

OPINION

The UAW Project: My perspective after three years of participation

BY SUZIE SAVOIE

It's late October and the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest (RRSNF) is about to release its environmental analysis (EA) for the Upper Applegate Watershed Project (UAW). The US Forest Service (USFS) started holding meetings for the UAW project in January 2016. The project has changed over three years of meetings and field trips; some aspects of the project have improved, while others have become highly controversial.

In the beginning the UAW project was planned as a collaborative project by the Medford District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and RRSNF within the Applegate Adaptive Management Area (AMA). The agencies even considered releasing a joint EA for the project. Both USFS and BLM staff participated in meetings alongside Applegate Valley community members. Both agencies wanted to rebuild the trust in the BLM that some Applegate residents had lost after the controversial Nedsbar Timber Sale.

The joint planning of the UAW project changed drastically when, only eight months into the process, in August

2016, the BLM released its new Resource Management Plan (RMP) for southwest Oregon that eliminated their recognition of the Applegate AMA, a sign to many residents that the BLM no longer valued community-driven projects in the Applegate Watershed.

The BLM's new timber-heavy RMP also made it impossible for the agency to support habitat restoration as the primary goal of the UAW project. In fact, the RMP pushes timber as the primary goal for BLM projects. Over time the BLM slowly pulled back from this project, sometimes sending only one staff member to meetings and, more recently, sending none at all.

UAW meetings started out with a strong emphasis on community input and local place-based knowledge. Although it was well understood that the main impetus behind the UAW project from the agencies' perspectives was fuel reduction and thinning, community members pushed hard for a comprehensive project that included riparian restoration, meadow enhancement, pollinator habitat planting, nonmotorized hiking

trails along old mine ditches, etc., in combination with prescribed fire, fuel reduction near homes, thinning in old plantation stands, and commercial timber as a restoration byproduct. (Some of these proposals have, unfortunately, been dropped from the plan.) For the most part, during initial planning, those who attended meetings agreed about the direction of the project, and UAW was shaping up to be a feel-good project.

The tone of the UAW planning process changed on the day participants were asked to identify "proposed actions," when an outside group, the Medford Motorcycle Riders Association, showed up for the first time and drew lines on the maps representing proposed motorcycle trails through unroaded habitats in the Upper Applegate, including a highly controversial proposal for a motorbike route on Boaz Mountain. From this point forward, what had been a habitat restoration project now included numerous proposed motorcycle trails.

Many Applegate Valley residents came to heated meetings, adamantly opposing new motorcycle trails due to the already high concentration of motorized routes on public land in the Applegate. Many felt the agencies had already sacrificed too much of the Applegate to motorbike and OHV (off-highway vehicle) routes. (In fact, the Applegate has a higher concentration of OHV routes than anywhere else in southern Oregon.)

How did motorcycle trails become part of a habitat restoration project? The USFS changed the definition of "restoration" to allow for new motorcycle trails. The definition that the collaborative partners had been working with for two years was suddenly changed, and although some community participants objected to the change, we were overridden and the new, loose definition of restoration has remained, allowing motorcycle trails to be part of a restoration project. Will this occur in other collaborative projects in the region, or just in the Applegate?

There's much more to this story, like the "Iterative NEPA" (National Environmental Policy Act) process that hasn't been so iterative, and concerns over the project being tied to the controversial Rogue Basin Cohesive Forest Restoration Strategy. When released, the environmental analysis will show where the project is headed, and hopefully all controversial aspects of the project will be dropped and the project will, in the end, be something the community can support.

I strongly support the prescribed fire and fuels work near homes that is needed to make our community more fire-safe, and I appreciate the agencies' prescribed fire strategy. I believe the UAW project should move forward where there is agreement and general consensus, creating a truly collaborative project.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Smart meters

I have been reading a lot about smart meters in the past months, and your recent articles in the Fall 2018 *Applegater* were very informational.

I have a real issue with this whole thing because of the lack of transparency from the power company. They brush aside safety concerns, pointing out how much radiation consumers are already exposed to, like it's okay to add more. Some of us don't use cell phones and don't have microwaves in our homes due to safety concerns.

I have been around for a long time, and it's been my experience that the public utilities don't do things to improve systems for the benefit of the consumer. In every case I've experienced, their actions have increased costs to me and my neighbors. The benefits of smart meters

most likely will fill the pockets of Pacific Power—and empty ours.

The question as to whether smart meters will increase the monthly bills of customers was very politically sidestepped by Pacific Power in their discussion on page 24—didn't say yes, didn't say no. Talked around the issue. Of course, it's going to raise power bills! It's not like their insights into the fact that my freezer costs me money will prompt me to unplug it! The response from Pacific Power to that question was insulting.

They go on to say that even if you choose *not* to have a smart meter installed, they are going to charge you \$36 a month for a monthly reading of your meter. So why now? They have been reading my meter for 30 years, and those charges were factored into the bills I have paid.

Pacific Power should not have the

privilege to do as they please without public input. It's basically "do as we say or we shut off the power." It would be far more cost-effective for the county to ban smart meters altogether.

Karen Affriseo, Grants Pass, OR

Jordan Cove Pipeline

Avista Utilities notifies customers that a pipeline rupture in British Columbia might result in a shortage to residences and businesses in southern Oregon. They ask us to conserve natural gas. Is that all? No! In Prince George, BC, the First Nation evacuates its community due to the massive blaze caused by this rupture.

It's not an isolated incident. In 2018 alone, we've seen disastrous pipeline ruptures, fires, and spills in 23 communities—now 24—across the nation. They've all been classified as "significant incidents" by the Pipeline

and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA).

According to the agency, a "significant incident" results if any of the following occurs: fatality or injury requiring inpatient hospitalization; \$50,000 or more in total costs, measured in 1984 dollars; liquid releases of five or more barrels (42 US gallons/barrel); or releases resulting in an unintentional fire or explosion.

Those who are promoting the fracked natural gas pipeline under the Rogue River and across 230 miles of public and private properties claim it's all about jobs and economic growth. Most of the jobs are temporary, but the potential damage to property and environment is inestimable.

The record of significant incidents tells us this pipeline and Jordan Cove aren't worth the risk.

David Sours, Talent, OR

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