

OPINIONS

River Right: Getting through the froth

BY TOM CARSTENS

Several years ago, after receiving a degree in environmental studies from Southern Oregon University (SOU), I was asked to be a math tutor. Since my math exam strategy was always “Check answer ‘C,’” I told SOU it probably wouldn’t be a good fit. I did, however, offer to help students with their writing. At the appointed time, I showed up to “interview” with a professor in the English department. Here’s how that chat went:

SOU professor: “Do you believe in global warming?”

Me: “I didn’t know there was a religious test.”

And that was pretty much it.

I didn’t stick around to find out what climatology had to do with composition, but I do know that the science is pretty complex. I gained an appreciation for this when I took a climatology course from Dr. Greg Jones, well-known to our Applegate vintners. He’s a great teacher who encourages his students to explore on their own.

For one of my projects, I decided to look into local climate history. As it happens, Grants Pass has a meteorological station that has been compiling data since 1888. Using some high-powered software, I was able to ascertain that there had hardly been any change in our temperature

patterns in the past century or so. As you can see in figure 1, the average monthly minimums rose a statistically minuscule amount over the period, but the average monthly mean and maximum temperatures remained constant. Figure 2 shows the year-round pattern. (Feel free to give me a call if you’d like to see the full report.)

Now, admittedly, this is a pretty short period when considering the life of our four and a half billion-year-old planet, but it’s all I had to work with. To help fill in *that* picture, I would have had to do some serious geological stratification analysis—and I don’t even know what that is.

Also at SOU, I was fortunate to have been able to take an ecology course from Dr. Tom Atzet (whose opinion piece appears on page 19). From him I learned how important skepticism is to the advance of science. Forgive me if I’m just a bit skeptical of those who cherry-pick morsels from the Internet that tend

to support political agendas. I admit that it’s a tough job for us laymen to sort out.

When I’m reading about science, I prefer to stick with scientists who are trained in the subject matter and who actually do field research and with reputable journalists who actually look into the research behind the claims. At a minimum, (1) they’ll discuss the population studied and the methods used, (2) they won’t confuse correlation with causation, and (3) they won’t draw sweeping conclusions that outstrip the focus of the research. Even then, there are no guarantees. Check out this July 14, 2016, vox.com article, “The 7 biggest problems facing science, according to 270 scientists.”

Trying to decipher all the claims about climate change is a lot like kayakers studying a Class IV rapid before charging through it. Most of us are skeptical about what the “old hand” has to say—we want to see the rapids for ourselves. He might not have run



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the rapids recently—water levels and flows vary—and his skill level must be considered. Usually there’s a path through the mayhem of boulders and turbulence. We look for “the green”—that’s where the water flow is most defined. The white frothy stuff doesn’t give much purchase for paddling and, really, who knows what’s going on under there? It reminds me of “science” from someone who is really spouting politics. It can get pretty frothy.

It appears that global temperatures may be rising for a whole host of reasons, many of which scientists understand and some they don’t. The last time the earth experienced a comparable rise in temperatures was around 56 million years ago. A geological study by Richard Zeebe et al., published in the March 2016 issue of *Nature Geoscience*, calculates that carbon release into the atmosphere was

about 10 times *slower* than today, but temperatures still rose around nine degrees Fahrenheit, and the extra heat lasted more than 200,000 years.

I’m pretty sure that before we’re able to wrap up our quixotic quest to conquer perennial climate change, our planet will adapt, as it always does. And so will we.

See you on the river. Hold the froth.

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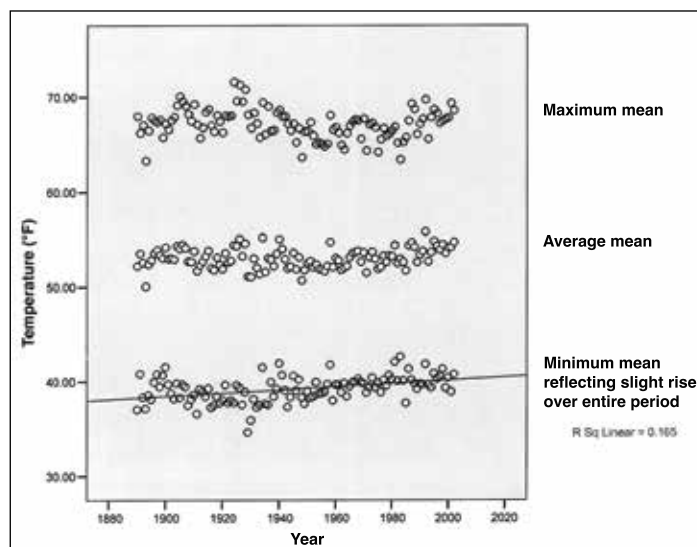


Figure 1. Scatter plots of monthly maximum, average, and minimum mean temperatures for Grants Pass, Oregon 1889 - 2002.

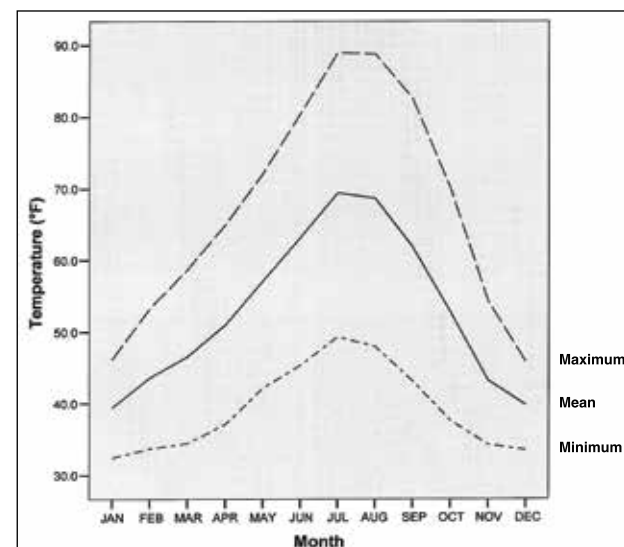


Figure 2. Monthly maximum, mean, and minimum temperatures for Grants Pass, Oregon 1889 - 2002.

New BLM RMP’s impact on the Applegate Valley

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a new Resource Management Plan (RMP) intended to direct management activities throughout western Oregon, including the Applegate Valley. The implications of this new plan for our forests, rivers, wildlife, wildlands, and communities are concerning. The plan will turn back many important environmental protections and eliminate land management designations that promote community-based collaboration.

The new RMP would eliminate or reduce many of the environmental protections of the Northwest Forest Plan. It would reduce streamside logging buffers by half, impacting 300,000 acres currently protected as Riparian Reserves. Commercial logging in these Riparian Reserves will harm many rare or endangered species such as the Pacific fisher and northern spotted owl as well as our endangered anadromous fisheries. The new RMP would also allow logging of 278 million board feet of timber annually, an increase of 37 percent since the last plan was approved in 1995. The new RMP emphasizes clear-cut logging techniques on nearly 500,000 acres

of land in Oregon’s moist forests and proposes a large increase in logging in the dry forests of southwestern Oregon. The increased logging will increase fuel and fire hazards adjacent to our communities and in important forest habitats. It will also degrade important wildlife habitats, impact water quality, and log off some of our last intact forests.

For instance, the new RMP will eliminate the proposed designation and protection of two Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (LWCs) in the Applegate Valley and open the Dakubetede and Wellington Butte LWCs to logging, road-building, and motorized recreation. The Dakubetede LWC is traversed by the Sterling Mine Ditch Trail and portions of the proposed Jack-Ash Trail. The Wellington Butte LWC is the wild core of the proposed Applegate Ridge Trail (ART). Having become hotspots for nonmotorized recreation, both LWCs are well loved by residents of the Applegate Valley and southwestern Oregon. Together, the land management practices proposed in the RMP will forever degrade these wildlands and the pristine nature of the proposed ART and

Jack-Ash Trails, impacting the quality of life, habitat, and the recreation-based economy of the Applegate Valley.

Perhaps most important to local residents is the elimination of the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). The AMA was designated in 1994 to encourage innovative, ecologically responsible and collaborative land-management planning in the Applegate Watershed. It was designed to provide the community with opportunities to collaborate and develop “idiosyncratic” methods of land management based on community values and ecological needs.

The Applegate Valley has been a model of community engagement with local land managers to create collaborative and socially acceptable land-management projects in the AMA. Our community has worked for 22 years towards consensus, building collaborative capacity and supporting the AMA. Many in the Applegate Valley have invested heavily in the AMA process, working to create a voice for our community and build trust between the BLM and local residents. Removing the AMA designation betrays that trust and will eliminate the BLM’s mandate to work collaboratively with our community and practice innovative forestry.

The majority of BLM land in the Applegate Valley would be located within

the Harvest Land Base, meaning that logging would be the primary form of land management. Timber production would be prioritized over ecological, social, or community values within the Harvest Land Base. This includes the Dakubetede and Wellington LWCs, numerous Recreational Management Areas, and the corridors proposed for the Jack-Ash and Applegate Ridge Trails.

Some BLM lands in the Applegate watershed will be managed as Late Successional Reserves (LSR), and, despite the stated goal of providing large blocks of late successional habitat for the recovery of the northern spotted owl, the BLM would mandate the logging of 17,000 acres per decade on the Medford District within these important LSRs.

Although the BLM claims to be emphasizing recreation and conservation in the RMP, nearly all designated conservation and recreation areas would prioritize timber production and motorized recreation. Likewise, our beloved AMA has been axed, along with more than two decades of effort from our community. The new RMP represents old, outdated thinking and a bias towards industrial land management. The public is looking forward to a more sustainable future. Will the BLM join us?

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