

OPINIONS

Behind the Green Door | The future of our country

BY CHRIS BRATT

I believe my left-leaning reputation on environmental and other important issues is well established. But I like to think of myself as being more mellow and unbiased in my advanced age. And besides, what's so left-wing about working to protect your environment, human rights, or anything else that's positive and important to people? It's not only anyone's right to protect our public lands and institutions—it's our obligation as citizens of a democratic society.

As it turns out, while I'm mellowing, many old white men like me in our society are taking up more dogmatic and reactionary political positions. None have pronounced this right-wing-bias attitude more than our crass president and the old white men presiding over our Congress. Let's face it, Donald Trump and his constituency continue to vigorously attack all people opposed to their programs. They state that any opposition is part of an "angry left-wing mob." And yet Interior Secretary Zinke has broadly labeled conservationists as "environmental terrorists" while ignoring ethics and scientific standards.

How unthinkable and biased is that? It seems they will do or say anything, including lies, to achieve their goals. Is the Republican leadership about to form another congressional "House Un-American Activities Committee"? The last time they did that, in the 1950s, many loyal Americans went to jail, lost their jobs, or were wrongfully identified as "un-American troublemakers." My own mother refused to sign a "loyalty oath" due to her concern that it would require blind allegiance. As a result, she lost her long-held job as a senior draftsman for the City of San Francisco.

Right now a lot of people in our country are outraged. They're angered by a bigoted president and a right-wing leadership in Congress pursuing such an amoral and largely unshared vision for America's future. Many of us are concerned about unrestrained power to remake the nation's laws, policies, and executive orders, especially when rulings support only this administration's distorted point of view. I believe these folks currently in charge have a different worldview, political agenda, and responsibility for the economic and

social welfare than most of the nation. Our founders never meant to establish a "winner-take-all" society.

Every day, right here in the Applegate Valley, people's lives are being affected by negative legislation, tweets, rule changes, and executive orders. These misguided actions deny the truth, reality, or validity of a whole host of issues important to common folks' wants and needs.

Here is just a short list of important issues that need some real accountability from this administration for people in southern Oregon:

- The recent introduction of legislation that would radically weaken the Endangered Species Act and other environmental laws.
- The belief that global warming is a hoax while wildfire and smoke overrun our communities and temperatures rise.
- The failure to protect our public lands, monuments, national parks, and forests from increased development, overcutting, mineral extraction, and pesticide use in defiance of established scientific evidence.
- The increased privatization of all things public for the benefit of a few.

- The slashing of budget funds needed to increase recreation and rejuvenation activities in our national forests and parks.

- The new public involvement guidance from the Department of the Interior and from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) that has created additional barriers to cooperation between the local federal agency and our community.

As I write this article, I'm thinking of a quote from Hermann Goering, one of Adolph Hitler's high-ranking followers. He stated at the Nuremberg Trials after World War II, that "it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy, and it's always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether a democracy, fascist dictatorship, or parliament. The people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, then denounce the pacifists for their lack of patriotism, and expose the country to danger. It works the same way in every country."

Sound familiar? Let me know.
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Wildfire: Thinning treatments required

BY DON BELLVILLE

I don't wish to be an alarmist but I am afraid I must be one! I am a retired wildland firefighter/fire investigator/prescribed fire and fuels specialist as well as a forester and silviculturist. I am saddened by the unnecessary loss of life and homes and the vegetation destruction caused by the Carr Fire in Redding, California. However, I am certain that within the not-too-distant future, a similar wildfire will occur in one or more of the communities in the Rogue River Valley *with similar results*. This probability is cause for alarm!

For years, local resource management professionals (including myself) have tried to get legislators, the general public, homeowners, and local environmental organizations to allow (permit) vegetation thinning treatments over significant acreages to try to reduce the damage that will occur from wildfires. *These wildfires will occur!* The only question is *when, where, and how much damage!*

For the most part, our efforts have been a failure. There has been a huge amount of talk but very little actual vegetation treatment over significant acreage. We have seen some progress but at the small scale. *The issue is scale! Hundreds of acres of treatment will not provide significant benefit! Tens or hundreds of thousands of acres of treatment will help!*

The primary problem is that every time large-scale, forest thinning projects are proposed, there is an outcry from naysayers that "Big trees are being cut" or "The project is too big" or "The environmental impacts are too great" or "It is in my backyard" or "A threatened/endangered species will be impacted," etc. As a result, the project is stopped or significantly reduced in size. *Sorry, but even these proposed thinning treatment areas are not big enough!* When we are

experiencing wildfires that are 20,000 to 500,000 acres, scattered treatment areas with hundreds to a few thousand acres of vegetation thinning will *not* cut it! (Pun intended.)

A history lesson

Before European settlement, areas in and around Grants Pass and Medford usually underburned with low-severity fires every 20 or so years. These fires tended to kill small conifers and reduce hardwood tree and shrub density. As a result, these "fire-tended" areas often had a "parklike appearance" with 25 to 50 large-diameter (over 30") trees per acre with scattered individuals or patches of smaller size, understory trees and shrubs. Today, however, these same areas are occupied by 3,000-plus small trees per acre *and homes and people*. Do you see the problem?

Compounding this situation is a warming climate. This warming should not be a surprise to anyone who knows history because a climate event called the Little Ice Age was ending in the mid-1800s. Therefore, it is not rocket science to expect these warming and drying conditions.

Our vegetation management needs to reflect these realities. We cannot save or maintain conifer and hardwood stands with thousands of stems per acre. Such areas will just further increase the chances for larger and more destructive wildfires. We need to reduce the density of these conifer and hardwood stands to 75 to 100 (or less) of the largest stems *per acre*. Subsequently, these areas should be periodically underburned and re-thinned in order to maintain these conditions. Yes, there are environmental trade-offs, *but* they are significantly less problematic than those from a 20,000-plus acre, high-intensity wildfire.



Forest surrounding a two-story log home that was destroyed by fire in 2018.

Folks, we all need to help with this problem. Firefighters are grateful for all the support and help they receive when working on these wildfires. It would be great that this same focus, energy, and commitment went into actively supporting thinning on private, county, state, and federal forests to help reduce

the chance for ever more destructive wildfires. The time for doing little or no active management of our forests is over!

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