

Editorial

The Sky Is Falling

By Larry Huss

So declared the Oregon Conservation Network in an email to supporters shortly before Christmas. And what is causing the “sky to fall?” Well, Measure 37, of course. Measure 37 is the wildly popular land use reform law that requires government to pay landowners for the use of their property or refrain from taking it.

You remember the dire predictions of 1000 Friends and every major newspaper editorial board that passage of Measure 37 would mean the environmental ruin of Oregon. You remember the predictions by these same alarmists that the cost of Measure 37 would run into the billions of dollars. Or, as the Oregon Conservation Network (OCN) hyperventilated, “Fertile farmland and open spaces are being converted to sprawl and mining operations... The Oregon that we know and love will no longer exist if Measure 37 claims like this are allowed to go forward.”

What a load of bat guano. Two years have passed and not one of their predictions has come true. However, they never give up, and so they are now intent on making a mountain out of a molehill. And the major newspapers of the state should be ashamed of printing their propaganda without asking one serious question or putting the matter in context.

Let’s look at the facts: Oregon occupies about 61 million acres of land. Just less than 60 percent of that (34 million acres) is owned by the state, federal or local governments and is , therefore, exempt from development. Only about 1.2 percent of Oregon is currently developed. Yes, that’s right. Only 1.2 percent or 730,000 acres are developed. The concern about “open spaces” is a crock. Ninety-eight point eight percent of Oregon is already “open spaces.” When you hear the environmental extremists talking about “open spaces” what they are really talking about is using your land for their purposes without paying you a dime.

The OCN email refers to “a demand by an out-of-state corporation to turn 32,000 acres of forests in the Coast Range into suburban-style development.” It’s always amusing to read the sinister references to “out-of-state corporations” by the extremist crowd while they quietly rake in hundreds of thousands of dollars from “out-of-state” interests in support of their radical environmental agenda. Apparently, there is “good” out-of-state money and “bad” out-of-state money, and only the environmental extremists are capable of determining which is which.

Be that as it may, the “sinister” out-of-state corporation is none other than long time Oregon business, taxpayer and employer Plum Creek Lumber. (By the way, few if any of the out-of-state supporters of the environmental groups have ever paid taxes or provided jobs in Oregon.) In announcing its intention to file its Measure 37 claim, Plum Creek acknowledged that little of the land was suitable for or would ever be developed for housing. Even if Plum Creek wanted to develop the land for suburban-style housing, it

would have to get all of the environmental permits required of every other developer, including providing sources for clean water, adequate sewage treatment, roads, utilities, etc. In other words, it ain't never going to happen. Not in your lifetime, not even in the infinite lifetime of a corporation.

These are just scare tactics. The same tactics used repeatedly by the radical environmental lobby.

You may remember that when Oregon adopted its famous land use system, it was held out to be the model for all of the United States. Thirty years have passed and not one other state has adopted it — not a particularly ringing endorsement of “model legislation.”

You may also remember that when Oregon adopted this land use system, the principal architects warned that the system needed to be modified to compensate landowners for the diminution in value of their land through imposition of land use restrictions. But it never happened because these same radical environmental groups opposed every attempt by the legislature to remedy the problem.

For 30 years, landowners have been denied the use of their own lands because of environmental restrictions. For 30 years, the state and local governments have enjoyed the unfettered use of this land without paying a dime. For 30 years, this abuse went unchecked until the voters of Oregon got fed up with it — got fed up with takings, got fed up with phony alarmists rhetoric of the radical environmentalists, got fed up with the insincere acknowledgements of the problem but never a solution.

And now, the same groups who opposed *any* solution are demanding that the legislature and the governor adopt legislation that will “suspend” Measure 37 while they study it for awhile. That is exactly the same rationale they extended in opposing every previous legislative solution. In the end, the study never ends, the suspension never ends, the solution never occurs, and Oregon is back to abusing landowners at the behest of the environmentalist who still are insistent in locking up Oregon forever.

The radical environmental groups are engaged in a coordinated effort to stampede the legislature. They are contacting every member — what are you doing?