

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door: Mixed messages from BLM

BY CHRIS BRATT

Twenty-two years ago, in what started as a community opportunity, federal land-management agencies invited rural local people to take a more active role in public forestland management decisions here in the Applegate. Through the new science and thinking developed in the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP), our community had the chance for more flexible and innovative approaches to public forest management and “extensive public participation.”

Many of us, having accepted the invitation, began participating with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service in their planned actions that affected our local environment. We informed ourselves about all our native plants and animals. Our local community became recognized nationally for our volunteer involvement and dedication to helping these agencies make improved analyses and decisions.

From my perspective as a participant, this proactive public participation greatly improved the management of public forests by emphasizing a more ecological and restorative approach to managing public forests in our area. It has altered previous agency behaviors, increased cooperation among participants, brought forward new information, helped design experimental projects, and identified desired future conditions that encourage making future forest management projects even better. And perhaps most importantly, this collaboration had a working document, the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA) Guide, which outlines how the federal agencies expect to do business with groups and individuals

in our 500,000-acre Applegate River Watershed.

But as I reported in the summer issue of the *Applegater*, all of the above successes and collaboration with the BLM are in jeopardy. Without a firm commitment from the Medford District of BLM to continue with the Applegate AMA process, its statements about continuing collaboration with the public sound hollow and insincere. Unless the BLM receives some different Department of Interior or congressional direction, it is hell-bent on going it alone and managing our forests strictly for “increased resource production” (cutting more trees at the expense of other resources and the environment).

As if to show us it is serious about making community collaboration more difficult and to keep the public more confused, the BLM has now released the Nedsbar timber sale Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Little and Upper Applegate drainages. This proposed timber sale is an example of BLM’s mixed messages to our community. The Nedsbar timber sale EA presently shows an existing Designated Wilderness Study Area (WSA) that contains slightly more than the required 5,000 acres to be considered for a possible future wilderness area. Although this WSA has the approval of the BLM under the management guidelines of the NFP and its present RMP, it is invalidating that contract with our community.

The BLM is now claiming that its newly proposed (2016) management direction *won’t allow it to consider multiple uses like Wilderness Study Areas because it has to cut timber in those areas.* It is planning to nullify the

present designations many community members have worked so hard to secure over the past decades. The BLM’s departure from its present direction on this and other multiple-use issues is a mockery of our community. It is also a deliberate act of *misleading* the public into believing that the BLM does *not* have the flexibility to truly collaborate with us on significant actions and projects. The truth is, however, that both the NFP and BLM’s own RMP allow for the kind of adaptability that for the past 20 years has enabled the BLM to do things like test new forest management approaches and designate wilderness study areas.

At this point, if the local BLM (Medford District) had any gumption, it would adopt our Community Alternative in its entirety for the Nedsbar Timber Sale. This excellent Community Alternative

(which received high praise from the BLM),

if adopted, would insure that real collaboration had taken place in one of the most biologically diverse areas in the United States. Let the BLM show that it is accessible and responsive to all its partners by applying ecological principles and creating a climate of trust and cooperation.

My message to the BLM is not a mixed one. If the BLM expects to continue the positive interactions and goodwill that our community can deliver, it must continue to support the shared set of goals already developed collaboratively in the Applegate Adaptive Management Area.

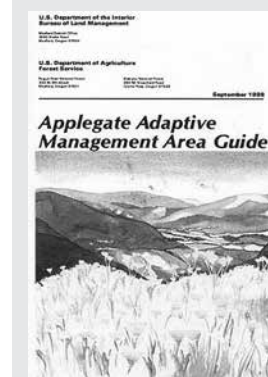
What’s your message to the BLM? Let it know.

Chris Bratt • 541-846-6988



Chris Bratt

More mixed messages from BLM



As the *Applegater* goes to press, the BLM has signed Records of Decision to implement its new management plans for western Oregon forests (including those in the Applegate). Sadly, its new plan is discarding our unique public land allocation called the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). This specially designated model of collaboration between citizens, scientists, and managers was “established to allow innovative and creative resource management approaches.” All participants “were expected to act in ways that further the technical and social objectives” mutually decided upon

by the partners. Success was dependent “on the cooperation of all participants, federal and private.” Trust was a requirement. Now the BLM has given a curt dismissal to over 20 years of mutual cooperation and building trust. The long-term vision and goals outlined in the Applegate AMA Guide will likely be dropped with BLM out of the picture. BLM’s disappointing action is not a good omen, nor is it a way to build trust with our community. —Chris Bratt

Fenced in

BY TRESSI ALBEE

According to the Oregon state regulations surrounding the cultivation of cannabis, the growing of medical and recreational marijuana must be obscured from public view. Infraction results in a minor fine, as for a traffic violation. When questioned, neither legislators nor employees of the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program (OMMP) knew the reasoning behind this law. For those of us living in Josephine and Jackson counties, the impact of this regulation is significant. Fences, or what may pass for a visual barrier, range from the well-built, usually wooden, and eight-foot-high ones, like something you would find in middle-class suburbia, to those made of all manner of tarps, plastic, or even, like one I saw, bent-up corrugated metal.

In rural Josephine and Jackson counties, we are in no way uncertain about what is growing behind these fences. The odor that starts in August and lingers into November is the tell-all. Notably, there are no such regulations surrounding the cultivation of wine grapes. Imagine the uproar if all vineyards were required to obscure the wine grape cultivation from public view. Quite the opposite,

there is a quiet, but healthy competition among the vineyard owners to have their vines pruned, tied, and tucked. Though alcohol is a far more dangerous and deadly substance than marijuana, the public may view the cultivation of wine grapes, but not cannabis.

The regulation that requires a barrier to “shield” the plant, or perhaps the public, appears to be some sort of hangover from the prohibition of marijuana. Being fenced in causes significant impact, not only on the landscape, but also on the psyche, which experiences this disruption to the organic flow of the landscape of meadows and farmland like a modern monolith to southern Oregon’s real cash crop. Additionally, these fences interrupt the natural migration patterns of wildlife. More often than not, by the end of the growing season the tops of the cannabis plants are peeking above these fences while the odor of the plant permeates about a square acre. So what or who is being protected by these fences?

Certainly any agricultural project in southern Oregon must consider protection against deer and other foraging animals, but, unless the farmer is growing cannabis, the fence does not have to be opaque. Our sprawling rural vistas are etched with fencing for animals

and farmland. But most wire fencing, which allows a visual vista and animal migration to remain little changed, does not create the same sense of being fenced in. Certainly fencing is expensive, but the kind of fence a cannabis grower chooses to build could be seen as a measure of respect for his or her neighbors.

Fencing in Oregon is not a new topic—the existing laws about fencing for ranches and livestock amount to a 21-page document. Yet there is no mention of obscuring from public view the happenings of a cattle ranch or other livestock operation. It is hard not to evoke a sense of shame in these requirements to shield the cultivation of cannabis from the public. Yet cannabis is the one plant that will allow humans to create a protein for food consumption,

make fiber for fabric, replace the wood industry (thereby protecting our forests) with hemp paper products as well as hemp building materials, operate a motor with hemp oil, create medicine for those with pain and anxiety, and support treatment for cancer and many other serious ailments, while being grown sustainably nearly all over the world.

Though Oregon has lifted the prohibition on cannabis, it appears that the collective psyche remains entangled in the hiding and obscuring associated with the prohibition era of cannabis. It appears to be time to fine-tune the nuances of the liberation of cannabis by freeing her from her fenced-in status in the new post-prohibition era.

Tressi Albee
tressialbee@gmail.com

OPINION PIECES AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Opinion pieces and letters to the editor represent the opinion of the author, not that of the *Applegater* or the Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc. As a community-based newsmagazine, we receive diverse opinions on different topics. We honor these opinions, but object to personal attacks and reserve the right to edit accordingly. Letters are limited 450 words. Opinion pieces **must be relevant to the Applegate Valley** and are limited to 700 words. Both may be edited for grammar and length. All letters **must** be signed, with a full street address or P.O. Box and phone number. Opinion pieces **must** include publishable contact information (phone number and/or email address). **Anonymous letters and opinion pieces will not be published.** Individual letters and opinion pieces may or may not be published in consecutive issues. Email opinion pieces and letters to the editor to gater@applegater.org or mail to *Applegater* c/o Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc., PO Box 14, Jacksonville, OR 97530.