

Editorial: The Long Goodbye(s)

September, 2002

A Message to East Coast Sierra Club Contributors

First off, we don't mean to pick on the Sierra Club alone. If you contribute to any of the multitude of environmental groups, like the Wilderness Society, Greenpeace, The World Wildlife Federation or the Audobon Society that claim to care about the environment and at the same time advocate no timber cutting on our national forests, please, count yourself in.

It's time to say goodbye to portions of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Maybe you contributed money to save wilderness areas like this one. The Wilderness was a part of the Biscuit Fire in southern Oregon.

Sorry, it's burned up. Gone in a whiff of smoke.

Organizations that said they would save wild, scenic areas like this one thought the best way to do so was to prevent thinning or cutting of any kind. Problem is, eventually all living things die. If you don't clear brush, thin trees, and remove dying or diseased trees, then Mother Nature uses fire to get the job done. Only fire doesn't discriminate between the pretty flowers, the wildlife, the endangered plant species and all the excess brush and trees. It all goes up in flames.

Oregonians aren't so happy with you who contribute to these sorry, wasteful policies. It means that in southern Oregon alone millions of board feet of timber were reduced to ashes rather than providing jobs and tax dollars for schools and highways. Not to mention the horrific blight on the landscape that will take decades to recover. For over a century most Oregonians have been careful stewards of these beautiful forests. The past two decades of poor management have left polluting smoke and cinders.

Let's put it in perspective: Oregon's Biscuit fire by itself has burned an area roughly two-thirds the state of Rhode Island: two-thirds of the whole state. Or an area roughly one-third the state of Delaware.

But for East Coasters to really put the whole mess in perspective maybe this will help. So far (and it's not over yet) fires across the West have burned a total area larger than the entire state of New Jersey. It's an area more than twice as large as Rhode Island, Delaware and Washington D.C. put together.

Poof. Goodbye New Jersey.

Maybe that would matter to the people who write checks to “save the environment” when the truth is their policies reduce it to ashes. But since it’s the West...well, out of sight, out of mind.

So say goodbye to over 6 million acres of forests in the West—this year alone. Goodbye to the trees, the grasslands, the native species, the wildlife. Say a long goodbye.

The Signature Business

Lots of Democrats and union types are crowing about Bill Sizemore’s thrashing in the recent initiative petition drives. His undoing was thanks almost entirely to the efforts of the Voter Education Project (VEP), a union-backed group whose hounding of petition signers has slowed or halted the success of many initiatives.

Sizemore’s political checkoff measure for union members was one of several proposed that did not gather enough valid signatures to make the November ballot. At least that’s what the highly partisan Democrat nominee for Senate and our current Secretary of State Bill Bradbury said. Though first he said the measure qualified. But then the VEP brought claims of invalid signatures. In some cases VEP said the signatures were duplicates. In other cases they said the signatures were not that of a registered voter. And Bradbury's office agreed.

Hmm. Think for a moment how easy it would be when signature gatherers are busy working the streets for someone who wanted to undermine someone else’s ballot measure to have someone sign their name twice, or maybe sign another name. That would be illegal right? And in the heat of conflict, in their zeal to eliminate Bill Sizemore, union members would never do anything illegal. They would never purposely have someone sign one signature sheet, then show up at a different location and sign the same measure. No way.

Of course there are legitimate reasons that signatures might not match—as we age our writing changes, at times our writing differs, and signing on a clipboard outdoors can often be clumsy. So what about the invalid signatures? Oregon Taxpayers United is tracking down the signatures disqualified for not matching and getting signed affidavits from those registered voters. Thus far, not one has actually been invalid. Not one. The 4,800 names tossed out on this basis would have put the measure on the ballot.

And who judges whether you indeed are the registered voter who signed the petition and exercised your right to the Oregon initiative process? Who analyzes the names? Most often that will be a public employee, a union member. Hmm.

Maybe you aren’t worried about the ethical problems raised in this year’s seesawing ballot measure results at the Secretary of State’s office. Maybe you aren’t concerned about the inherent conflicts in the union money fueling the so-called “voter education” project. But if legitimate measures are being kept off the ballot, then you may be kissing

goodbye to your right to participate in the initiative process. Worse, according to OTU the same people who verify petition signatures have the authority to judge whether you are the registered voter who signed your vote-by-mail ballot. And they can say goodbye to your vote if they claim your signature doesn't match. Hmm.

Gone Fishin'

At the end of eight years as Governor of Oregon, it would be nice to bid farewell and say something appreciative about the state's talented chief executive John Kitzhaber. One thing you could say—the man knew fish.

But, it's bad manners not to know when to get off the stage. Even Bill Clinton took a lower profile in the campaign to succeed him, if that's possible, than Kitzhaber now seems prepared to do.

When Kitzhaber vetoed the legislature's budget compromise bill he took time to lecture the state about how this was his attempt to reintroduce principle back into Oregon politics. Remember, the governor is a romantic. When he was reelected in '98 he quoted Bobby Kennedy quoting the English poet Tennyson, and dreaming of a rebirth of the liberal passions of '68. As a romantic, he had big dreams—to tear down the dams (a proposal Washington's Democrat Governor Gary Locke didn't want to get near). When he didn't get his way he pouted, and abdicated much of his second term, which is pretty unprecedented when you have as high approval ratings as the Kitzhaber once had. The Governor's pattern of romantic self-absorption followed by retreat became even more pronounced in his second term. Example: Months of teasing the media about challenging Gordon Smith ended when the governor went fishing after September 11 and issued a press release to fellow Democrats that they couldn't count on him. Once again, with the state facing almost a \$1 billion deficit and three special sessions, Kitzhaber returned to the romantic, seizing in his mind the high road of principle.

The problem: credibility. After eight years as governor, four spent in abdication, there isn't a person in Oregon with less credibility to lecture the state about putting principle back into Oregon politics. If he cares that much about it, where has he been the last eight years? The college freshman romanticism about pure government may be easy to take from say—freshman in college—but it's nauseating when it comes from a seasoned politician who had everything his way for eight years, including the largest microphone in the state.

Now, instead of gracefully surrendering power and smoothing the way for a successful transition, Kitzhaber petulantly demands eleventh-hour solutions to complex, long-term problems and last minute leadership from term-limited legislators.

Leadership? Solutions? That was your job, Mr. Governor. Emphasis on was. For the sake of all concerned, please cut short the long goodbye, and hang up the sign that says "Gone Fishin'."