

OPINION

Keeping it wild in the Wellington Wildlands for Chris Bratt

BY LUKE RUEDIGER

I intended to write an article in memory of Chris Bratt, highlighting all he has done for the environment in the Applegate. I quickly realized that 700 words is far too few to describe the major contributions Chris made. While pondering what to write, I wondered, "What might Chris say?" After some thought, I came to the conclusion that Chris would say, "Stick to the issues, protect our environment, and save Wellington Wildlands." So instead of writing this article about Chris Bratt, I decided to write it in his honor and in defense of the Applegate wildlands he loved.

Currently, the most threatened wildland in the Applegate Watershed is the Wellington Wildlands, a 7,527-acre roadless area located on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land west of Ruch. The roadless area includes portions of China Gulch, Long Gulch, and Balls Branch of Humbug Creek. It is also the central feature of the proposed Center Applegate Ridge Trail as it traverses the slopes of the Applegate Valley from Jacksonville to Grants Pass. Although not remote, the area is wild and spectacular. It is a wilderness in our backyard and represents one of the most accessible wildlands in our region.

The BLM identified and inventoried roadless areas in western Oregon for their 2016 Resource Management Plan (RMP). In the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, the BLM identified 5,711 acres of roadless habitat surrounding Wellington Butte as a Lands With Wilderness Characteristics (LWC). The area met all requirements for LWC protection, including intact, unroaded habitat, the potential for primitive forms of recreation, and adequate size—it is 711 acres beyond the 5,000-acre threshold. (Citizens have identified an additional 1,816 acres not acknowledged by the BLM.)

Much of the area is colonized by beautiful oak woodland, dense chaparral, sweeping grasslands, and scattered stands of conifer forest, including old-growth stands in the Balls Branch of Humbug Creek and Long Gulch. Although it supports only scattered timber on arid, relatively unproductive slopes, the BLM has identified some potentially merchantable timber within the Wellington Wildlands. Singularly focused on timber production, the BLM chose to exclude the forested acreage from the larger LWC proposal. By doing so, the BLM reduced the inventoried portion of the Wellington Wildlands to below the 5,000-acre threshold for protection, thus eliminating LWC status for this important wildland and allocating the area as "Harvest Land Base."

The BLM has proposed its first timber sale in the Applegate Valley under the 2016 RMP. The "planning area" for this timber sale—known as the Middle Applegate Timber Sale—extends from Bishop Creek across the Middle Applegate Watershed to Slagle Creek, including the Wellington Wildlands.

Applegate Neighborhood Network (ANN) has been working hard to protect the Wellington Wildlands for many years. With the help of Applegate residents and expert filmmakers Ed Keller and Greeley Wells, we created a short film titled *Saving Wellington*. The film highlights the Wellington Wildlands and explores the controversy surrounding the Middle Applegate Timber Sale. The film has been well received and was recently featured at the Ashland Independent Film Festival.

Chris Bratt proposed that we show this film to the BLM, which we did in April, just two days after Chris passed away. We also handed BLM a petition to save Wellington Wildlands with over 400 signatures, including those of many Applegate residents.

ANN is asking the BLM to exclude this important wildland from the Middle Applegate Timber Sale planning area. BLM has refused, telling us they lack the discretion to do so. Apparently, BLM land managers feel that community concerns and input cannot be addressed under the 2016 RMP, which emphasizes timber production over all other resource values. This leaves the Wellington Wildlands vulnerable to road construction and commercial logging. These impacts could forever degrade the wilderness qualities of the area and preclude the area from future protections.

Wellington Wildlands is far more valuable to this community as a wilderness to explore and enjoy than it is for timber production. It is the backdrop to our valley and many of our local wineries. The scenic and recreational values far outweigh the area's marginal timber values. Our local economy has moved on from the days of boom-and-bust logging; unfortunately, the BLM has not moved forward with us and demands to live in the past. Despite immense public support for Wellington Wildlands, the BLM may log off our natural legacy.

In memory of Chris Bratt, we cannot let the BLM log the Wellington Wildlands. We love you, Chris, and we love our wildlands.

Save Wellington Wildlands!
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Climate change?

Those of us who recall a time when fallout shelters were a thriving business in America might question Alan Journet (*Applegater* Spring 2019) when he pontificates about the dangers of climate change. We might, in fact, look back and ask the age old question, *qui bono* or "who benefits?"

There's usually a beneficiary at the driving end of a politically motivated meme—especially one that's promoted as fact, with dire consequences if a frightened public doesn't react in the appropriate manner. For instance, there was the questionable reality of yellow-cake uranium that drove the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the rumor of a malicious videotape that prompted a spontaneous uprising in Benghazi prior to the 2012 election. Back in the 1970s there were dire warnings of a coming ice age. Maybe the most insidious false narrative of all was the fabricated tale of the Gulf of Tonkin incident during the Vietnam War, a Johnson-era falsehood that resulted in the loss of tens of thousands of American servicemen.

And now there's climate change, a phenomenon that's been ongoing since planet Earth was formed, including in the Applegate Valley.

But there are still backyards all across the nation with unused fallout shelters. Iran is gradually taking over Iraq and would in a minute if US troops were pulled out. The truth about Benghazi became apparent shortly after the 2012 election, and, thankfully, the ice age of the 70s never materialized. It's just a faint memory now in the minds of those who still recall it. Memories of the brave souls who were lost to perverted political ambitions in Vietnam, however, will be with the American public forever.

Purveyors of climate change, though, insist it's a real cause for concern, and they say it is being caused by people. If true, one would think the obvious answer would be fewer people. And even more pressing than human numbers would be the thousands of migrants from underdeveloped countries who force their way into industrialized nations each year to become super-consumers—and by extension, super polluters.

Knowing that, one might reasonably conclude that climate change promoters would be tripping all over each other in order to support President Trump's efforts to stop the influx of migrants at America's southern border.

But they're not doing that.

In fact, some of the folks who profess to worry about climate change are simultaneously engaged in the process of assisting migrants in their quest to become super-polluters. All of which induces many of us to suspect that climate change might be political after all. And that takes us back to our original question—*qui bono*?

Robert Bennett, Grants Pass

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Fond memories of Chris Bratt

It's hard to write this today thinking that Christopher Bratt isn't going to be here to add his commentary as he so often did. After being on the *Applegater* board with Chris for seven years, I can only say what we all think—what a loss to the Applegate Valley and to the many causes in our area. Chris not only volunteered on many boards and committees over the years, but he also put his money where his mouth was and financially supported many nonprofits. He tirelessly worked for the *Applegater* for years before and after I was on the board. He was always available to talk through any situation that was developing. He was a wonderful advocate for rural communities and a logical and clear thinker for what he considered as right and just. He will be missed. Not everyone always agreed with Christopher (and vice versa), but he was always willing to listen and to be courteous and a real gentleman to whoever was expressing an opinion.

While words can never fully express how much someone means, language and the written word can still provide comfort, hope, and even inspiration. Chris loved the *Applegater* and was a force for keeping it going for many years. Let's never forget him and his wonderful and generous spirit. Our hearts go out to his family.
Paula Strickland Rissler, Jacksonville

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. Opinion pieces and letters to the editor **must pertain to and mention the Applegate Watershed. We encourage authors to include verifiable facts to back up their arguments.**

Opinion pieces are limited to 700 words; letters are limited to 450 words. Submissions will be edited for grammar and length. Opinion pieces **must** include publishable contact information (phone number and/or email address). All letters **must** be signed, with a full street address or PO Box and phone number.

Anonymous letters and opinion pieces, reprinted articles, press releases, and political campaign articles will not be published. Individual letters and opinion pieces may or may not be published.

Email opinion pieces and letters to the editor to gater@applegater.org or mail to *Applegater*, Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc., PO Box 14, Jacksonville, OR 97530.



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