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**OREGON STATE SENATOR**  
NEWS FROM **Dennis Linthicum**

## Finch and Fires

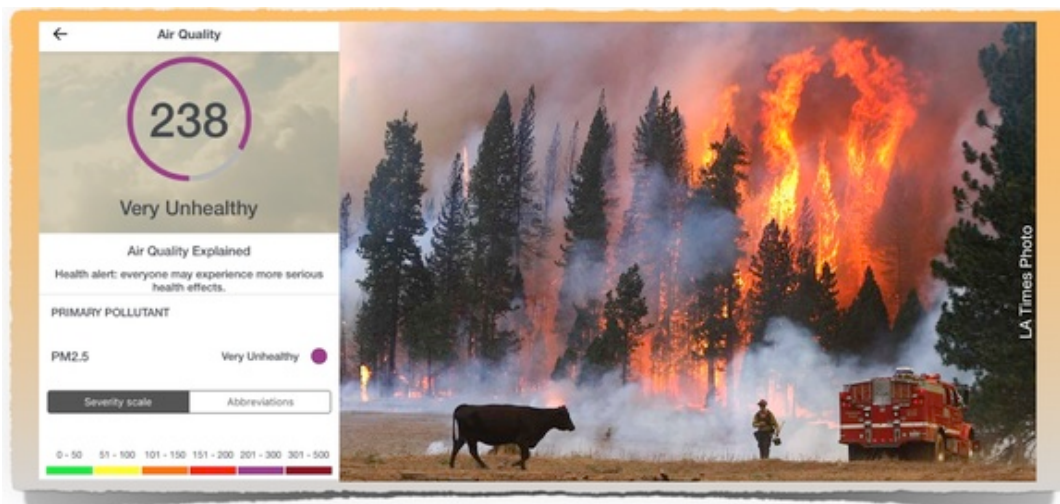
In Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, a rabid dog growls his way onto the street where Atticus Finch and his family live. The entire neighborhood is watching, waiting and afraid to act. They see the threat, yet because of their own weakness in the face of danger, they are unwilling to respond. Most of the townsfolk in the fictional town of Maycomb, Alabama, simply bolt their doors and wait for someone else to do the dirty work. Atticus, was the one man who was willing to exercise his own courage and prudence by stepping up and shooting the dog.

In the story, Lee uses the rapid dog as a symbol for a "madness" that must be slain. What is the madness? – unconscionable community consensus.

In the novel, community consensus had rallied against Atticus because he was a lawyer, willing to defend a man that the town believed was guilty. Public consensus said, "Tom Robinson was guilty," simply because he was a black man. In this way, the book, shows us that overwhelming consensus means nothing if it is based on unfounded bias and prejudice.

This same type of dangerous consensus is what litters the field of discussion for most environmental fads. The tragedy happening in our public forests today follows this same vein. These vast resources are burning-up as we watch. The paradox of forest management is that forests are healthier when well-rounded policies regarding harvest, thinning, and re-planting are used. Unfortunately, the current one-size-fits-all policy implies that humans should remove themselves from the forest because Mother Nature knows best.

The Wilderness initiatives that we see destroying our forests were created with good intentions and sound principles. At the time, environmental ecology was not well understood, and most regulatory attempts were aimed at egregious mistakes. However, in an attempt to understand how the world works and how humanity fits in, a faulty assumption arose – "man is the problem." This mindset implies that man's technological achievements are unwelcome. This is why motorized vehicles are not allowed in Wilderness Areas and why there is a concerted effort to remove the four dams along the Klamath River.



David Attenborough reinforced this faulty worldview with his claim that humans are, “a plague on the Earth.” His faulty model dovetails with Richard Dawkins evolutionary maxim that suggests the purpose of life is only reproduction. In humans, this means our “selfish genes” are bound to mindless reproductive tendencies bursting forth like maggots on roadside carrion.

However, a more appropriate stewardship model would recognize that humans are the only free, moral agents on the planet. This means only people can use insight, judgement, wisdom and discernment to engineer a better world for ourselves, our posterity, animals and environment. In a word, people care.

People also have the technical expertise to control their environment by creating, converting and utilizing the planet’s natural resources for energy, cell phones, and tomatoes. Quite frankly, neither the Ocelot, Octopus, or Opossum give a rip about the plight of the Blue Whale or Bandicoot.

Environmentalism has generated a robust record of direct observations about the circumstances in our natural world. However, the physical data collection efforts don’t lead to, or create policy direction, guidelines or programs. Those are set by non-scientific and politically motivated actors seeking to maximize their own power.

The modern environmental movement has mainly been effective by using small, politically correct groups to commandeer the political power stored within the walls of the over-burdening regulatory state. When tax-payer funded bureaucracies are used to force compliance with the latest fad then protected markets are created and regulated, with profits for the chosen few. Their Malthusian reasoning was simple and straight-forward; controls were needed because too many people are consuming too many resources

Legislators assumed that a one-size fits all, top-down policy would be the best solution, but these regulatory efforts are typically mired in unintended consequences and bureaucratic failure. Single-focus strategies are problematic because they force large swaths of the landowners to follow one set of rules. Yet, all landowners are not the

swaths of the landscape to fall under one set of rules. Yet, all landscapes are not the same. Additionally, the rules, regulations and regimentation force millions of people to behave like herded animals. This, in turn, strains both the market and the environment.

Economist Barry Brownstein notes, “Politicians who trust their seat-of-the-pants good intentions inevitably become authoritarians. They are relying on the limits of their error-prone minds and not on proven principles that promote human flourishing.”

Every summer it is easy to see how many trees are being saved through the misguided policy effort of curtailing forest production – just look outside. You can see the saved trees going up in smoke. Surrendering our forest policy to Nature’s whims creates dangerous conditions where homes, forests, watersheds and resources are squandered.

Additionally, the unhealthy air quality conditions impact millions of people and entirely negates the possibility for greenhouse gas absorption. The landscape will need at least another 30-40 years to develop the same capacity for greenhouse gas absorption as exists today.

Today’s wildfires are the most relevant contributor to fine particulate pollution (PM2.5.) Since the mid-1980s, the total US area burned by wildfires has been increasing, with fires in the Northwest United States accounting for 50–60 percent of that increase, according to a recent report.

In essence, the environmental policies that were designed in an effort to protect forests are actually responsible for destroying them.

**As part of the Oregon Legislature’s Fire Caucus, I will continue to work towards correcting our stewardship model for proper forest management on our public lands.**

**Remember, if we don’t stand for rural Oregon values and common-sense no one will.**



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