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OPINION

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(By Tania Gonzalez Ortega)

Editorial

Seeking balance

Sometimes it is not always clear which is worse, the pest or the pesticide. In the coming days and weeks, a couple of helicopters will be making low passes over nearly 12,000 acres of Methow Valley land to try and fend off a projected outbreak of voracious, tree-eating Douglas fir tussock moth caterpillars.

Both the Forest Service and the local group of upper valley landowners have done a fine job of getting the word out about the spray program and trying to gather input from residents and answer questions. The pesticide applicators will be flying low, just over the tree canopy, to avoid drift.

There seems to be no vocal opposition to the spray project, but one gets a sense of uneasiness from some folks who live near targeted spray zones. We have learned to not always take government and corporate sources at their word, so when "they" say a particular bio-control is relatively safe for humans, it is not unreasonable to be skeptical.

Indeed, it makes more sense to limit our exposure to questionable substances, many of which have turned out to cause health problems long after exposure and long after they were considered "safe."

With that in mind, it would be reasonable to heed the warnings about the local tussock moth spray program and try to stay either indoors or get away from the area during spraying.

TM Biocontrol, which the Forest Service is spraying over 11,000 acres around the valley, is considered a severe eye irritant which could cause irreversible eye damage. People are advised to avoid contact with skin, eyes or clothing.

Foray 48B, which the private landowners are spraying over about 900 acres in the upper valley, has been largely untested for its health dangers, according to the Material Safety Data Sheet for the compound. It is considered an irritant to the skin, eyes and throat.

While spraying the TM Biocontrol virus or the Foray 48B virus on the tussock moth caterpillars may decrease the damage to trees this year, their use does not come without potential side effects to the human population as well.

In the long run, the challenge for the Forest Service, Department of Natural Resources and valley landowners is to try and address the issues that are pushing our forests out of balance in the first place. Some variables, such as water availability, cannot be controlled. But dense stands of uniform, single-species trees – Douglas fir in particular – are at a higher risk for infestation than a mixed, more open forest environment.

Our admission that generations of snuffing out wildfires has created an unhealthy forest is a start in trying to transform our forests back to some semblance of the sustainable, diverse ecosystems they once were.

But the fact is, once you start managing an ecosystem, you have to keep managing it. So until we find that balance, steer clear of the helicopters and seek out fresh, clean air.

– John Hanron

Letters to the editor

Unhappy with increase

To all real estate taxpayers,

It is time for the property owners to protest the new real estate assessment. If your assessment has gone up, and most have, you need to check to see if you could actually get that amount for your home or property if you were to sell it now.

Real estate is supposed to be assessed at fair market value. Since August 2008, real estate prices and sales have gone down drastically in the Methow Valley. I know this through my research for an appeal I had on April 2010. The county is still assessing at prices in 2005, 2006 and 2007, which were the highest in the history of the world! Some prices have gone down as much as \$100,000 to \$150,000 and more.

The assessment on my house went up \$61,800 on the 2009 assessment. I appealed through the Board of Equalization, which overruled the determination of the assessor. My assessment was reduced. This reduced my real estate taxes by \$531.84.

The appeal process was not too hard. Going before the Board of Equalization was not as bad as I had thought it would be. The board was pleasant and helpful.

You have until July 1 to file an appeal, so you need to act soon. The directions are on your assessment.

In the 45 years that I have been paying real estate taxes, the county and state have asked for more and more tax every year and they get it. They have not saved for when the economy is down, like it is now. They keep spending because they know they can get more money from the taxpayer. At this time, a lot of people are not as financially secure as in the past. It is time for the real estate taxpayer to say, "enough!" Appeal this assessment and let's get the

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county to have true and fair value on our properties. Let them know we are very unhappy with the increase. The more taxpayers that appeal, the more chance we have of being heard.

Donna L. Orr
Carlton

Plenty of blame

To the editor:

The ongoing oil well blowout in the gulf resulted from a series of technical problems that accumulated to culminate in the loss of control of the well. The first warning should have been the loss of blowout preventer (BOP) control redundancy. This was followed by loss of partial function on various parts of the BOP due to dead batteries and low hydraulic fluid pressures.

Next came a software problem. There was no lockout of the drill pipe pusher when the annular gasket was activated. Thus an elbow bump of a joystick jerked up four miles of 20-inch pipe a full 15 feet, destroying the integrity of the rubber annular gasket, needed to measure pressure in the well.

Over three weeks, rubber bits from the gasket rose with the drill mud. A double handful was displayed to the drill boss. Finally, to pop the cork on the champagne, BP execs ordered the early removal of the heavy, four-mile column of drill mud.

This was a complete failure of government regulators and regulations. This was also a complete backfire on the oil industry lobbyists. The oil industry has achieved regulatory capture – a system where the industry self-regulates under rules written by their own lobbyists. Expensive, but possible with our coin-operated, ever-incumbent Congress. And also up to now, a profitable system.

Prevention was possible.

A very simple set of rules requiring full functionality of the BOP, backed by an independent observing agency, could have guaranteed compliance.

Aircraft operators have to keep maintenance current. It's not that hard and it is good business in the long run. Would that we could go back in time and do a week's worth of BOP repairs.

And it looks like Congress won't be up to the task either. They are already calling for international standards, thus putting off the task indefinitely and so deflecting criticism.

Meanwhile, the mob is muttering and blame is rapidly being exported to London. No good can come of it. Of course BP must pay, but the blame should be placed squarely in D.C., the only place these regulations can be fixed – and fixed they must be, lest the capital investments of the oil industry prudently move elsewhere.

Dan Aspenwall
Winthrop

Clarifying PUD points

Editor

An informational note to clarify comments on PUD plans for a second Methow Valley transmission line.

The valley has had reliable, low-cost power for decades (since the construction of the Loup line following the flood of 1948 and investment in Wells Dam). The PUD has not enhanced the situation by investing in WHOOPS nuclear generation and diesel generators, or by retaining its 56 percent rate increase in response to the short-term Enron-induced "emergency" in 2001.

The PUD refused to investigate using new composite conductors in a rebuild of the L-L line; that would use an existing (recently cleared) right-of-way (not interfering with property rights), existing structures (recently fireproofed), carry triple current power, and be much less expensive than a new line. The L-L line should have been re-conducted 10 years ago and avoided millions for lawyers and consultants.

It's curious that PUD commissioners and business interests in the Okanogan Valley are bigger boosters of raising rates by investing in a new Methow line than local residents.

As for "a shorter route to Wells Dam," the existing line is the shortest line to most valley residents. Power from Wells Dam goes to Bridgeport, up the Okanogan Valley and then over the Loup from Malott; there is no line from Wells to Pateros along the Columbia.

The name calling ("enviro-nazi," "self-anointed elitism," "enviro-mafia country club") and the idea that the plan for a new line was not proven in court to be wrong reflect the uninformed opinion of one Okanogan resident. The judge's decision was that PUD commissioners (two Okanogan residents, one Methow Valley resident) had the authority to make the decision – right or wrong was not decided.

Don Johnson
Carlton

Faithful discretion

Dear Editor:

The Board of Trustees of the North Central Regional Library opposes censorship at its most fundamental level and we strive in all our decisions to support our mission, "To promote reading and lifelong learning." We affirm the right of all people to use our libraries safely without fear of others using library computers to commit illegal acts, harass employees or expose children and others to unwanted assaults of inappropriate behavior.

The lawsuit brought by the ACLU against the library, Bradburn et al. vs. North Central Regional Library, raises profound issues. While pornography can be lawful and constitutionally protected information, we believe that it is inappropriate to include it in the library's collections. Accessing Internet pornography at the library has the potential to harm our children and other patrons. Library employees deserve workplaces free of pornography and the behavior it sometimes inspires.

We believe our patrons expect us to provide resources and facilities that are conducive to contemplative thought and intellectual stimulation. We also believe the public wants the board of trustees to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars that support the North Central Regional Library. However difficult and controversial, we will not abdicate the responsibility to make these important decisions.

We are gratified by the Washington State Supreme Court's recent decision that "just as a public library has discretion to make content-based decisions about which magazines and books to include in its collection, it has discretion to make decisions about Internet content." Our commitment to the communities of North Central Washington remains, as always, to exercise this discretion faithfully and with the utmost integrity.

The Board of Trustees of the North Central Regional Library

Deborah Moore, Chair, Grant County; Lynn Beltz, Ferry County; Jim Brucker, Okanogan County; Gail Huntley, Grant County; Alec McKay, Douglas County; Jennifer Maydole, Chelan County; Barbara Wolff, Chelan County

Correct spray info

Dear Editor,

Your article about the impending spraying of areas in the Methow Valley with Foray 48B referred to it as 28B. People who want to research the risks involved with this product will not find them unless you correct this.

It would be wonderful if you could discover and publish the specific areas to be sprayed with Foray 48B so that people who wish to get out of the way could do so.

Thank you.
Audrey Lyle
Seattle

Editor's note: We stand corrected about the Foray 48B typographical error. We did change the text to reflect the correct name in the online version of the story shortly after publication last week. The article about the tussock moth spray project and maps in this week's paper are an attempt to give residents and visitors more information about the spraying, which will be happening this month on federal and private land around the valley, with spray areas concentrated around Mazama, Eightmile and Twisp River.

Rally around conservation

Dear Editor,

We would like to extend a huge THANK YOU to all who joined in making the Imagine the Methow donor thank you and community celebration event on Memorial Day weekend at the Winthrop Barn such a fun and memorable gathering.

We extend special thanks to Luc and the Lovingtons for the home-grown entertainment, Cameron Green for the delicious meal, each of the more than 40 volunteers who shared their time and talents, and a long list of very generous local businesses and partners whose donations, discounts and services remind us of the tremendous resources we enjoy here in the Methow Valley.

Most importantly, we'd like to thank the entire community for rallying around this historic effort in support of voluntary private land conservation in the Methow Valley.

With warm appreciation,
Roxie and Carl Miller, Dave Sabold and Sonya Campion
Imagine the Methow Campaign co-chairs

Bradley supports Cindy for clerk

Editor,

I feel that I owe a debt of gratitude to all the people in Okanogan County who have supported me over the 38 years that I have served as the Okanogan County clerk. It has been important to me to have been successful at bridging party politics. I believe that bipartisan cooperation is the key in the health of our county as a whole.

With regard to the office of the clerk, I am endorsing Democrat Cindy Gagne for that position. Her successful business management experience is what the office needs. Cindy has firsthand experience with collecting debt on behalf of businesses. Given the financial stresses experienced by the county as a business, Cindy's skills will ensure that the clerk's office will be solvent. Although the office of the clerk is a partisan position, it is not a broad-based policy-making office (like the commissioners). Cindy has earned a wealth of experience in successfully negotiating across partisan lines for a number of years while in municipal government. She is someone that the county can be proud of in her representation on the many boards she would be assigned to as your clerk.

I have truly enjoyed my career as the elected clerk. I am confident that what is needed is the business perspective that Cindy would bring to this career challenge. I urge all of my past supporters to lend your support in seating Cindy Gagne to the position of Okanogan County Clerk.

Jackie Bradley
Okanogan

My Turn

Fish habitat is common goal for groups at RiverBank building

By Lee Hatcher

You may have noticed people snorkeling a stream in mid-winter, or traipsing along irrigation canals with survey instruments in 100-degree summer heat. Maybe you saw stacks of blue pipe or excavators working near the river or in the canals. Perhaps you noticed all the people entering and leaving the old NCNB building at 206 Glover St. across from the post office, or that the parking lot there is often overflowing with vehicles.

All of these activities are connected. Evidently some in the Methow Valley are wondering about what is going on and who is involved. We want to answer these questions directly for everyone. So, on Friday, June 25 from 3-7 p.m., we are hosting the RiverBank open house for the public to come and meet the people who work here and learn about what we do.

We now call the old NCNB building the RiverBank. It is a collaborative environment housing 13 organizations working on restoration of fish habitat. Many more organizations, as well as local landowners meet here. We strive to successfully balance the needs of people and fish by bringing together diverse community interests to create lasting solutions that work for both our community and the natural environment. All of us are figuring out how to improve habitat while protecting water and land for citizens in the valley.

Calling this place the RiverBank seems appropriate: we invest in the local river and riparian ecology. We also hold and protect the community's interest and investment in the health of our rivers and the availability of water. We work with the community for its ecologic, economic, and social benefit. The RiverBank is a storehouse of expertise: fish and riparian biologists, river ecologists, surveyors, engineers, planning coordinators, project managers and more.

It is also a conduit to bring outside funds into this valley to restore our habitat in ways that fit the community's needs now and into the future. We even kept the vault from the old bank; unfortunately it was empty when we moved into the building. So, we look elsewhere for funding. The Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, Washington River Project of Trout Unlimited and the Bureau of Reclamation work to secure funding that support efficient irrigation for local irrigators and projects that enhance habitat diversity. These projects support local community members and businesses while working hard to restore the natural processes of our river ecology.

The Bureau of Reclamation leases most of the building and facilitated various organizations, private, non-profit and government agencies leasing space in the building. This formed a creative environment for restoration and protection of fish habitat in the Methow Watershed basin. These differing groups share common goals and are connected by their interest and expertise in water resources, river ecology, habitat restoration, agriculture, and economic and community interests. Working together in the RiverBank creates a sense of teamwork and investment in the community that could not exist in any other setting.

Local specialists employed by these organizations, along with many other partners, work together planning and implementing projects to improve fish habitat, remove fish passage barriers, and update irrigation systems in the Methow Basin. We work with landowners, farmers, ranchers, shareholders and irrigation directors to improve water use, availability and efficiency to help satisfy irrigation needs, while increasing the amount of water left in the Methow Valley's streams for fish and ecosystem health.

We also work with many other organizations outside the RiverBank, sometimes through a number of public meetings held monthly in our conference room. The Methow Restoration Council convenes meetings at the RiverBank in which local organizations and citizens participate. The MRC is the Watershed Action Team formed by the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board to coordinate habitat restoration projects in the Methow sub-basin. The Methow Watershed Council also convenes monthly meetings. These involve implementation of the Methow Basin Watershed Plan for allocating water among towns, agriculture and homes while maintaining streamflows for fish.

As part of a coordinated education effort, we encourage young people interested in natural resources to come in, introduce themselves and look around. We have opportunities for high school students to apply for volunteer summer monitoring activities and earn community service credit. Stop by or call Paula Mackrow at 997-3200, extension 267, for more information.

So, if you're curious about what's going on in the old bank building and want to learn more, come meet the people who work here. Find out what's going on in your backyard and along your rivers by attending the RiverBank's open house on Friday afternoon, June 25, from 3-7 pm. Light refreshments will be served.

Lee Hatcher is the coordinator for the Methow watershed Council.



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