

MY OPINION FROM BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR

Safekeeping the lands we share in common

BY CHRIS BRATT

First, do no harm

I'm lucky to be a recipient of Medicare (it's even better than Obamacare) and social security. I earned these great benefits through a lifetime of hard work and paying in to these marvelous programs. I'm also thankful for all the people and policy makers in the past who worked so hard to give older Americans the health and financial security we share today. I hope it remains a safe bet for everyone.

I feel like I have an added benefit when I go to see my doctors, knowing they have taken a pledge with their Hippocratic Oath that promises "First, do no harm." It's an admirable basic goal that has saved many lives for centuries and led to better results for patients and for improved health care in general. The idea of first doing no harm cannot only improve our bodies and spirits, it can also open new doors to the way we address our total environment. It can create new habits and ways of thinking about how we interact with nature.

I've been thinking for awhile about this pledge the doctors take and have concluded that all of us, whatever work we do, should be taking the same oath. There is so much fear and uncertainty about the ecological and financial health of our planet that everyone needs to be helping to lower the risk of ongoing unacceptable damage to our surroundings. Most importantly, a promise of "First, do no harm" is especially necessary for people who manage or use natural resources on our public lands, oceans and forests. These decision makers and users of the public domain can't continue the risky, contentious and damaging management practices of the past. There is popular support and scientific evidence for less destructive treatment of our environment.

There is also a universal calling for assurance that the planet's resources will be protected and maintained into the future. Isn't it time we end the decline

and corruption of our natural world by following the doctors' advice?

The third time is the charm

It's always seemed to me (at least for 35 years) that the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) public forest management actions are in a continuous state of change and wavering in the shifting political winds. Every time a new president (some with old ideas) is elected to office, they embark on a new BLM Forest Management Plan for Oregon. So, a new BLM plan

revision was just announced by the Obama administration in March, and will be number three, one for each of the last three presidents. The last one, a George Bush plan to cut a lot more trees, had a very long planning period and a very short life.

In promoting this new Plan Revision, BLM spokespeople are saying, "There is a bunch of new information out now." And, "It seems like a good time to get the planning started." I think the new information they're speaking about was already available, they just didn't use it. Hopefully, the new revision plans will be more environmentally friendly than the last Bush plan, which the March 3, 2012, Medford Mail Tribune reported to "have been through more court cases than a habitual criminal."

For me, the stated reason ("new information") for starting another new Forest Plan Revision is a smoke screen. Legal action disqualified the Bush administration's Western Oregon Plan Revision (WOPR) that illegally ignored the federal Endangered Species Act requirements. If the BLM (in the Bush WOPR) had looked forward to returning to a new balanced approach in managing public lands to protect fish and wildlife, they could have saved lots of time, money

and unnecessary legal problems.

I believe the main problems in public forest management stem from law and policy makers always looking at BLM's Oregon forests as geese that are continually laying golden eggs. Their decisions have always rested on the mistaken theory that cutting more trees will somehow solve all of Oregon's economic and social problems.

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Their theory doesn't recognize that there are many more essential resource values to be considered.

These values reach far beyond just timber production and resource extraction for industry well-being.

Change of tune

As a consequence of having to start another BLM Forest Plan Revision, coupled with an uncertain future of federal payments to many struggling rural counties, additional proposals for managing these public lands are now being circulated. Some of these recommendations will attempt to solve the timber counties financial problems as well.

A new forest management submission by the much-respected forestry professors Jerry Franklin and Norm Johnson is already being tested on BLM lands in the Middle Applegate drainage "Pilot" projects. Their plan uses a restoration forestry approach emphasizing thinning. They designate certain areas as critical habitat for wildlife species and protect old-growth trees 150 years and older. My considerable involvement with these "Pilot" projects so far shows them to be a very positive management program with some real community participation in the planning. The "Pilot" model could end up as a preferred alternative in

the new Forest Plan Revision.

Another more radical proposal is being put forward by Congressman Peter DeFazio called the O & C (Oregon and California) Trust, Conservation and Jobs Act. If this proposed law is enacted, it would place 1.5-million acres of BLM lands in Oregon into a logging trust to be managed by an appointed board solely to generate revenue for the counties. This logging trust would be managed much like private industry lands (okay to clear-cut and spray herbicides). It would operate under the laws and guidelines of the Oregon Department of Forestry. The remaining BLM lands (approximately one million acres) are slated to be transferred and managed by the U.S. Forest Service under their laws and guidelines. To me, this is a scary, bad bill that is advocating more intense management and a giveaway of our public lands. More information next time when more of the potential impacts and details are known.

In the meantime, let's recognize the wonders of Oregon's land, forests and communities and our obligation as citizens to preserve and revitalize them for future generations. "First, do no harm" is a great doctrine to live by. Can I sign you up? Let me know.

Chris Bratt
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Chris Bratt

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