

OPINIONS

Is it our backyard — or isn't it?

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Our national forests, our federal recreation areas, monuments and parks... are they really ours? Are they any more "ours" if we live next to them? And, does being good neighbors with said federal neighbor count for anything?

I've only been involved in natural resource and wildfire issues for a little over ten years, but it seems like I've seen a lot of change in that time. Or maybe it's just that there's always "something new" coming down the pike.

In 2000 we were presented with the National Fire Plan, which provided direction on how to address the serious wildfires our nation was having. The Applegate embraced this, grabbed grant funding, and with the help of our fire and natural resource agency partners, wrote our own Applegate Fire Plan. Some questioned the validity of a "plan" written by a community, but we got right to work thinning vegetation to create our defensible spaces, doing our part in the wildfire picture. We also prioritized places for our federal land managers to reduce hazardous fuels around our Applegate communities, and lo and behold, they did what our Fire Plan suggested.

We had wildfires in the summer of 2002, and our fuels work helped firefighting efforts in the Squires Peak Fire. So much so that the President came to town, bringing the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (HFRA) with him. More direction, for federal land managers and for communities in the Wildland Urban Interface or WUI that faced the threat of wildfire. The Applegate snatched some of that HFRA funding and kept doing more hazardous fuels work.

By this time nearly 90% of the homeowners in the Applegate had created defensible space around their homes, and many were getting help to thin even more of their property for better forest health and resiliency. The federal land managers—both the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service—in turn got more funding to do more thinning on their lands in the Applegate, and we seemed to collectively be making a difference. However, no timber was being cut, so mills were closing.

Then came the BLM's new Western Oregon (Resource Management) Plan Revision, or WOPR. It was all about timber, and so Applegate folks fought to include responsible management that met the needs of our SW Oregon "Mediterranean" climate written into this WOPR. The WOPR eventually replaced the Northwest Forest Plan and then was rescinded, but the fight drained a lot of energy from folks.

Land management seemed to languish for a while and we were lucky to not have any big wildfires, but many other states did. Federal fiscal issues brought a call from Congress for a new Cohesive Strategy for wildfire management in an effort to reduce national fire suppression costs. (I've written about this strategy before in the *Applegater*.) The underlying premise of the Strategy is to shift more responsibility for wildfires to state and local entities, even as many counties in western states are struggling with their own budget

shortfalls due to the loss of federal timber receipts. The Strategy wants communities to become "fire-adapted."

Several years later, the planning of this new national wildfire Strategy is still ongoing, and yes, I'm still hanging in there, attending conferences, meetings and calls on it. Someone's got to help them figure out what a "fire-adapted community" means!

Meanwhile, vegetation in our forests keeps growing, mills are still closed, and new folks continue to move into the WUI at steady rates. Every once in a while someone tries to lock up our lands in wilderness areas or monuments, but those who truly care about our watershed know this isn't what the land needs. It needs management. During the 2001 Quartz Fire we saw firsthand what happens if we don't thin our old growth stands: they burn to black sticks and ash, and critical owl habitat is destroyed.

Applegaters inherently seem to recognize and cherish the specialness of our watershed, and so many dedicated folks here haven't given up. Our new (Secretary of the Interior) Pilot Projects here in the Applegate are the result of *thousands* of hours of collaboration, communication and hard work by many partners towards finding a solution to forest management in our region.

I like the concepts of the prescriptions and methodology that were proposed for our Pilot Projects. I do have some reservations around the implementation of these prescriptions, because it's not the same old way of doing things, and some folks still are adamant that the "old way" is what we need to get back to.

As I write this, I have not yet seen the work on the ground in Pilot country (too much snow), but I've heard comments both favorable and not. However, if the BLM can make the Pilots work environmentally, financially *and* wildfire-safety wise, I feel that this might very well be the answer to our local forest health and timber receipt problems. To say nothing about helping to make the neighborhoods of the Applegate more fire safe.

With the new Cohesive Strategy calling for more responsibility by locals to prepare their communities for wildfire, with more people moving into Oregon's WUI, with our Counties facing financial collapse, and with more and more of our forests overstocked to the point of falling prey to insects and disease, I can *almost* understand why our desperate lawmakers are concocting preposterous new laws to try and get back to the old way of logging. Laws that are written in the offices of politicians with the help of the timber industry or national environmental organizations, but *without input* from local folks who are neighbors to the federal lands in question? I think not!

In my opinion, federal land management isn't working the way it is right now, and things *do* need to change. I feel that land management needs to be balanced, and that those who live next to federal lands and care about said land management issues should have a more powerful voice than folks from say, New York or Los Angeles.

But laws that propose to throw out a century of building a national system of environmental management and protection can't be legal, and they can't be good. I don't feel these proposed laws are good for the land, the forests, our waterways, or our wild critters. They aren't good for sustainable timber production or for wildfire hazard reduction, and they certainly aren't good for people who live next to federal land (roughly one in three landowners in the Applegate).

And, they *won't* help make our

Applegate communities more able to withstand a catastrophic wildfire.

So if you feel as I do, get involved, learn about the issues and speak up constructively to our elected officials, so that we Applegaters can and will have a voice in the management of "our backyard." We can't go back to the old ways of cutting timber and we also *can't do nothing*, because if we do, Mother Nature (or our elected representatives) will step in and do something for us.

Sandy Shaffer, sassysoneOR@q.com

Genesis of Applegate Valley Days

BY ED TEMPLE

Applegate Valley Days came about originally as a fundraiser for Cantrall-Buckley Park. Cantrall-Buckley Park, although county-owned, is managed by the Greater Applegate Community Development Corporation, a nonprofit 501(c)3 community-based group that has taken on the responsibility to fund and maintain the park, rather than have Jackson County close it.

When I was approached to organize the fundraiser, I agreed with the stipulation that we make the event broader and more encompassing in order to celebrate the totality of the Applegate Valley.

Having lived in the Applegate Valley for over 22 years, I feel it is my true home. My wife and I have made wonderful friends, we live on one of the prettiest pieces of land God created and are eternally grateful to be able to live the life we have. For me it is an opportunity to give back, to share and to show what true treasures we have here.

There are many events in the Applegate throughout the year, mostly small with targeted audiences. I had this vision: what if we have a major three-day event in early summer that would appeal to almost everybody. I wanted to have something that, whether you were four years old or one hundred and four, would be of interest to you. We really have it all here in our wonderful area. I guess I should preface the above with this disclaimer:

I'm talking about history, natural beauty, recreation, good food, excellent wine and good old-fashioned fun.

Applegate Valley Days is a lot of work, with a lot of folks working hard to make it a success. We want to make Applegate Valley Days an annual event with the proceeds going back into community projects. This year the proceeds will go to improvements in Cantrall-Buckley Park. We also want to showcase all of the Applegate Valley. We have some of the finest wines in the world produced here (not just my opinion, they are worldwide award winners), organic produce at its finest, and unsurpassed recreational opportunities.

As you look at the events that are planned, I hope you find something appealing. You might wonder, why is this guy so willing to share his part of paradise? The fact is that there is enough beauty and serenity to go around. The area is large enough that we welcome visitors, and land use is so strictly regulated in the rural areas of Oregon that we don't have to worry about it being overbuilt.

One last point: this event is about all we have around us. I don't care what your personal beliefs are, whether you're right or left, pro or con, green or brown, brand new or lived here all your life. Leave it at home, come join us and have fun!

Ed Temple • 541-846-7769

Project Director
Applegate Valley Days

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. We are a community-based newspaper that receives diverse opinions on different topics. Letters should be no longer than 450 words, and may be edited for grammar and length. Opinion Pieces should be no longer than 600 words. All Letters and Opinion Pieces must be signed, with a full street address or P.O. Box and phone number. Individual Letters may or may not be published in consecutive issues.

Address Opinion Pieces and Letters to the Editor to:
The *Applegater* c/o Applegate Valley Community Newspaper, Inc.
7386 Highway 238 • PMB 308
Jacksonville, OR 97530
Email: gater@applegater.org

Dear Editor,

We want to thank you for your in-depth, informative "The Starry Side" by Greeley Wells. We can't always figure out all the details from the instructions, but we have gained a great amount of information that adds to our knowledge of the night sky. We continue to gaze up at this unique corner of the universe we call home. Thank you for the research, insight and personal comments. We look forward to reading what Greeley has to say in EVERY issue. In appreciation,
Sherry Peterson and Peter Miller
Williams