

## OPINIONS

## River right

BY TOM CARSTENS

While paddling down the Klamath River with several kayaking buddies the other day, I finally felt at home again. I've just returned from a long trip Down Under—it felt good not to have to remember to “look left and drive right” for a change. On the drive down to the river, I kept trying to shift gears with my left hand. So I really enjoyed the freedom to paddle wherever I wanted, with no worries about where the controls were located and which side the traffic was on. Only the river rocks and rapids dictated my path.

I wish this were so with our country. We seem to be paddling hard upstream and getting nowhere. It's like we're letting the current take us backwards through some pretty rough rapids without a recovery plan. I sure hope we don't tip over. I read the other day that our average government debt (federal, state and local) is now over \$50,000 per person and climbing. Say what? I tried to check this on my hand calculator, but I couldn't fit in all the zeros. (How much is \$17 trillion, anyway?) One prominent economist, Laurence Kotlikoff, tells us that we would have to permanently raise taxes by 64 percent to close the gap between federal income and spending. Does anyone think that's got a snowball's chance in hell? Does anybody out there want to pay more taxes?

So, like it or not, we're going to have to get a handle on spending. We're already seeing the downside of this locally. Both the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service are grappling with budget cuts. Many of their programs are being reduced, delayed or canceled outright. We've already heard about the cuts to the federal firefighting budget. But when big fires hit, they're going to have to spend the money. Where will they get it? From other federal programs, that's where. Who knows what sacred cows are going to be gored!

Speaking of sacred cows, the county budgets are loaded with them. Tax

revenues are flat, while pension costs are rising. Josephine County is a basket case: proposed tax hikes get nowhere. Jackson County's current tale of woe is a two-million dollar increase in pension expenses next year. (How much is two million, by the way?) So the commissioners are once again raising the specter of closing our local libraries. The Oregon State University Extension Service is also on the chopping block. Grassroots organizations have sprung up to try and save these beloved programs.

I think we have a fighting chance as long as we don't hang our hats on increasing our taxes. We've been there before. In 1984, voters approved a Jackson County library levy only to see it disappear into the general fund 13 years later with the passage of Measure 50. Historically, tax increases have a tough time getting voter approval, because that's usually not the end of the story. Even if the new taxes manage to fix what's wrong, more money will eventually be needed, especially as salaries and pensions go up. Would user fees help? That's how all county parks, including Cantrall-Buckley and Fish Hatchery, are paid for.

Recently, a friend said to me that we ought to ask ourselves: What is it that we want government to do? Here's maybe a better question: What do we want government to do *that we can afford?* Maybe we need to make a big priority list and tick off items from the top until we run out of projected revenue. Regardless, more cutting is coming. I hope we can avoid the squabbling that we've seen elsewhere. I'm confident that everyone is trying to make the best of a bad situation.

Oh, and one more thing . . . next time you see one of our volunteer firefighters, tell 'em “Thanks.” Salary: Zero. Pension: Zero. Return on tax dollar: 100%. Top of the list stuff.

See you on the river.

Tom Carstens • 541-846-1025

## Legislation seeks to remove federal safeguards for forests

BY DANIELLE SCHRECK

The forests managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in southwestern Oregon have been a point of contention for years. Now, once again proposed legislation seeks to remove federal safeguards. These forests were designated as resources to be managed for the greater good in perpetuity. Please do not be swayed by timber interests who want to loosen regulations. Our rural community has been greatly affected by surrounding clear-cuts by private logging interests—most logs never going to our local mills but are shipped raw to Asia. Our federal forests remain the only buffer providing us with clean water, biodiversity and recreation. Think about other economic values we have. Our organic farming industry has grown exponentially in recent years and is our economic and environmental future.

Since the passage of the Northwest Forest Plan in 1994, federal forests have been protected from unsustainable logging, such as clear-cutting and cutting of old-growth forests. However, these protected public forests are interconnected with privately owned forests. Private forests may be clear-cut, doused with herbicides that poison our waters, our farmlands, and our fish and wildlife. The cumulative effects of this unsustainable logging are buffered and offset by our protected federal forests.

One logging company from Grants Pass has informed the Oregon Department of Forestry of their plans to clear-cut 157 total acres in two sections near Grayback Mountain in southwest Williams. Because these lands are under private ownership, logging is regulated only by the Oregon Forest Practice Act. This means they can cross over and cut right up to the non-fish-bearing streams that meander through causing massive erosion and sedimentation.

Contrary to this invasive riparian treatment, federal management does not allow logging within 170 feet of non-fish-bearing streams. The subsequent herbicide applications that always follow this type of private logging have been proven toxic to the aquatic systems that we all depend on. They will accumulate in the bodies of fish and wildlife and leach into the streams and groundwater. There is no buffer along these streams for aerial spraying of herbicides.

Our watershed consists of 55,602 acres with 28,161 acres managed by BLM, 6,772 acres managed by the US Forest Service, and 6,116 acres owned by private timber companies. This means a potential of 74 percent of our lands could potentially be harvested. BLM has a plan to treat 8,000 acres over the next ten years, and so the combined negative impact of BLM and private timber companies could be huge.

The struggle we see in rural southern Oregon communities is not due to a loss of timber, but rather a loss of value. The beautiful forests that surround us are a valuable resource that simply cannot

be replaced by young mono-crops of trees. Clean drinking water, biodiversity of plant and animal species, erosion control, temperature regulation, and salmon habitat are resources on which we all depend. Today's changing climate cannot support logging at levels that were previously the norm.

Although the laws governing logging vary greatly between private and publicly owned forests, the natural world does not obey these boundaries. To loosen federal regulations would be the beginning of the end of some of the last remaining protected forests in the world.

Do we really want to create jobs that sacrifice our children's futures? Do we the people of Oregon believe that this is our only hope? As Oregonians, we are much more resourceful than to depend only on these outdated practices. We have a growing organic farming industry, recreation and tourism, and a landscape that drives people here from all over the nation. The fact is these industries, which are truly sustainable and promote land stewardship, are not even possible without healthy forests. We ask you to see past the rhetoric and propaganda and join with those who can think outside the box in creating a future that is economically sound without sacrificing the land we all depend on.

If you truly want to help move Oregon forward, don't look backward to outdated models of economic prosperity that rely solely on resource extraction. Contrary to the beliefs of the few who stand to profit from the rape of our federal lands, we are educated citizens who understand that the ecological values provided by our forests are truly priceless. We also understand that contrary to the rhetoric, Americans have the ingenuity to create new venues for sustained economic prosperity.

Our public lands are not for sale! We will not support any legislation that seeks to betray the public trust in the name of profit for a select few. We have heard these promises all over the nation, from the Appalachian coal mines to the natural-gas drilling in Wyoming; promises of jobs and schools available only at the expense of our natural resources. We have seen what happens; a few profit and then move on to the next extraction site, leaving rural citizens stripped of their productive land and clean water.

Without federal safeguards, we fear that these effects will become too massive in scale and a threshold will be crossed, beyond which our forests will not be able to recover.

For more information about Williams Community Forest Project, visit our website at [www.williamscommunityforestproject.org](http://www.williamscommunityforestproject.org) or send an email to the address below.

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