

Opinion

Change, hope and wildfire

BY SANDY SHAFFER

All summer long, in between stories on wildfires, the newspapers talked of “Change we can believe in.” On Election Day they spoke of “hope” for future generations. And now as I write this in mid-November, the headlines are about wildfires in California—again. I’m thinking that these three words—hope, change and wildfire, have more in common than first meets the eye.

Wildfires play a big role in forest health and management; we in southwestern Oregon know this well. We always hope that our little corner of the Applegate doesn’t get destroyed by fire. Change is also a key element of forest health, with something like drought bringing quick change, while restoration after a fire or re-growth after logging are slow, gradual changes over decades. As we try our hand at forest management, whether it’s our own ten-acre parcel or a national forest, we always hope we’re getting it right, that we’re doing good for the land.

I believe that two recent changes could acutely affect wildfires in Oregon; one of them gives me a lot of hope and the other just a little. I’m talking about the election of Senator Barack Obama as our next President, and the Bureau of Land Management’s recently announced Preferred Resource Management Plan for Western Oregon (the end of the “WOPR” process).

Let me begin with the hopeful. I recently read the Obama position paper entitled “Obama-Biden: Committed to Wildfire Management and Community Protection.” There are many good things in this paper, including a key statement highlighted in the first paragraph: “As President, Barack Obama will aggressively pursue an effective fire prevention, mitigation and land and forest management plan that decreases the fire risks that many communities are now facing.”

One concept high-lighted throughout the paper gave me the most hope. It said that Obama would work with Governors, Congress and local officials in a bipartisan manner to “develop and enact reliable, dedicated funding sources to fight the most catastrophic fires so that public lands may continue to be managed for... other multiple uses.” Dedicated fire suppression funds, rather than raiding other program budgets! No more of what we’ve seen over the past five years: projects planned and then put on the shelf because funding was pulled back

to Washington D.C. to pay for the summer’s wildfires. Yes, this absolutely gives me hope.

The BLM’s Preferred Resource Management Plan (PRMP) for Western Oregon’s O and C lands would definitely bring about change. But I think that if it were approved as initially written it could bring more heartburn than hope. True, the BLM did include one big change in the PRMP that we in the Applegate have been advocating for many years—specialized treatments for our multiple-aged, multi-species forests. This is a good change for us in southwestern Oregon, one that I wish the U.S. Forest Service would also adopt.

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However, what the BLM dropped, abandoned or ignored in the PRMP was the concept of Adaptive Management Areas and working with local communities in land management planning. Because I felt this change boded no good for fire-prone areas such as ours, I recently ‘spoke my piece’ to the BLM State Director, who will make the PRMP decision in December. Among other things, I essentially told him that “Reducing the dangers of wildfires cannot be addressed through federal action alone.” This happens to be a direct quote from the Obama-Biden position paper, and it’s something that I’ve been preaching for years. I must say, it gave me a great deal of hope to hear back that the State Director will be adding collaborative partnering back into their final RMP for the Medford District. Still, we should hope that the new Administration would make this mandatory for all federal land managers across the country.

The Obama-Biden paper also mentions “implementing cooperative projects,” and reducing fuels “... in close coordination with those communities that are most at risk.” Unlike land management policies of the past eight years, this paper seems to recognize that partnering is the only way we’re going to be able to address big-and-getting-bigger issues such as catastrophic wildfires. It looks at the intricate, long-term picture of wildfire and forest management issues. The changes in approach being proposed by the new Administration give me a lot of hope for healthier and safer forests for our future generations. And also for less wildfires in California!

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PETS OF THE MONTH



Missy - #K2962
a beautiful Diluted Tortie with green eyes.



Ginny - #K1579
a loveable girl with white fur & brown spots.



Bruno - #K2362
a cat with black fur, & a heart of gold.



Scampi - #K3087
a Chihuahua boy who bonds quickly.



Douglas - #K3044
an orange & white 1-year-old cat with a twin sister.



Cuba - #K2636
a mellow fellow who really soaks up love.



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