IDAHO'S SORE THUMB

Fear and loathing in the Panhandle
Dear Reader

The phrase “vast right-wing conspiracy” is often overused. Unfortunately, Cascadia Times has cause to believe one is at work here in the Portland metro area. This local manifestation should resonate throughout the region with people who care about controlling growth.

Editorial

The property-rights group Oregonians in Action — the folks who brought us a takings initiative that voters approved in 2000 — is back and this time Metro, Portland’s regional government, and its growth management regulations are in its sights. The OIA has sponsored a ballot measure, 26-11, with the honey-coated title of “The Neighborhood Preservation Act,” with the intent of wiping out our ability to regulate land use and control growth.

Measure 26-11’s vague and possibly illegal language would erase our urban growth boundary and thus turn vast tracts of farmland over to hungry speculators and developers. And it would encourage OIA’s right-wing funding base into funding an all-out assault on Oregon’s land-use system.

Growth management and an urban growth boundary have had everything to do with the Portland area’s enviable quality of life, clean air and water, and vibrant neighborhoods. These tools have been a model and inspiration for similar efforts in the Northwest and around the country.

The Metro Council has placed its own ballot measure, 26-29, on the same May 21 ballot to counter the OIA effort.

While confusing matters, it deserves a “yes” vote. More importantly, Cascadia Times urges you to join us, 1000 Friends of Oregon, the Oregon League of Conservation voters and many others who love this place and vote “no” on Measure 26-11. Let’s put the OIA out of business right here, right now.

For more information, go to checkitoutyourself.com.

Thanks to the help of many, many people who helped make this issue possible.
The Bush Legacy: Year One
From arsenic to the Arctic, the White House chips away at the environment

By Paul Koberstein

George W. Bush began his first year as president with a hugely controversial decision to roll back protection from arsenic in drinking water. The second year kicked off with a full-on blitz to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling.

In between, he pushed an environmental agenda specially designed with help from 18 of the energy industry’s top 25 financial contributors to the Republican Party, according to the New York Times. Specific concessions were granted Enron, which seemed to treat the White House as just another one of its offshore partnerships. The White House changed details in the National Energy Plan to benefit Enron, and even dispatched the vice president to lobby India on behalf of an Enron and even dispatched the vice president to lobby India on behalf of an Enron venture. More than anything, the White House mirrored Enron’s management style, squandering a trillion-dollar surplus in just a few months, and then stonewalling anyone who had the nerve to ask questions about it.

Bush’s budget for fiscal year 2003 proposes more than $34 billion in taxpayer subsidies for oil, gas, coal and nuclear power companies, while slashing spending for environmental and natural resources departments by $1 billion, or 3.4 percent. Hardest hit are energy efficiency and water protection programs. The cuts make room for $558 million for coal, oil and natural gas research and development; $200 million for the development of so-called “clean coal” technologies; and $10 billion in loan guarantees for a natural gas pipeline from Alaska to the lower 48 states. Bush is also seeking tax incentives for hybrid and fuel-cell (or hydrogen-driven) vehicles, but is steadfastly resisting efforts to improve gasoline efficiency of new cars, trucks and SUVs. These proposals follow Bush’s pattern of almost daily announcements through his first year of decisions rolling back protections for the environment, wildlife or global climate, often in the name of national security or boosting the economy out of recession (also for national security). Critics dismiss his agenda as payback to corporations that supported his campaigns. Following are 20 key environmental decisions made by the Bush administration in its first year:

Continued on page 4

History and Tragedy Repeat at the Thirtymile Fire

By Tim McNulty

Northwest Senators blasted the U.S. Forest Service during a Senate hearing for failing to enforce safety measures that resulted in the deaths of four firefighters in Washington’s Thirtymile Canyon last July. Forest Service Chief Dale Bosworth promised reform, but those familiar with the agency’s firefighting history aren’t holding their breath. Disregard for the safety of fire line workers is an agency legacy going back more than a half-century.

On July 2, 1994, a lightning strike sparked a small fire high on the shoulder of Colorado’s Storm King Mountain. It burned slowly for four days, then “blew up” into a raging inferno. In a matter of hours more than 2,000 acres were scorched and blackened, and fourteen firefighters lay dead on the mountain’s slopes.

It was the worst firefighting disaster since the infamous Mann Gulch tragedy, which took the lives of thirteen Montana smoke jumpers in 1949. Lessons learned in the aftermath of that earlier blaze became codified into the ten safety commandments of fire fighting. But the same mistakes that fueled the Mann Gulch tragedy were repeated at Storm King Mountain: underestimating the seriousness of the blaze, poor communications, a lack of escape routes and complacency among supervisors. Fire bosses ignored standard policies. Eight of the ten commandments were broken.

In September the Forest Service released its report on the recent fire fighting tragedy, the Thirtymile fire in Washington’s Okanogan National Forest. History repeated. The report concluded that the deaths of four young firefighters: Karen FitzPatrick, 18, Jessica Johnson, 19, Devin Weaver, 21 and Tom Craven, 30, were avoidable.

Jim Furnish, a Forest Service deputy chief who led the investigation team, said that factors leading to the tragedy were “agonizingly familiar.”

The report laid blame at the feet of the supervisors in the field that day. Not eight, but all ten of the safety rules were broken. And like the Mann Gulch and Storm King Mountain fires, most of the warning signs that the Thirtymile fire was growing dangerous were ignored.

Conditions became dire on July 10 when a small wildfire near Thirtymile Creek in the Chewuch River canyon north of Winthrop, Washington, blew up into a major blaze. Within a few hours the fire exploded from 25 to 2,500 acres. Fourteen firefighters became trapped on a dead-end road in the canyon. They climbed into the portable fire shelters they carried, but four perished breathing superheated gasses as the fire roared past.

Among “significant factors” that led to the deaths, the report cited the failure of crew leaders to assess the fire’s volatile nature or change tactics, to establish escape routes and safety zones, or direct inexperienced firefighters in deployment of their fire shelters. The same prob-
Field Notes continued

Arctic

The prospects for Senate approval of drilling in the Refuge evaporated in April. But the administration was still pushing hard, and woe to any scientist who dared speak her mind. The administration imposed a gag order on all Fish and Wildlife Service employees preventing them from making public comments on the Refuge, and disparaged the agency’s research showing oil drilling in the refuge to be incompatible with wildlife. In January 2002, the Interior Secretary Gale Norton announced that oil drilling wouldn’t harm polar bears on the refuge’s coastal plain, rejecting two studies showing that it would. And last October Norton lied to Congress when she said oil drilling won’t harm caribou, misrepresenting the findings of biologists.

Clean water

The Bush administration announced it would suspend new rules to reduce arsenic in tap water. It also invited the mining industry, a major discharger of arsenic into water bodies, to argue for a weaker standard. After a public outcry, the Environmental Protection Agency announced it will keep the arsenic standards adopted at the end of the Clinton administration.

Clean air

In February 2002, Eric Schaeffer, head of EPA’s Office of Regulatory Enforcement, accused the Energy Department and the White House of catering to the power industry and obstructing EPA efforts to enforce the Clean Air Act. Schaeffer said in his resignation letter that he was tired of “fighting a White House that seems determined to weaken the rules we are trying to enforce.” Bush proposed a system of tradable “pollution rights” that gives utilities financial incentives to reduce emissions of toxic mercury, sulfur dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. Bush would let industry decide how to meet nationwide emission caps. Federal lawsuits against Midwest power companies responsible for fouling the air in eastern cities have not yet been dropped, but the rules on which those lawsuits were based are being significantly weakened. In March, a new study confirmed air pollution as a major cause of lung cancer in cities, though whether it will have much impact remains to be seen. So far, science has not been the leading factor in Bush policy decisions.

Clean water

The Bush administration has relaxed rules to clean up the nation’s water bodies, threatening water quality in several ways. The EPA estimates that 40 percent of surveyed waterways are unsafe for fishing, boating, swimming, or drinking. Even so, the Bush administration is poised to weaken the TMDL (total maximum daily load) program requiring states and the EPA to identify waterways that remain polluted, rank them for priority attention, and then develop pollution limits for each water body. The administration has initiated a process to weaken its oversight of state administration of the program, and enables states to ignore polluted waters.

Since the first Bush administration, federal policy called for “no net loss” of wetlands. But in January 2002, the White House signed off on a controversial plan by the Corps of Engineers to relax nationwide wetlands and environmentally unjustified, warning the plan is scientifically and environmentally unjustified, warning the proposed changes would increase destruction of “aquatic and terrestrial habitats.” These comments have been ignored by the administration.

Sewage containing bacteria, viruses, fecal matter, and other wastes is responsible each year for beach closures, fish kills, shellfish-bed closures, and human gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses. According to the EPA, there were 40,000 discharges of untreated sewage into water bodies, basements, playgrounds and other areas in 2000. Before the Bush administration took office, the EPA issued load-overdue rules minimizing raw sewage discharges into waterways, and requiring public notification of sewage overflows. The proposed rules, however, were blocked by the regulatory freeze ordered by the Bush administration last January. A year later, they are languishing in regulatory limbo.

Buckling to industry pressure, in November the EPA proposed to relax rules protecting public health and the environment from the impacts of livestock factory farms, where thousands of cows, chickens, or pigs in five confined areas and produce enormous amounts of untreated waste. These industrial operations are prone to break, leak, or overflow, fouling waterways. The new rules would weaken groundwater controls and monitoring, authorize states to exempt factory farms from Clean Water Act permitting requirements, and substitute mandatory controls with voluntary measures.

Cruise ships

A law signed by Bush in October threatens endangered humpback whales in Alaska by allowing cruise ships to pass through the waters where they breed. The law would override a federal court ruling that disallowed a cruise ship from passing through the whales’ breeding ground because it would “threaten the survival of the species.” The Bush administration has invited the Coast Guard to take responsibility for enforcing the law, but the Coast Guard has no authority to do so.

The larger question, one not adequately addressed by the Forest Service’s Thirtymile report, is why any crew was fighting the fire at all. Similarly, reports following the 1994 Storm King Mountain fire failed to explain why crews were there. There were no houses or buildings on the mountain, just a fire-dependent scrub community of pinyon, oak and juniper.

In his op-ed “Young Men and Fire,” writer Norman Maclean framed the Mann Gulch blaze as a classic tragedy, the heroes descending from the sky to do battle against a force beyond their control. But the Thirtymile fire, like the Storm King fire before it — and all the fatal blazes that followed — is something more modern. These are tragedies where young men and women fall victim not to uncontrollable forces but to a bureaucratic failure to learn from the past.

Tim McNulty is a natural history writer living on Washington’s Olympic Peninsula.
Endangered species

Bush proposed to suspend mandatory deadlines for listing species, effectively nullifying a citizen's ability to go ask a court to enforce the law. Four species the administration proposal would harm are: Desert Tortoise. After agreeing to a legal settlement to remove livestock from endangered desert tortoise habitat in Southern California, Norton has repeatedly refused to comply. In May, a federal judge sharply criticized the Bush administration for failing to fund its promise to restore cattle grazing on 427,000 acres of Mojave Desert public land allotments to protect critical tortoise habitat. Grizzly bear.

The Interior Department indicated its intention to shelve a plan to reintroduce grizzly bears into federal wildlife lands in Idaho and Montana. In doing so, Norton torpedoed decades of scientific work and successful efforts to win the trust of local timber companies and timber workers.

Northern spotted owl.

The Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that logging has not appreciably affected spotted owls, opening the floodgates for the return of timber sales in Pacific Northwest national forests. The agency sent letters to the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management informing them that, contrary to earlier findings, at least 91 percent of spotted owl habitat will be destroyed by logging by the end of the first decade of the 100-year Northwest Forest Plan. Wildlife officials originally estimated that over that period timber cutting would eliminate almost 3 percent of the old-growth forests the owls need for nesting. Logging over the last 150 years has destroyed as much as 96 percent of the owl's habitat, forcing their listing as a protected species under the Endangered Species Act.

Salmon.

In February 2003, the National Academy of Engineers issued its final recommendation against breaching four dams on the lower Snake River, even though leaving the dams intact could lead to the extinction of the Snake River's salmon and steelhead runs. Instead, the Corps wants to spend $400 million over the next 10 years on fish ladders, additional transportation barges and other devices to keep the dams less lethal to migrating fish. The Corps also signaled its intent to go forward with deepening the Columbia River from its present average depth of 40 feet to 43 feet despite long-term damage to salmon. A series in The Oregonian pointed out that the Corps' economic studies supporting dredging were based on outdated information, and that the project's costs will outweigh all benefits.

Enforcement

A Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility report indicated a steep decline in environmental enforcement during President Bush's first year in office. PEER's analysis revealed that cases referred by the EPA for criminal prosecution dropped by 50 percent. The EPA meanwhile said about 40 percent of its criminal enforcement staff would be moved to less-environmental security tasks.

Forest policy

The Forest Service pushed through a plan to log a roadless area in Montana's Bitterroot National Forest without allowing for citizen appeals. A federal judge threw out the plan, which would endanger bull trout and grizzly bears. A revised plan still allows for logging outside roadless areas. If President Bush gets his way, subsidies for logging will increase in national forests next year. The administration intends to offer 2 billion board feet (decreasing an_envisional volume for beetle timber), up from 1.4 billion board feet. Meanwhile, the Forest Service announced “interim” guidelines that would roll back protection for 60 million acres of roadless areas, including those in the Tongass National Forest. The Forest Service is planning more than a dozen timber sales in roadless areas throughout the Tongass that will cover hundreds of thousands of acres.

Global climate

By the start of his term, Bush reversed his campaign pledge to limit carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Instead, he is asking Congress to devise ways to limit their increase of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, that contribute to global warming. There will be no federally mandated targets. And even if his voluntary targets are actually achieved, emissions will still increase over the next ten years at the same pace they increased over the last 10 years.

Mineral extraction

Norton announced new “hard rock” mining regulations that reverse more stringent environmental restrictions on mining for gold, silver, copper and other metals on federal lands. Under the new rules, the Bureau of Land Management has rescinded the government’s authority to deny permits on the grounds that a proposed mine could result in “substantial irreparable harm” to the environment. The new rules also limit corporate liability for irresponsible mining practices.

Superfund

The federal trust fund used to clean up 30 percent of the nation's worst waste sites is running out of money. Under pressure from chemical and oil companies, Congress abandoned the “polluter pays” principle in 1995 by letting the corporate taxes that funded the program expire. The fund has dwindled from a high of $3.8 billion in 1996 to a projected $28 million next year, and will be broke in 2004. Bush plans to shift cleanup costs to citizens rather than make polluters foot the bill. He also intends to designate fewer sites for restoration.

Yellowstone National Park

The Interior Department decided to allow snowmobiling to roam Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks if they abide by some limits on noise and gasoline. Snowmobilers, meanwhile, are continuing to violate rules designed to protect wildlife and ensure public safety in Yellowstone, according to a study by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition.

A Bird in the Wrong Hand

The Endangered Species Act is once again under attack. So what's new this time out? Not much other than the mix of players and the secretary in charge. Timber interests are demanding that Interior Secretary Gale Norton and the feds should consider withdrawing Endangered Species Act protection for the northern spotted owl and the marmot murrelet or face a lawsuit. They plan to argue on scientific grounds that new evidence shows the bird are not in as much trouble as originally thought when they earned protection under the law in the early 1990s. Joan Jewett, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, refuses this, saying the owl and the marmot populations are examples of two of the best-studied animals in the Pacific Northwest. Both are still declining and still need help.

Desperate Measures Part II: Drilling is Drilling is Drilling

They lost the big Arctic drilling vote - a procedural vote on an amendment that would have lifted a drilling ban on the 1.5 million-acre coastal plain in northeast Alaska. So now they're moving to plan B: Green lighting a plan to let North Slope Natives drill on their own land within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plain.

Environmentalists say any drilling would threaten wildlife and destroy a fragile ecosystem. Native lands, including 22,000 acres owned by Nalutok Inupiat Corp, are in the heart of refuge - right in the center of the coastal plain. Stay tuned for the round two of the Arctic battle.
Alaska accuses BC of “biological pollution” in fish farm fight

The British Columbia government has decided to lift its seven-year moratorium on new salmon farms in marine waters, despite warnings from scientists that fish farms cause “biological pollution” by deliberately releasing billions of fertilized eggs and other material that could harm the environment.

In a statement last December in reference to an article in the Washington Times, Lynn Hunter, a member of the Alaska Conservation Council, said: “It’s clear that farm fish invade wild fish habitat, spread disease, take food from and prey on wild fish. BC must be a good neighbor and reinstate the moratorium to prevent damage to intact salmon runs and marine resources in both countries.”

Alaska charges that BC salmon farms commit “biological pollution” by deliberately allowing the annual escape of hundreds of thousands of farmed fish.

Furgate: right-wingers cry “biofraud”

The word is “biofraud,” and it’s stirring anti-environmental passions around the West.

The term, a contraction of “biological fraud,” was used in the Washington Times last December in reference to hearings on eco-terrorism, where he has equated environmentalists with terrorists.

“If in fact it occurred, and there’s clear evidence it did, people ought to be fired,” said Sen. Larry Craig, Idaho Republican and chairman of the Senate’s Agriculture Committee, in a statement posted to her website.

If we get this wrong — if we shut down access to hundreds of acres of public land because of endangered species that turn out to not even be there — we only take away people’s enjoyment of these lands, but we also damage jobs that rely on access to that land,” Craig said.

We avoid recreation, tourism, farming, ranching, logging and more. We put people out of work,” Craig added.

Rep. Barbara Cubin, a Republican from Wyoming, was another lawmaker quick to denounce the biologists. In a letter to Interior Secretary Gale Norton, published in the Washington Times, she noted that “dozens of federal and state biologists who knowingly submitted unauthorized and false control samples — on more than one occasion — for analysis as part of an ongoing nationwide survey of salmon.”

In making these allegations, the members of Congress themselves may be breaking the law, according to the group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, or PEER.

In legal terms, says PEER, the lawmakers may have violated the Hatch Act, a federal law protecting civil servants, when they called for the firing of federal biologists involved in the salmon study. In a letter to the secretary of Interior and Agriculture, PEER said when a federal employee risks removal because of his or her scientific judgment may anger a Member of Congress, then the patronage system is truly alive and well.

“They’re taking some misinformation and turning it into a campaign against public employees,” said PEER’s Eric Wingerter. “The reason they’re doing it is to create a chilling effect on other scientists working on endangered-species issues.”

tries. Norway found that fish farms expose wild fish to high concentrations of pathogens and parasites. In Maine, the state is considering placing a moratorium on more fish farms because of disease problems. Earlier this year, seven cases of infectious hematopoietic necrosis (IHN) virus have been confirmed at different salmon farms on the British Columbia coast, and the Interior Department has concluded that the disease has spread to several federal and state biologists who knowingly submitted unauthorized and false control samples — on more than one occasion — for analysis as part of an ongoing nationwide survey of salmon.”

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A newspaper chain's threats and smears divide a community as it weighs toxic cleanup.

IDAHO'S SORE THUMB
Fear and loathing in the Panhandle

COEUR D'ALENE, Idaho

It's a fact of history that Congress once voted to sever Northern Idaho from the rest of the state and attach it to Washington, but President Grover Cleveland thought it was a bad idea and pocket-vetoed the law in 1887. The northern part of the state became the Idaho Panhandle, though it looks more like a thumb.

Make that a sore thumb. Before Cleveland took office in 1885, the waters of the Coeur d'Alene-Spokane River basin were already being poisoned by hard rock mining in the upper reaches of the basin, an area known as the Silver Valley. Though mining companies quit dumping toxic tailings into the river in 1968, their waste continues to poison the river to this day.

The mines' legacy has also poisoned children and adults, contaminated residential properties and open spaces, killed wildlife and defiled waters all the way to the Columbia River. In the 1970s, a smelter fire in Kellogg caused the highest measured levels of blood lead poisoning in U.S. history. Some of the

STORY BY PAUL KOBERSTEIN

Wherever they come to rest, these metals poison sediments, fish and wildlife, and people.

To stop the pollution and correct the damage, last fall the Environmental Protection Agency proposed an interim $350 million Superfund cleanup plan that could eventually grow to $1.5 billion, one of the largest environmental restoration projects ever, building on limited cleanup efforts that began in 1989. A final decision on a cleanup plan is due in late June.

Hijackers, terrorists and jack-booted feds

One might think the people of the Silver Valley would be celebrating the sizable benefits of a cleanup to public health and the environment. With the economy battered with poverty and high unemployment, people here would gain from many new jobs. A

those of two daily newspapers owned by one of Idaho's most famous industrialists, Duane Hagadone: the Shoshone News-Press in Kellogg, and the Coeur d'Alene Press in Coeur d'Alene.

People who dare speak out in favor of the cleanup are excoriated almost continually in the Shoshone News-Press. In news articles, editorials and letters to the editor, that newspaper has repeatedly published personal attacks and smears against environmentalists, often targeting Barbara Miller, executive director of the Silver Valley People's Action Coalition (SV PAC), as well as members of other media organizations and employees of the EPA. The Kellogg newspaper has even published "tongue in cheek" death threats against EPA employees and this reporter. While complaints of improper EPA actions may well be valid, and are the focus of an Ombudsman investigation, the Kellogg newspaper has compared EPA workers and their methods to hijackers, terrorists and jack-booted federal agents. Articles in the Coeur d'Alene Press are less antagonistic, yet often are written with an anti-EPA or anti-cleanup slant.

"Every ethical line has been
crossed, said Bob Boswick, a spokesman for the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and a former reporter for a Spokane television station, in reference particularly to articles in the Shoshone News-Press. "Some of these things are just absolutely shameful, stunningly shameful."

Over the last year the angry tone seems to have escalated while people in the community were trying to weigh various plans for cleaning up mining waste under their feet. Charles Moss, director of the state of Idaho's cleanup team, said the "industrial strength" rhetoric has polarized decision-making. Others say the newspapers have gone to such lengths to discredit health risks that they may have discouraged people from seeking medical care needed for themselves or their children. People have almost come to blow after public meetings. Environmentalists have been yelled at on public streets and at school functions.

"It's insane what these people are getting away with," says Tina Paddock, a former Silver Valley resident who continues to advocate cleanup from her home in McMiniville, Ore. "Mothers are afraid to speak out on behalf of their kids. They are afraid to receive the treatment like Barbara Miller has endured. Their families still work or wish to work for the mines and they can not risk it. I had one lady come to me. She was afraid her husband would become violent. I hold the newspaper, in part, responsible for the licensing of this attitude."

Paddock charges that Hagadone's newspapers seem to be on a mission to destroy the People's Action Coalition because of its assertion that the region is not cleaned up, and people's health is at risk. They want Miller shut down.

For Miller, the personal attacks are nothing new—she claims they have been going on since 1986. "These people lie about me personally and tell people to not support our work," Miller says. "It is a little difficult to go out and talk intelligently to people today about the pressing issues facing the need for further cleanup and health intervention. This community needs to heal. It doesn't need more opportunity for prolonged violence and hatred and anger."

Miller, meanwhile, is not holding her breath for the appreciation she believes her organization deserves. "The work we've begun has improved the quality of life here to the point that people have never seen before."

I'll bring the tar if you bring the feathers

On Jan. 30, 2001, Miller woke up to read these chilling words in a letter to the editor published in the Shoshone News-Press: "Neighbors and friends, I'll bring the tar paper if you will bring the feathers and we will have a wonderful time on these people (the Silver Valley People's Action Coalition), doing something that will be of some benefit to this valley in a positive way."

The news media in the Silver Valley is the one institution with a responsibility to protect and foster: a free and open debate on just this kind of public issue. Instead, they have fostered a nasty tone that suppresses candor.

Hagadone, who also owns almost all the other daily and weekly newspapers in northern Idaho, plus several radio and television stations, has a financial stake in silencing cleanup advocates. Hagadone owns the Coeur d'Alene Resort, the county's biggest employer, and his other agendas include promoting expanded casino gambling on nearby tribal lands. His newspapers have expressed concern that too much attention on pollution and Superfund cleanup may drive tourists away.

Hagadone also has had a stake in the area's mining industry, and may still. Until 1998, he was a director of the Coeur d'Alene Mining Corp., which owns properties in the Silver Valley and is on the hook for millions of dollars in Superfund cleanup costs. (Other companies on the hook include ASARCO and Hecla.) Back in the 1980s, Hagadone was a member of a partnership that purchased portions of the mining properties within the Bunker Hill Superfund site in Kellogg. The partnership, Bunker Limited Partnership, spent much of the late 1980s fighting efforts by the EPA to hold it responsible for cleanup costs, according to an Inspector General's report in 1990.

Cascadia Times attempted to reach Hagadone and editors of the two newpapers by telephone but was not successful.

In 1996 High Country News reported that Hagadone had used his newspapers to downplay the dangers about heavy-metals pollution in the area. Hagadone's newspapers have continued to dismiss those dangers, claiming in recent editorials that "no one in the past 20 years has been proven sickened by heavy metals in the Silver Valley." A search of Coeur d'Alene Press online archives over the last two years shows the paper's news columns have heavily reported information that backs up the editorial page viewpoint while all but ignoring other views.

For example, a 1,600-word article in the April 19, 2002, Coeur d'Alene Press dwelled on a California pediatrician's opinion that there's no validity to the EPA's claim that lead poisoning threatens Silver Valley children. The article quoted Edgar J. Schoen as saying, "A pediatrician who has been trained within the past 20 years has never seen a symptomatic case of lead poisoning."

The article, written by David Bond, quoted at length the pediatrician's criticism of a 1979 study linking lead poisoning to brain damage in children.

Schoen also charged that the government squanders billions of dollars pursuing "a nonexistent problem" under the spell of a "lead mafia running on government grants." Schoen

More than 18,000 acres of lakes and wetlands in the Coeur d'Alene River basin have been poisoned by lead at levels that can kill waterfowl. Almost all tundra swan deaths are attributed to lead poisoning from mining waste, including the eight at right. In April the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found 15 dead swans in six wetlands and another 12 at Thompson Lake. Numerous other dead and sick waterfowl were observed throughout the basin. (Top photo by Paul Kobersteins. Photo at right courtesy The Landis Council.)
Most newspapers in Northern Idaho are owned by the Hagadone Corporation, which also owns the Coeur d'Alene Resort at left. The resort is located on Lake Coeur d'Alene, where tens of millions of tons of mining waste have come to rest.

Hagadone’s newspapers have continued to dismiss environmental dangers, claiming in recent editorials that “no one in the past 20 years has been provably sickened by heavy metals in the Silver Valley,” despite mountains of evidence to the contrary.

also claimed that the EPA bases its assumptions about childhood lead poisoning on “controversial studies” that have “long since been discredited by the scientific community.”

Bond did not cite any studies that contradict Schoen, though there are many. In 1995, the American Academy of Pediatrics reviewed 18 scientific studies on the correlation between children’s mental abilities and lead in their blood. The relationship between lead levels and IQ deficits was found to be remarkably consistent,” the Academy said.

Similarly, a May 17, 2001 article in the Coeur d’Alene Press presented the views of three critics of the EPA’s lead cleanup standards without finding a single expert to defend their validity. The end of the article did present a taut defense offered by a state of Idaho official.

The newspapers can also be misleading when they report on cleanup issues. For example, in a Feb. 14, 2002, article on a lawsuit filed by the Bunker Hill Mining Co. against the EPA, the Coeur d’Alene Press stated that the “EPA caused to be built next to the South Fork (of the Coeur d’Alene River) a hazardous waste landfill not in compliance with regulations of the EPA to protect the public health and the environment.”

While there is, in fact, a landfill next to the South Fork, that landfill was built in the 1920s by the mining industry, a full five decades before the EPA was created.

A mobilizing force

Hagadone’s Kellogg newspaper tends to dismiss people who claim that lead poisoning is a problem in the basin as “barbarians,” “Millistines” and “Millstones” — clear references to the leader of Kellogg’s environmental group. Last year, Bond described Barbara Miller in this way: “This woman flies around the country like a one-winged bat... A few years ago she found she could make a buck blathering lies about the mental and physical health of the Silver Valley. She makes stuff up. She has other people who make stuff up for her.”

Miller says that so far she hasn’t been physically harmed. But, she quickly adds, “I do not feel safe alone.” And while ostracized in her own community, outsiders admire her work, which has created even more tension, again fostered by the Hagadone-owned media.

Last August, when the Ford Foundation nominated Miller as a finalist for a prestigious award, the Shoshone News-Press launched a campaign against her. If Miller won, a $130,000 prize would have gone to the Silver Valley People’s Action Coalition for its work in the community. This prompted the Shoshone News Press to ask members of the public to join an effort to block it.

Daniel C. Drewry, the paper’s publisher and editor, urged readers to write letters to an affiliate of the Ford Foundation “to help choke off the stream of lies, half-truths, and distortions that emanate from the organization. The potential damage to the community, should the grant be awarded, is horrifying.”

In the same editorial, he wrote, “We as a community know that Barbara Miller and her claque represent a tiny, disaffected minority. The group has no credibility and no respect. They bring in one or two outside ‘experts’ who spew insults at all of us from Rose Lake to Mullan. The spew is picked up by the same editorial, he wrote, “We as a community know that Barbara Miller and her claque represent a tiny, disaffected minority. The group has no credibility and no respect. They bring in one or two outside ‘experts’ who spew insults at all of us from Rose Lake to Mullan. The spew is picked up by outside media, and the valley gets another black eye from the People’s Action Coalition.”

The Ford Foundation reported that among the finalists, it received letters of protest only regarding Miller’s nomination. A typical letter apparently came from Jan Petersen, a resident of the Kellogg area who wrote in a letter published in the Idaho News Observer...
in Wallace (one of only two dailies or weeklies in northern Idaho not owned by Hagadone), "I do truly add my opinion to Barbara receiving this grant. The money will not be used to benefit the community, nor will it be used to educate the general public or anyone on lead or any other contaminants. It might be used to pay some back water bills, pay Dr. (John) Rosen (a medical consultant to the People's Action Committee) and buy her child much needed clothing and update the heap she (Miller) is living in."

Miller won the "Leadership for a Changing World" anyway. In granting the award, the Ford Foundation noted, "In a part of the United States where mining for metal has had a devastating effect on the environment and public health, Barbara Miller has mobilized residents to force the cleanup of contamination. She has also created a network of health and policy officials who are examining the residual impacts of lead poisoning on public health throughout the Northwest."

On other occasions, Miller's critics were successful in blocking grants to her group. Miller says the Catholic Church in 2000 rescinded an award under pressure from some local residents.

Bond has directed additional attacks toward Paddock, a former Wallace resident who moved away after she discovered her house was severely contaminated with lead dust, an allegation that is central to a lawsuit filed against two real estate agencies and the former owner of the house, claiming they failed to inform the Paddocks about the risk. Paddock is also a former board member of SV PAC.

In a Nov. 7, 2001 commentary Bond wrote: "You (Paddock) sit down there with the Spruce Goose in McMinnville and take pot shots at us, and you sit on Barbarian Millstone's board of directors — the sole purpose of which is to terrorize honest, working people here in the Silver Valley."

Last July, Bond wrote that if he was mayor of Kellogg, he would "reaffirm" for property owners "their right to shoot trespassers on sight, if they are employees or agents of the EPA or (state) Department of Environmental Quality." In September he wrote that locals should be afraid of the EPA. "It sounds like they are saying you better get an agreement before we lace up the jack boots and start playing Waco with you."

Let's lace up the jack boots and play Waco

In May 2000, the EPA notified Idaho officials that the agency would formally propose a Superfund in the basin if the state did not agree to an adequately funded cleanup. Almost immediately, Idaho's congressional delegation called on the Ombudsmen's office to investigate the decision. Days later, EPA Ombudsmen investigator Hugh Kaufman was quoted in Hagadone's Coeur d'Alene Press as saying people in Idaho have reason to be afraid of the EPA. "It sounds like they are saying you better get an agreement before we lace up the jack boots and start playing Waco with you."

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Idaho politicians also seem to revel in EPA-bashing. Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, a Republican, said in a Nov. 13 speech in Wallace that EPA should all but butt out of Idaho.

"The bureaucracy of the EPA is absolutely non-responsive and we've had it. Absolutely had it," Kempthorne said. "I've become so frustrated with EPA that I'm on the verge of asking EPA to leave the state of Idaho."

Predictably, Hagadone's newspapers gave prominent play to stories on the governor's speech. Kempthorne and the newspapers are allies in supporting legislation allowing increased casino gambling in the area. The...
IDAHO'S POLITICAL PRISONER

Jailed activist claims mining industry retaliation

WALLACE, Idaho

Barbara Miller wore prison green as she spoke from inside the Shoshone County Jail.

"I'm a political prisoner of the state of Idaho," she said defiantly. "I was put here by the mining interests and the mining industry in Shoshone County."

Miller, executive director of the Silver Valley People's Action Coalition (SVPAC), is known locally as an attorney as the leading local advocate for a thorough and effective cleanup of mining waste in the Shoshone Basin. She was sent to jail for five days in late March by Judge Dan McGee for minor violations of a child custody decree between her and her ex-husband, Ed Miller. Miller's attorney, Michael Branstetter, has repeatedly and aggressively used McGee's court to score legal victories against the former wife. Twice, motions seeking jail time for alleged violations of visitation rules have been granted.

Branstetter, a lawyer in private practice, is known locally as an attorney representing ASARCO and Hecla, two large mining companies in the Silver Valley, as well as smaller mining interests. Branstetter also represents the school district in Wallace that for years has denied that pollution on its school grounds is hazardous or has caused childhood health problems.

Barbara Miller's bitterness is compounded by her suspicion that mining companies are footing her ex-husband's legal bills as "payback" for her environmental work, though she has no proof. Branstetter did not return telephone calls. Neither did Ed Miller, a bar owner in Kellogg.

Judge McGee has stripped Miller of her house, almost all of her other financial assets, and placed a $14,000 court judgment on her head. She says she can't afford to pay the judgment on her $12,000 annual salary. The ex-husband now owns the house, and will personally collect thousands from the court judgment. McGee also jailed Barbara Miller in 2000 for a similar minor custody violation, and in 1999 sent her to jail for voting in the wrong precinct, a charge rarely if ever leveled in Idaho history. Barbara Miller maintains she was innocent of all charges, and accuses her ex-husband of domestic assault.

According to court documents and police records, Ed Miller assaulted Barbara Miller in their home in 1998, an event that triggered the divorce. A son witnessed the attack, and three police officers who responded to the incident reported cuts and bruises on Barbara's head and arm. The report notes that Barbara Miller suffered a bump on the back of her head, cut on her lower outer right hand and a bump on the front of her head just above the left eye brow.

"Ed Miller came out of the room as I was going up the stairs," Barbara Miller said. "I recall him throwing me down on the stairs, hard and then shoving my head into the wall a couple of times. There was an iron railing on the wall. I think my head was shoved against it at least once by Ed Miller. It was very frightening.

And yet Judge McGee dismissed the ex-husband from jail a few hours after his arrest on grounds of "no probable cause." The case was never prosecuted. Legal experts contacted by Cascadia Times say in Idaho it's rare for domestic violence cases to be dropped without a hearing, especially in cases with physical evidence (bruises) and a witness.

The court system failing her, Barbara Miller says she was left with no option but to file a civil suit against her ex-husband for the assault. That case goes to trial in September, says Miller's attorney, Brit Groom.

Miller formed the People's Action Coalition in 1986, fighting for a more extensive cleanup of mining waste in the Silver Valley. Last fall, the Ford Foundation honored Miller with its "Leadership for a Changing World Award," and a $130,000 grant to support the Coalition's work. In early March, Boise State University recognized Miller as one of its "Women Making History" honorees.

Miller says she is not opposed to mining in the basin. Her father worked in the mines. Miller's top priority is the establishment of the Community Lead Health Project in Silver Valley, where lead-poisoned children, former workers and residents could for the first time obtain diagnosis and treatment for lead poisoning and other health problems.

Support for Miller's cause is growing around the Northwest. "She's been blamed for every ill in North Idaho mining country since Superfund arrived," writes Dave Oliveria in the Spokane Spokesman-Review. "The restless natives cheer when she occasionally lands in jail for petty offenses. The Barbashers even tried to bushwhack her nomination for a $130,000 Ford Foundation award. It didn't work. Miller and her People's Action Coalition got the award for fighting to rid Shoshone County of toxic waste. Saint? Sinner? Dunno. But she's got guts.

"This is the kind of legal action businesses use in an effort to financially and emotionally destroy people like Barbara who believe in democracy and participate in our democratic way of life," says Darlene Schanfeld of Port Angeles, who has been fighting for a Superfund cleanup of an old Rayonier paper mill in her community. "What does this say about a corporation or anyone involved in trying to hurt Barbara that would use a child, in this case Barbara's daughter, as a pawn."

"She is a champion on a mountain of pollution of the likes found no where else in the world," says former SV PAC board member Tina Paddock of McMinnville, Ore. "Local community leaders ignore the fact that hundreds of people are still being lead poisoned, exposed to arsenic, cadmium and continue to suffer health consequences for the past one hundred years of pollution."

"When will these attacks end?" Paddock said.

"Barbara needs powerful attorneys to help her fight this harassment," said Jeri Gillespie, an activist in Okanogan, Wash. "She also needs more support from the environmental community, to help her deal with the negative impacts on her emotions and sense of well-being."

Edie Schultz, president of the Silver Valley People's Action Coalition, said the case against Barbara Miller is part of a "vicious cycle carefully put together by the mining companies and in my opinion corrupt legal system in Shoshone County. "(Our) mission is to have a healthy community for children to grow up in and not have the threat of toxic contamination."

The Barbara Miller Legal Defense Fund is accepting donations.

Make checks payable to:
Barbara Miller Legal Defense Fund
P.O. Box 164
Cataldo, Idaho 83810
papers are owned by the Hagadone Corporation which in 1998 contributed $10,000 to Kempthorne's successful run for governor.

Kempthorne's comments played well in Northern Idaho judging from letters to the editor from people cheering the governor on. "He took a courageous stand worthy of all our support," James H. Hollingworth of Coeur d'Alene wrote in a letter published in the Coeur d'Alene Press. "It appears we are being held hostage by the EPA and a few radicals who only have to threaten to sue to cause us to back off. It is time we sued them and the radical judges who refuse to stand for American principles and the Constitution."

But EPA workers were not as thrilled. Before the meeting, EPA officials called for increased security for employees. Cami Grandinetti, the EPA's cleanup manager in Kellogg since 1996, said the agency's employees remain wary if not altogether frightened for their safety.

"I was there," Grandinetti said. "I don't personally think I'm a target or that there's a threat against me. I feel uneasy. But I don't feel there would be any sort of retaliation taken. That being said, I really wish it were easier to work in that community."

The EPA has asked the newspapers to tone down the rhetoric. Last summer, Charles E. Findley, then interim director of the EPA's Northwest regional office in Seattle, complained in a letter to the Shoshone News-Press that one of its columns "plainly suggests that your readers shoot EPA employees."

"Much has been said during the sometimes acrimonious debates regarding EPA's work to protect children from environmental threats in the Silver Valley," Findley wrote. "However, it is wrong and dangerous for anyone, particularly the media, to say or print anything that can be perceived as a physical threat to anyone."

A former friend goes bonkers

In an interview with Cascadia Times, Bond said his columns containing threats were written "tongue in cheek." "I just want somebody to unfuck a dastardly wrong here," he says. "It is the absolute abuse of this area by people like Barbara Miller, by the EPA and by corporations like the Union Pacific of a wonderful place." Bond said the Union Pacific has been allowed to walk away from enormous amounts of contamination.

D.F. Oliveria, an editorial writer for the Spokane Spokesman-Review, Hagadone's newspapers. "As an newspaper that competes against Idahoan by choice, a Washingtonian by birth, I'm embarrassed, and not reluctant to say so," Fisher says. "Of course Hagadone is pushing his business interests with his crusade against EPA, especially the prospect that Lake Coeur d'Alene — Coeur D'Alene — is included in a Superfund designation. And most Idaho politicians have been only too happy to pander to him. Former Gov. Phil Batt would be pushed only so far, but his replacement (Dirk Kempthorne) is a true patsy."

As for Bond, Fisher dismisses him as "a former friend and competitor ... who has apparently gone bonkers since I last saw him."
arsenic, cadmium and zinc. Fish tissue testing shows the presence of lead and zinc. The Columbia River is a toxic soup, an ecosystem so stressed that any additional sources of heavy metals are not only significant, but could prove deadly to fish and wildlife downstream," says Cyndy deBruler, executive director of Columbia River Keeper.

A bitter duel over the cleanup has erupted between the states of Idaho and Washington over details and control of the cleanup. Washington senators Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray, Gov. Gary Locke, and the city of Spokane have announced support for EPA's cleanup plan. But Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne, in rejecting the EPA plan, proposes to limit the cleanup to "the few areas that need some work." Idaho would remove just 12 percent of the dissolved metals from rivers in the basin, compared with the EPA's plan to remove 57 percent.

Many people on the Idaho side of the border would be happy if the cleanup ended tomorrow. Of the 400,000 people who live in the basin, about 80 percent reside in Washington.
Toxic metals flow into the Columbia River at a rate of a ton or two per day, 400 tons a year, and about 4,000 tons a decade. They contaminate the Columbia's sediments and poison its fish.

Idaho asks for delay

Under an agreement signed in April, the EPA has given Idaho the lead role in restoring the river system. Idaho has almost all the votes in a new agency, the Basis Environmental Improvement Project Commission, that will make cleanup decisions. The commission includes the EPA, the states of Idaho and Washington, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, and three Northern Idaho counties. The counties count as one vote, and all voting members except the state of Washington will have a vote to decide on the budget.

With this structure in place, environmentalists believe Idaho residents will be sensitive to the fact that for more than a century, mining pollution entered the river basin — and continue to do so. "We do not want to have a lot of stake in the future in determining where regional land use is," says the Idaho Clay Mineral Society.

The EPA says Idaho leading the cleanup should be an example of the major problems in restoring the river. Idaho has been transformed into "killing lakes and wetlands" with their great capacity for absorbing heavy metals. The EPA says Idaho is already asking for federal money to build wastewater treatment facilities. Idaho's mining waste is located within "safe areas", while the EPA's policy is to prevent mining waste from entering the river.

Idaho politicians don't really want to work with Washington," said Bart Grosh of The Lands Council, an environmental group based in Spokane. "All we hear is that Idaho wants to see the EPA out of the picture. To do that, it looks like they're going to work with Washington instead. Idaho wouldn't want to work with Washington now, a stronger effort, acting alone without cooperation from the state and intending to clean up, directly damaging the interests of Washington's citizens.

Washington residents believe Idahoans are acting insensitive to the fact that for more than a century, mining pollution entered the river basin — and continue to do so. "We do not want to have a lot of stake in the future in determining where regional land use is," says the Idaho Clay Mineral Society. The EPA says Idaho leading the cleanup should be an example of the major problems in restoring the river. Idaho has been transformed into "killing lakes and wetlands" with their great capacity for absorbing heavy metals.

Clearcuts make a bad flood worse

On Feb. 8, 1996, a warm rain fell on a heavy snow pack in the Coeur d'Alene River Basin. For the next 12 days, firefighters battled the valley with a mix of snow and rain. River systems, especially those in northern Idaho, were still recovering from the 2002 floods.

On Feb. 22, 1996, the EPA set estimates of 300 tons of lead in Spokane, which is the most contaminated with lead in the basin. The EPA's cleanup plan has to meet two threshold criteria, protecting public health and protecting the environment. The EPA says it will not do the job.

South Fork

The EPA has proposed to build wastewater treatment facilities for fish, but there's no information about whether fish or wildlife from the lake is threatened. Although the lake is within 100 miles of the Spokane River, it is not one of the sites listed for the Clean Water Act. The EPA says it would have to spend a lot of money on the South Fork, but that would not result in excessive scouring of the lake.

Lead from mining waste contaminates the Spokane River. Left: Clearcuts in the headwaters help make bad floods worse. (Photos by courtesy The Lands Council.)
Act (CERCLA) for natural resource damages. Among other conditions, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe demanded that a thorough Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be done. The Union Pacific responded with a plan to convert the line to a public trail, as provided by a 1983 federal law, the Rails to Trails Act. This law, intended to solve the twin problems of railway abandonment and public demand for recreational trails, allows public agencies to obtain unprofitable or inactive rail corridors from railroads and convert them into hiking and biking trails for public use. If demand for rail transport increases in the future, the railroad can reoccupy the trails, reinstall the tracks, and resume rail operations. Most of the Union Pacific rail corridor could have reverted back to private property owners were it not for the 1983 law.

The tribe eventually dropped its demand for an EIS and settled for a cleanup proposal submitted by Union Pacific. The natural resources damage lawsuit was settled in 2000 with what the U.S. Justice Department touted as a "novel" consent decree that required the Union Pacific to spend $25 million.

**TRAVAIL OF THE COEUR D'ALENES**

Toxic rail cargoes from long ago haunt community amid charges of Union Pacific-EPA cover up

HARRISON, Idaho

To get an idea of the kind of cleanup the Environmental Protection Agency has in mind for the Coeur d'Alene Basin, consider its Superfund response to poisons within a critical sliver of land running through the guts of the basin: the 72-mile rail branch from Plummer near the Washington border, to the Silver Valley near the Montana border.

In the 19th Century every mine needed a railroad, and in the Silver Valley the line was run by Union Pacific and its predecessors. Over several decades, trains heaved and tugged and derailed along this route to the mines, smelters and fertilizer plant located in the valley. Until discontinued in 1992, the Union Pacific carried loads both into and out of the valley, including ore concentrates from foreign mines that were shipped to Kellogg for further smelting.

Toxic cargo from uncovered, leaky railcars blew and spilled into Lake Coeur d'Alene while crossing a 3,000-foot trestle near its southern reaches. Toxins spilled from trains as they passed along sharp curves around the lake, and into smaller lakes and wetlands as trains traveled alongside the Coeur d'Alene River. Trains also spilled poisons onto the Coeur d'Alene Reservation, private farmlands and residential properties. The trains added pollution to an area already massively contaminated from mining waste - where waste has been killing tundra swans and other wildlife for decades.

When spilled, the highly concentrated ores poisoned the environment at levels far greater than most other places in the basin. This was because the concentrates had much higher levels of heavy metals than mine tailings, ranging up to 75 percent pure lead. The spilled metals - lead, arsenic, cadmium and zinc - were pushed around by over 100 years of rain, snow and groundwater, poisoning adjacent waters, land, and rocky shorelines. The rail bed itself was built largely from mine tailings.

A 1999 study showed severe contamination all along the right-of-way, and extremely high contamination at numerous "hot spots" that may have been the scene of continual shunting of cars, derailments and other accidents. Lead levels as great as 74,000 parts per million were found along the right-of-way, far above the 530 parts per million standard that the EPA says is poisonous to waterfowl.

Today, a "cleanup" engineered under a federal court-ordered consent decree is in progress. The plan calls for removing only a tiny portion of the contamination, converting the old rail bed to a public trail for hiking and biking, capping the old rail bed with a 2.5-inch layer of asphalt, and leaving the rest of the contamination in place.

**A Union Pacific-EPA study gets it wrong**

The chain of events leading to the decree began in 1991, when the Coeur d'Alene Tribes (and later the state of Idaho and the federal government) sued the railroad in federal court under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA) for natural resource damages. Among other conditions, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe demanded that a thorough Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be done. The Union Pacific responded with a plan to convert the line to a public trail, as provided by a 1983 federal law, the Rails to Trails Act. This law, intended to solve the twin problems of railway abandonment and public demand for recreational trails, allows public agencies to obtain unprofitable or inactive rail corridors from railroads and convert them into hiking and biking trails for public use. If demand for rail transport increases in the future, the railroad can reoccupy the trails, reinstall the tracks, and resume rail operations. Most of the Union Pacific rail corridor could have reverted back to private property owners were it not for the 1983 law.

The tribe eventually dropped its demand for an EIS and settled for a cleanup proposal submitted by Union Pacific. The natural resources damage lawsuit was settled in 2000 with what the U.S. Justice Department touted as a "novel" consent decree that required the Union Pacific to spend $25 million.
wetlands and lakes next to the rail bed. This study did not even look for toxins that seeped toward the edges of the 150-foot-wide right of way. Instead, the study focused solely on the middle 30 feet, and looked no deeper than 3.5 feet.

New data reviewed by Cascadia Times shows that if the EPA had looked wider and deeper, it would have found pollution under the railbed at levels greater and in places more widespread than the 1999 study acknowledged. Soil samples taken by Hardy found lead levels as high as 10,300 parts per million toward the edges of the right-of-way — places that the Union Pacific-EPA study did not analyze.

The Union Pacific-EPA study also vastly understated the amount of contamination. Subsequent data shows that at depths of at least 30 feet, lead contamination remains as high as 40,000 parts per million, and that lead levels at shallower depths are as high as 55,000 parts per million. While this information may be buried among thousands of pages at public information repositories, the Union Pacific or the EPA have not exactly trumpeted the news that their study got it wrong.

The contamination includes elevated levels of other poisons, especially arsenic. Hardy’s sampling revealed concentrations of arsenic that could pose a significant health risk, especially to children and pregnant women. To avoid this risk, please:

- stay on the trail in rural areas;
- eat at tables and/or benches provided at designated safe areas;
- do not drink any surface water even if filtered;
- clean your hands before eating;
- don’t eat wild plants from the flood plains river or lake areas.

The state recently renamed it “Trail of the Coeur d’Alenes.” But to residents along the trail, it is bitterly known as the place where the Union Pacific was allowed to get away with a minimal cleanup of the contamination it has caused.
KEMPThORNE KNOWINGLY PUTTING CHILDREN AT RISK?

Coeur d'Alene Basin children still show high levels of lead poisoning, yet critics say governor more concerned about the health of business

No one would benefit from a cleanup in the Coeur d'Alene-Spokane Basin more than children, especially the smallest ones. Many residential yards throughout the upper reaches of the basin are still contaminated with high, unhealthy levels of lead dust. Soils on playgrounds at schools in Kellogg and Osburn are still riddled with lead.

Alarming numbers of pre-school children continue to suffer from dangerously high lead blood levels, despite assurances from Idaho's governor and politicians that there's no public health emergency.

Studies show lead poisoning at levels seen in the Silver Valley produce permanent, irreversible damage to brain functions, and pervasive deficits in academic skills. Very young children are vulnerable because lead interferes with brain development, which occurs most rapidly in children of that age, and no amount may be safe from toxic effects. "The lowest blood lead concentration associated with adverse effects has not yet been defined," says Dr. Bruce Lanphear, a nationally recognized childhood lead expert at Children's Hospital Medical Center in Cincinnati.

Because there have never been any scientific studies of childhood lead poisoning in the basin, no one knows with any precision how many children are or have been poisoned.

And yet last November, Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne said the children of the Coeur d'Alene River Basin no longer face a health emergency from lead poisoning. His interpretation of new blood lead screening data led him to urge the Environmental Protection Agency to drop its plans to clean up lead in and around all contaminated residential property. Instead, he called for a scaled-down cleanup coupled with increased spending for economic development.

"Blood lead monitoring has shown a great improvement this year. This is great news," he said last November in Wallace, Idaho. "We never want to have an Idaho child with an elevated blood lead level. But it is very important that we all recognize that we do not have a public health emergency in the Coeur d'Alene Basin."

The data was based on blood samples taken from children in Silver Valley communities around Wallace and Kellogg. These samples seem to indicate a small reduction in blood levels from previous years in communities in the basin. But the samples are limited in number and do not represent children in the community as a whole.

"Screenings of this type should be considered a 'snap shot' at one specific point in time," says Dr. John Rosen, a nationally recognized children's health expert in New York who is a technical adviser to the Silver Valley People's Action Committee. "Screenings of this type do not determine the actual prevalence of lead poisoning in any community."

Marc Stifelman, the EPA's lead expert, has warned against drawing conclusions about the data Kempthorne has cited. "It's not a study, it's not a survey, it's just a service," he said.

Health experts say that to determine the true prevalence of lead poisoning, one must choose a sample of children that is representative of the whole community. The study's design must take into account such factors as age and season of the year, and be tightly controlled, Rosen says.

Kempthorne and other leaders seem so eager to dismiss health concerns in the basin that the Spokane-based Lands Council and the Sierra Club's Idaho and eastern Washington chapter accuse them of knowingly putting children at risk for lead poison-
Kempthorne and business interests fear that elevated blood lead levels would trigger a “Superfund” cleanup throughout the basin, carrying with it a negative stigma that allegedly discourages investment.

From a public health point of view, even as a snapshot survey, that can be considered to be an epidemic,” says Rosen. This study was based on a model that takes into account such things as lead concentrations in soils around homes, the type of lead compounds detected and their behavior in the body.

This study also shows that 80 percent of the cases of children with high blood lead levels live in homes with high concentrations of lead in yard soils. The other 20 percent of the cases might also be attributable to lead in paint, Stifelman said. He said the full number of contaminated yards in the basin is unknown, only one in five have been tested.

The rate of lead poisoning cases among children in the basin is far higher than the national average among rural communities similar to those in the basin. In fact, it is comparable to lead-poisoning rates typical among the nation’s most polluted inner-city neighborhoods, Stifelman said.

Kempthorne and business interests may have a financial motive for dismissing the health risk to children in the basin. They fear that elevated blood lead levels would trigger a “Superfund” cleanup throughout the basin, carrying with it a negative stigma that allegedly discourages investment.

They worry that tourism plans for the basin, including those of Duane Hagadone, owner of the Coeur d’Alene Resort and newspapers in the basin, might falter in the wake of negative publicity. Among their plans is a scheme to allow riverboat gambling on the lake.

Many business and government leaders in the Coeur d’Alene River basin agree with Kempthorne, including Idaho Lt. Gov. Jack Riggs, a former emergency room doctor in Coeur d’Alene. “The valley is not perfect, but there’s not a spot on the globe that doesn’t have problems.”

Ron Roizen, a Wallace resident hired by Shoshone County to review the EPA’s plan, claims the EPA’s plan to spend $92 million removing lead from homes, yards, parks and playgrounds would benefit only “between seven and 13 basin children (the EPA) believes are at statistical risk from lead. The bottom just fell out of the EPA’s plan that a health risk exists in the basin.”

In fact, the EPA claims that the number of poisoned children is far higher, though not even the EPA knows the exact number.

Roizen is also among many local residents, leaders and school officials who claim that people cannot absorb the type of lead compounds in the basin’s soils. The EPA agrees that the type of lead compounds commonly found in the Silver Valley are harder for the body to absorb than other types of lead compounds. But the EPA says its models take the differences into account. They show, for example, that small children absorb lead into their bodies far more readily than older ones.

Roizen, who has a Ph.D. in sociology, is among many self-designated lead experts in the area who oppose the EPA cleanup. He is a member of the Shoshone Natural Resource Coalition, an organization funded by the mining industry that has already filed suit to block the EPA cleanup plan. (Other plaintiffs are the cities of Smelterville, Wallace, Pinehurst and Mullan.)

Even if the data quoted by Kempthorne and other anti-EPA activists were statistically valid, it still would show that average blood lead levels among children in the basin are statistically no better than they were in 1996. The data would also indicate other serious problems, such as:

- 10.9 percent of pre-school children (under 5 years of age) had blood lead poisoning, defined as levels greater than 10 micrograms of lead per deciliter (one-tenth liter) of blood. Children at this age are more readily exposed to lead, as almost everything they grasp goes into their mouths. They may also be more vulnerable to lead’s toxic effects, as they brains and nervous systems are developing most rapidly.

- Average blood lead levels were high-
est among 3-year-olds. The 3 and 4 year old group also had the highest maximum readings. By sorting dust that include older children whose blood lead levels are typically lower, Kempthorpe and others ignore lead poisonings among the younger, more at risk, children.

Within the existing Superfund area and around Kellogg, more than 7 percent had blood lead levels of 10 or higher. The most heavily poisoned in this group were the 2-12-year-olds, of which more than 12 percent had elevated levels.

Lanphear, the epidemiologist in Cincinnati, told Cascadia Times that further studies of children in the area are probably not necessary. "We know enough now that we need to take action," he said.

The EPA is most concerned with blood lead levels of greater than 10, but newer peer-reviewed studies raise alarms about lesser levels, Lanphear says. He was the lead researcher on a study released in 2001 that showed there may be so safe concentration of the metal in blood.

"There appear to be adverse effects even below 5 micrograms per deciliter," Lanphear says. The study, "Subclinical Lead Toxicity in U.S. Children and Adolescents," found deleterious and persistent effects of low-level lead exposure on brain function, such as lowered intelligence, behavioral problems, and diminished school performance."

The only way to make the basin safe for children appears to be removing the lead from their environment. The EPA plans to reduce lead contamination in 1000 parts per million. While those levels represent an overall improvement, they may not be enough to protect public health. At other lead contaminated sites around the country, the EPA has reduced lead levels to 400 parts per million.

Lanphear says a new study in Utah shows that removing lead from soil around homes reduces lead levels in children's blood. According to the study's abstract, for children less than 3 years old, blood lead levels dropped by 3.5 micrograms per deciliter for every 1000 parts per million reduction in soil lead concentrations. Details of that study have not yet been published, but Lanphear shared the study's abstract with Cascadia Times.

Lanphear says that lead levels revealed in the sampling data can significantly reduce IQ.

Other data confirms lead-related health problems persist in the basin. The Idaho Department of Health reports that substantially more babies born in Shoshone County have low birth weights when compared with all other parts of Idaho. Studies show that lead poisoning can cause low birth weight. Low weights at birth are often associated with other health problems.

In January 2002, eight current or former basin residents filed a class action suit seeking compensation and medical treatment for about 180,000 people allegedly poisoned by the lead. "While the Environmental Protection Agency looks at the long-term cleanup, we need to find ways to help stop the damage of the lead contamination now," said Steve Berman, the plaintiffs' attorney from Seattle law firm Hagens Berman. "We must help parents identify kids in danger of reduced intelligence, delayed development and a myriad of other health problems caused by the contamination."

Plaintiffs Arden and Rita Bornitz live outside St. Maries, Idaho, about 12 miles from the Bunker Hill Superfund cleanup site. Their three children all have elevated lead levels, possibly from playing along the contaminated Union Pacific rail line (see story Page 16). Other plaintiffs include Rod and Toni Hardy, who live along the rail line. "Like all parents, we want the best for our children," Arden Bornitz said. "Our kids are suffering profound health damages that we believe are tied directly to lead poisoning. We know what we are facing and are doing everything we can to help our children, but we believe there are hundreds of families that have no idea that their kids are in danger of these health risks."

For nearly one hundred years, the mining companies created a legacy of illness for our children," he said. "As parents, we must hold them accountable today."

The Bornitz's youngest son, Kyler Bornitz, had blood levels showing a lead content of 27 micrograms per deciliter by the time he was 18 months old. According to the complaint, some parents have suffered significant economic losses in efforts to safeguard their children.

Tina and Harve Paddock, former Wallace residents, found lead levels topping 2,600 parts per million in their home. The EPA removed more than a foot of top soil from their yard with levels as high as 2,900 parts per million lead, leaving yet more contamination below a landscape barrier. Interiors were not addressed at all. Before they purchased their home, a state of Idaho study in 1996 found elevated lead levels in the yard, but the results of these tests were not disclosed to the Paddocks when they bought the house in November 1997.

The Paddocks claim in a separate lawsuit that two real estate agencies violated state and federal law by failing to disclose information about the lead contamination. The Paddocks say that it is not illegal to live in a home that is polluted, but it is illegal to rent or sell a home without disclosing lead hazards. The plaintiffs recently asked the court to move the case to Boise "because of the hostile nature of articles in the press," Tina Paddock said.

"In a strange sense, the Paddocks were lucky — they could move, although it cost them an enormous price," Berman noted. "No parents should have to weigh their children's lives against their family's financial survival."

Berman stressed that medical monitoring is absolutely essential to determine the true impact of the mining contamination.

"The blatant disregard for human health extends far beyond dollars-per-acre," Berman said. "These children must be protected from mining waste — that's the real bottom line."

"The efforts at remediation over the years have been successful," said Vicki Veltkamp, a Hecla spokeswoman in a statement. "This is not a widespread problem. The med­­i­v­e­al­y­ is ong­o­ing from the government, and the mining companies are already doing all they can."

She added that relatively few people have been shown to have high levels of lead.

"This is not an emergency health situation here," Veltkamp said. "What we've done here is overblown the problem severely to what it does give a negative public perception to the Silver Valley that it's not a pleasant place to live and that it's dangerous, and that's not true."

Meanwhile, the many homes, parks and schools remain contaminated. One of the most contaminated sites may be Kellogg Middle School, located within a hundred yards of the former lead smelter site. The EPA's data shows contamination of up to 17,000 parts per million lead in soils in the school's playground. Yet there are no plans to clean it up in the coming months.

The EPA's $92 million cleanup would remove lead from soils around homes, in parks and at schools in the basin. The state of Idaho proposes spending just $29 million for lead removal.

"The evidence is in," Kempthornor said. "The Coeur d'Alene Basin is one of our nation's greatest treasures, and the environmental costs of the past will no longer need to haunt us."

If only that were true...
Schoolyards in the Silver Valley have had high lead contamination levels.

**FAILURE TO DISCLOSE**

Wallace schools censored lead health information from student handbook

In 1999, the Wallace School District briefly considered the idea of warning students about lead hazards on school playgrounds. The school board decided not to insert a warning into the student handbook, despite a plea from the district superintendent, Nancy J. Vandeventer. Soon after, Vandeventer resigned.

At the time, lead levels on playgrounds at the district’s schools were so high they exceeded the federal standard for taking swift and immediate action to protect children’s health. Yet, a cleanup at some schools was delayed for two years after lead levels became known, and no cleanup has occurred at all other schools.

Interiors have never been cleaned at any school. School officials say this is not necessary because an examination of interiors was performed in 2000 by the state of Idaho that gave them a clean bill of health. But critics, including Dr. John Rosen, a childhood lead expert in New York, say the testing was not performed in conformance with federal standards and was done by a company that was not certified by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Parents, teachers and area residents have never been informed about the extent and amount of pollution to which children have been exposed. School districts in the basin have not followed federal laws requiring them to disclose lead hazards at facilities occupied by children.

EPA regulations say pollution at public access areas like parks, libraries, schools, stores and homes harboring deadly toxins require even more strict cleanup because of the risk of constant exposure. Yet, in the Silver Valley, the EPA has weakened the cleanup standard so that mining companies responsible for paying for cleanup don’t go bankrupt. This tactic may help some companies stay in business, but it poses increased risks for the public — especially the children.

But the biggest result may be the schools’ failure to inform.

“We had enrolled our 3 boys in school district,” says Tina Paddock, a former Wallace resident who now lives in McMinnville, Ore. “At no time did any school official or staff member ever inform us about this contamination.”

Paddock broached the idea of presenting lead health information in the handbook after receiving data on lead levels from the Environmental Protection Agency. Paddock obtained the data through the Freedom of Information Act.

When Paddock met with Vandeventer, the superintendent claimed she did not have the information. “She told me they did not have the information at a time when the school was already scheduled for partial cleanup,” Paddock says. “I think the information was kept from her by the school board.”

Tina Paddock and her husband Harve moved to Wallace in 1997 to run a landscaping business. They had bid on a project to install a sprinkler system at one of the Wallace schools, Silver Hills Middle School. The Paddocks did not know that the field at the school was a toxic nightmare containing up to 63,000 parts per million lead in its soils. The EPA considers levels below 400 to be safe.

Tina Paddock says Henry Nibbs, the director of a youth baseball league, told her husband that the school was getting its ball field ripped out by the EPA as part of a lead remediation effort.

In February 1999 Tina called Vandeventer to see if the district would “get something in the student handbook” about the lead.

“She said she would have to talk to the school board,” says Tina, who recorded the conversation on tape.

These are the words that Vandeventer proposed to insert into the student handbook:

“WSD # 393 does not lie within the identified boundaries of Superfund. However, we always advise our students to wash after playing outdoors and to keep soil, etc., out of their mouths. We cooperate with all governmental agencies that focus on providing a safe, healthy and clean environment in which to learn.”

The statement was incorrect — Wallace was and is within the Superfund site, defined as any place in the basin the mining waste has come to rest — and it makes no reference to lead hazards, much less to the EPA data showing extremely high lead concentrations in school yard soils.

The school board told Vandeventer that if Tina Paddock showed up at her office again, Tina should be told to go talk to the school attorney. The school board also told Vandeventer not to talk to Tina any further. The school board chairman is Tom Fudge, an executive with Hecla Mining Co. in Wallace.

On tape, Vandeventer explains to Paddock that the school board declined our request to inform parents as they “did not want to be waving red flags.” Vandeventer says she would continue to try to get something printed in the student handbook.

“You could tell in her voice she was sorry, but she was really hands tied,” Paddock says. “Finally after multiple visits with her, she really understood about the pollution but was still told by her board that employed her not to talk about it.”

So Paddock paid a visit to the school attorney, Michael Branstetter, who represents the mining companies as well as Barbara Miller’s ex-husband, Ed Miller, in their child custody case.

Paddock says Branstetter advised he to ask the EPA to disclose the information. She recalls Branstetter saying, “They always like to strong arm in situations like this.”

Paddock also approached the Idaho Department of Education for help. The EPA had provided the state with the sampling data, and in 1997 the EPA informed the state of its responsibility to protect the student body and faculty. But state officials told her by letter that the issue was a local matter.

“The worst thing that could happen did,” Paddock says. “The Idaho schools did not disseminate the information. They were in denial that that information even existed.”
IDAHO'S SORE THUMB

Cost of repairing mining's damage to the West? ...AT LEAST $2.5 BILLION

Last December, the U.S. Forest Service approved an exploratory permit for a controversial new hard rock mine adjacent to and underneat the Cabinet Mountain Wilderness of western Montana. Rock Creek Mine would be due deep below the Wilderness Area, one of the first areas protected under the Wilderness Act of 1964. Every day miners would extract 10,000 tons of ore in search of silver and copper while producing up to 3 million gallons of waste water. Over 300 acres of waste rock would be piled up a short distance from the Clark Fork River, a major tributary of the Columbia River.

Before it can develop this mine, Sterling Mining will have to post the largest reclamation bond in Montana history — $77 million. That money will be needed after closure because the mine is almost certain to pollute Rock Creek, the Clark Fork River and Lake Pend Oreille with heavy metals. But the mine may also produce “acid mine drainage” that could require water treatment in perpetuity. There’s no money in the reclamation bond to pay for this.

“It’s just all a leap of faith,” says Bonnie Gestrin of the Mineral Policy Center. “It’s just a ludicrous thing to be authorizing a mine that needs water treatment in perpetuity.”

The mine may also contaminate, dewater and drain two alpine wilderness lakes, Cliff Lake and Moran Basin, and two streams, Rock Creek and Bull River. “If these impacts were to occur, they would clearly be irreversible,” Gestrin said.

This scenario assumes Sterling does everything according to its plan. Any foul-ups would cause even greater problems. Though approval of the mine is under appeal in federal court, federal mining laws make it nearly impossible to block new mines on federal lands, and the Bush administration has rolled back some of the newer environmental safeguards enacted under Clinton.

The $77 million reclamation bond is significant because, after the valuable metals are dug out, there is no guarantee that Sterling will be around to do anything more than file bankruptcy papers, given the track record of its main people and the mining industry in general.

A study in 2000 by the Center for Science and Public Participation, a Bozeman-based think tank, shows that the total, potential reclamation liability of large mines in all the western states exceeds one billion dollars. Add to that another $1.4 billion dollars to clean up Idaho’s Coeur d’Alene River Basin, and perhaps another $100 million more to take care of the W.R. Grace asbestos mine in Libby, and the costs exceed $2.5 billion. At Libby, where perhaps hundreds of people have gotten sick or died from lung disease, Grace filed for bankruptcy last year in the wake of lawsuits seeking compensation for victims and medical treatment. The Environmental Protection Agency has declared Libby a Superfund site. Many other western mines have declared bankruptcy, including 38 in Nevada alone, as well as one survey company that insures mines against environmental damages.

Even ASARCO, once one of the largest mining companies in North America, is threatening to walk away from its responsibilities to clean up a Superfund site in Tacoma. The EPA has threatened to fine ASARCO $27 million, but its Seattle Post-Intelligencer reports that the Mexican holding company that controls ASARCO may shift assets to other parts of its corporate empire and walk away. Interestingly, until 1999 ASARCO held title to development rights at the Rock Creek Mine, but sold out because of the low price of copper.

So it goes with mining in the West. “Federal mining law lets miners have taxpayer-owned minerals for as close to free as you can get, then frequently sticks the same taxpayers again for the cost of cleaning up the messes made by the miners,” says David Chambers, the Center for Science and Public Participation’s director. “We’re talking about toxic dumps that contaminate aquifers, kill rivers and wildlife and permanently scar the landscape — environmental disasters that will require remediation in perpetuity.”

Before mines are constructed, federal laws require the owners to prove they will not violate the Clean Water Act. More often than not, these assurances are subsequently broken. In central Idaho, the Grouse Creek Mine was hailed as a “state of the art” facility when it was built in the 1990s. It operated for just three years before cyanide was detected in salmon-hunting streams coming from the site. Now the Forest Service is trying to force the owner, Hecla, to put up one of its mines in Alaska as collateral for the cleanup. Hecla is also on the hook for cleanup costs in the Silver Valley.

In Montana alone, eight of 12 large mines permitted since 1979 were given special approval to construct their mines in the Wilderness Area, one of the first large scale, cyanide heap leach mining operation when it was built in 1979. It could not be built today; the state of Montana now bans the technology. Most of the waste rock and spent ore is generating acid, requiring treatment of all waste water draining from the mine forever. All streams emanating from the mine area, including water flowing to the Fort Belknap Reservation, have been seriously polluted with acid and heavy metals.

The chief executive of Sterling Mining, Frank Duval, was a co-founder of Pegasus Gold. In 1988, after leaving Pegasus, Duval re-opened the Bunker Hill mine in Kellogg, Idaho, but closed it less than a year later and filed for bankruptcy, leaving unpaid taxes of more than $2.4 million owed to the county and local schools. Also in 1988, Duval and another partner from Pegasus, Hobart Teneff, were cited for alleged violations of federal securities rules during their tenure with Pegasus Gold. They agreed not to break those laws in the future. (Teneff is now an officer in the Rock Creek venture.) In 1991, Duval and others filed for bankruptcy at another Silver Valley mine, leaving miners with unpaid wages.

Duval is also president and director of Midnite Mine, located next to a tributary of the Columbia River on the Spokane Indian Reservation. This operation has polluted wetlands, creeks, surface and ground waters with elevated levels of heavy metals and radioactivity. In February 2000, the EPA listed the Midnite Mine as a Superfund Site.

“If the Rock Creek Mine is being appealed in court by eight conservation groups that claim it would degrade 7,000 acres of habitat vital to the survival of the Cabinet-Yaak grizzly bear population, destroy bull trout habitat in Rock Creek, and would discharge up to three million gallons of waste water a day into the Clark Fork River. Even the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service now has second thoughts, and has withdrawn its December 2000 finding that it would not jeopardize these species.”

“We’ve said all along that this mine cannot be built without pushing the Cabinet’s fragile grizzly bear population and bull trout habitat in Rock Creek to extinction,” said Mary Mitchell of the Rock Creek Alliance.

The Forest Service has until mid April 2002 to respond to the appeal. If the appeal is rejected, the Rock Creek Mine will be the first hard rock mine permitted by the Bush Administration. “It will serve as a precedent for other mining to proceed in federally designated wilderness,” Mitchell said. “It will also focus attention on the current discussion to reform the antiquated 1872 Mining Law, which continues to wreak havoc on the nation’s resources, environment, and its taxpayers.”
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15

Idaho border. These areas will be monitored for recontamination.

Siemens. The Spokane River has tribes, which relies on the river for monitoring for recontamination.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

high arsenic levels, up to 310 parts per million. The EPA does not require separate testing for arsenic, which, Hardy maintains, likely migrates differently than the lead.

Hardy presented some of this data to the public and the EPA at an Ombudsman’s hearing in August 2000. The point of all this, Hardy says, is that “there is substantial contamination along the causeway in lakes, wetlands and on private land where the Union Pacific has no plans to do any cleanup.”

Union Pacific officials did not return telephone calls seeking comment.

A loophole big enough to drive freight trains through

It now appears the Tribe and people who live along the trail won’t get the cleanup the consent decree they say they were promised.

For years, the Union Pacific often promised the removal of all but 1000 parts per million lead along the westernmost 15 miles of the right-of-way. But the consent decree provided a loophole through which the Union Pacific could escape this obligation merely by providing notice to the EPA and the Tribe.

After the Ombudsman hearing, the Union Pacific went back and did more extensive sampling, subsequently concluding that the cleanup it promised to do in this section would be too costly and therefore not required under the consent decree. The UP has conducted further tests, but has yet to release this latest data to the public.

Rather than remove the poisons, the UP announced in December 2001 that it will cover up contamination earlier promised to remove with a 10-foot-wide strip of asphalt down the middle of the 150-foot-right-of-way and walk away with only minimal further liability. High levels of arsenic, lead, cadmium and zinc will be left in place.

The EPA and the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, after reviewing the revised Dick Martindale, the EPA’s cleanup spokesman, said it would be too costly for the railroad to perform a more extensive cleanup, and the Union Pacific would find it difficult to find places to store the contamination after it’s removed. Tribe spokesman Phil Cernera did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

By merely capping the rail line off the Reservation, the Union Pacific creates another problem. In certain places, the cap may be less than 1½ feet above the ground, and on private land where the Union Pacific has no plans to do any cleanup.
PRETTY? PRETTY TOXIC

Tons of heavy metals including lead, arsenic and zinc are making their way downstream from mining activities in Idaho and being deposited into our river and aquifer.

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All contributions will be greatly appreciated.
Project Learning Tree: education by omission

By John Borowski

What do you get when the powerful extractors of resources on earth, combine their bottomless war chests, and finance the worst form of a lie? It is called Project Learning Tree, funded by the worst clearcutters on earth, such as Sierra Pacific, Weyerhaeuser and Pacific Lumber, and guilty of that greatest sin in education: omission.

With the motto, “We teach kids how to think, not what to think” PLT gives new meaning to the terms: pandering and knavery.

Corporate America has realized that ecological fluency, brought on by environmental science classes in public schools, was enlightening young citizens to their shrill fabrications about sustainable growth and logos like Willamette Industries “Timber today, forests forever.” And it was time to fight back. This meant spin and the best curricula timber money could buy.

Project Learning Tree panders and constructs their ‘curricula’ according to their funders. PLT does not discuss short rotation mulch, the down sides of monocultures, or the most serious wildlife problem worldwide: fragmentation of habitat. No serious discussion of clearcuts and salmon, or herbicides and human health takes place. Their curriculum has a great focus on tree farms and management. And most noticeably, timber multinationals are absolved of their horrendous track record on public lands, their influence on political riders, their vehemence towards protective legislation and their ownership of powerful political allies. These are not even discussed in a single sentence.

Detractors of such opinion will quickly ask does PLT have some good activities. And the answer is yes. Just like Monsanto, the Greening Earth Society or Exxon, PLT has credible science in their portfolios, but ingeniously weaves a web of deception for unsuspecting teachers. Which leads to a critical point: wouldn’t most teachers be able to supplement the issues in question themselves, don’t they see a need to ask hard questions of PLT’s avoidance of data that reflects poorly on ‘big timber’? And the answer is a resounding: no.

Users of this curricula range from elementary school teachers, who have very limited training in science, to high school teachers, who teach earth science or biology, but have never been trained to teach the dynamics of forest ecology, successional systems and population dynamics of the forest.

The big environmental groups have failed to counter this assault by big timber on science education and most science teachers are not certified in environmental science, because that certification in many states simply does not exist. When free, slick lesson plans are presented to an overworked and exhausted teacher it is tempting to implement those materials, and not rely on instinct to question its’ motives. And the motives of PLT are clear. Teachers are not at fault here, there is no system in most schools to screen these ‘freebies’ and with plummeting economic support schools are taking what they can get. And PLT is giving it to them: literally.

A knife is a deceitful rogue. PLT ‘friends’ are a true rogue’s gallery.

The American Forest Foundation, of which PLT is their miseducation program, just recently announced a new player (and big funder) to their team. The American Petroleum Institute gives new meaning to being a rogue. A leaked internal memo revealed API’s intention to use propaganda to downplay global warming in America’s classrooms. A NY Times story revealed a multi-million dollar scheme to set up a new front group to put industry PR in the hands of school children and their teachers under the name “Science Education Task Group”.

Boise Cascade is a funder of PLT, and avid opponent of roadless legislation and according to the EPA a major polluter of air and water. Georgia Pacific, a funder and supporter, states, “PLT shares GP’s goals of non-biased, scientifically grounded environmental educational materials.” Yet, GP’s own educational materials site old growth as somewhat inferior, old trees, shading the ground and stunting forest floor growth? PLT is endorsed and used by Wise Use Groups such as the Southern Appalachian Multiple Use Council and the Wyoming Timber Industry Association. The Wisconsin branch of PLT went as far as giving the National Hardwood Lumber Association an award. NHLA is a proud Wise Use Group.

We may conclude that PLT’s motto is “teach kids how to think, as we omit thing they need to know, to make decisions about forests.”

But, it gets worse. Some inside the ‘environmental education’ community actually endorse PLT. So as debate divides environmental educators, PLT makes greater inroads. The National Audubon (not local state chapters of Audubon), have announced plans to make Oregon’s uncut gem, Opal Creek an environmental learning center.

Many of National Audubon’s eco educators are backing PLT. PLT in Opal Creek, funded by the same folks that wanted to make over 10,000 acres of Opal Creek deforested in 1990?

It is enough to break the hearts of the activists who saved Opal Creek and possibly sink the ‘flagship’ of the forest movement in Oregon.

Unless PLT decides to explore all its’ omissions, cuts its’ ties with nefarious despots of Mother Earth, it will remain a pet to timber interests. Unless we as teachers and parents demand that our schools have the resources to explore all ‘sides’ of the forest debate, corporate interests will own one more vestige of our children’s culture, and in turn, a forest in the eyes of children will be no more than Douglas fir trees, forty years old, and in line, just like PLT wants our children to be.

John Borowski teaches high school science in Salem, Ore.

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