxes ready to explode when hit by lightning strikes. For example, Gov. Kate Brown created the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response in 2020. The board's mission is to review Oregon's existing model for wildfire prevention and determine if it is still valid.

During the recent legislative session, Senate Bill 762C, was passed the House and Senate. The bill casts a wide net but, among other things, requires public utilities that provide electricity to develop and execute wildfire protection plans and directs the Oregon State Board of Forestry to create rules to develop a statewide map of wildfire risk.

So good, first steps are evident from the state. Yet considering the massive Bootleg Fire, far more needs to be done.

First, a comprehensive, full-scale plan needs to be developed, certified, and put into

place for all of Oregon's forests regarding fire mitigation. The plan needs to be effective, uncomplicated, and funded appropriately.

Second, a solid determination needs to be made regarding the viability of logging forests to help mitigate fire risk. The subject is controversial and in many circles, considered a nonstarter. Already, though, some salvage logging is a common tool in fire restoration yet is almost always bitterly challenged by some conservation groups.

But we cannot continue to allow large, uninhabited sections of federal and state forests to essentially rot and await the first solid lightning strike to erupt into major fires.

Finally, unfortunately for taxpayers, more money needs to go into a plan to safeguard our forests.

At this point there is no denying climate change plays a role in the terrible forest fires burning in Oregon but to change the climate paradigm will take years and we don't have decades when it comes to our forests and the damage fire delivers to them.

We cannot sustain blazes like the Bootleg Fire indefinitely. If the Bootleg Fire is a harbinger of things to come, then we need to act fast.

There is no time to waste regarding the health of our forests.



Bootleg Fire Incident Command/Contributed Photo
Trees burn at the Bootleg Fire in south-central Oregon on July 25, 2021. Firefighters reported progress against the nation's largest wildfire, containing 46% of the blaze.

COLUMN

I'm out when the reality of sports becomes virtual

Is anyone else disturbed that one of the fastest-growing sports isn't even played on a field or court and doesn't require being in good physical shape? I'm talking about esports.



TAMMY MALGESINI
INSIDE MY SHOES

With more and more colleges and universities adding esports to their programs, it seems to me we're endorsing a generation of couch potatoes as athletes. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy an occasional video game, but it would be a far stretch of the imagination to think of myself as an athlete playing a sport.

Seriously, even the Oxford Dictionary has standards. Sport is defined as "an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or a team competes against another or others for entertainment."

I suppose gamers can break a sweat while clicking and shooting. I used to joke about golf not being a sport because players often wore slacks and polo shirts. Don't get me started about

some of the overweight, chain-smoking, alcoholic bowlers out there. And I won't even open the can of worms with the debate whether race car drivers are athletes.

I don't have a problem with the concept of having organized competitions for video games, but just don't dress it up like a sport. Instead of the National Association of Collegiate eSports, how about eGames or vGames.

I recently got all worked up about esports when I read about a program starting up at my alma mater. I see the dollar signs as George Fox University likely will start a campaign to support costs associated with both intramural and intercollegiate programs on campus.

The article said they would have uniforms and a head coach. George Fox already has dedicated a 1,200-square-foot arena in the university's Wheeler Sports Center.

I'm sure next they'll need an athletic trainer assigned to the team —

because you know someone is going to get a severe case of Nintendo thumb, gamer's grip, tennis elbow or more accurately, "mouse" elbow and a whole host of other potential repetitive strain injuries. Soon, they'll have masseuses, vision specialists and chiropractors on the training staff to attend to the needs of the esports athletes.

As esports has continued to legitimize sitting in front of a computer playing games, it's already filtering down to the high school level and even younger kids. With college scholarships available, tournament money and high salary jobs, it gives little Johnny another reason to avoid going outside to ride his bike, take a hike or mow the lawn.

I have an idea — how about if they combine esports with robotics? Then, maybe household chores still could get done.

Tammy Malgesini, who recently returned as a Hermiston Herald community writer, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.

PUBLISHER'S DESK

Stay informed on Oregon wildfires

We've added a new feature to our websites across the six east-side newspapers of EO Media Group that I think is needed and, unfortunately, necessary.

On each of our news websites there is a tab where all our fire coverage is collected. Click on the tab and readers will be able to catch up on what is going on across the state and see updates on the progress of blazes.

I think the feature is a good one and will help give our readers a sense of the magnitude of the fires that are scorching huge chunks of forest across Oregon.

While I think the new feature is a great asset, I, of course, wish it wasn't necessary. The vast size of this summer's blazes took me by surprise, and when I read our great coverage on the fires I always feel a little sad. That's because I have spent more than enough time recreating in

this great region of ours, and it pains me to see the areas I've considered as places of refuge go up in flames.

Yet, part of our job is to ensure our readers are informed. That can be a challenge when we are trying to cover a breaking news story like fires. First, we want to make sure we get the most accurate information available to our readers. Then we want to deliver comprehensive coverage, news stories that provide context and background on how the fires started and the damage each one inflicts upon our fellow Oregonians.

In our modern era we are in many ways more connected to each other than ever before, but in some ways I'd argue we also are further apart. Social media provides a platform of connectivity unlike anything seen before, but we also live in a secluded region of the state where cities and towns are spaced far apart.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

Yet, what occurs in say, Baker City, can eventually have an impact on a place like Pendleton. The recent forest fires are a good case in point. While the Bootleg Fire — one of the largest in the U.S. — is burning in Southern Oregon the residual impact of the blaze — smoke — is impacting not only Oregon but most of the nation.

That is a different kind of connectivity but a real one that we all must live with when the sky becomes choked with smoke.

I believe our new forest fire landing page furnishes our readers with an up-to-date resource so they can stay informed and understand what's happening around them.

So don't forget to check it out.

Andrew Cutler is the publisher of the Hermiston Herald and the regional editorial director for the EO Media Group, overseeing the Herald, East Oregonian and four more newspapers in Eastern Oregon.



ANDREW CUTLER

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

SUBMIT A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters Policy: Letters to the Editor is a forum for the Hermiston Herald readers to express themselves on local, state, national or world issues. Brevity is good, but longer letters should be kept to 250 words.

No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

OBITUARY POLICY

The Hermiston Herald publishes paid obituaries. The obituary can include small photos and, for veterans, a flag symbol at no charge. Expanded death notices will be published at no charge. These include information about services. Obituaries may be edited for spelling, proper punctuation and style.

Obituaries and notices may be submitted online at hermistonherald.com/obituaryform, by email to obits@hermistonherald.com, by fax to 541-276-8314, placed via the funeral home or in person at the Hermiston Herald or East Oregonian offices. For more information, call 541-966-0818 or 1-800-522-0255, x221.