

improve education, and
Ability to control immigration,
failed! Ability to react to warn-

candidate for the Guinness
World Record).

to back that statement up. In
your article, the writer with

California, moved to Colorado
in 1980, and when I retired in

Fires didn't explode because of habitat protection

Bert Brackett's desperate attack on Western Watersheds Project and me is a slanderous diversion from the realities of the Murphy Complex fire and the condition of public lands across southern Idaho. As a public figure, he should be ashamed of himself.

The Murphy Complex fire's huge extent occurred because of extraordinary high temperatures and dryness with no rain at all for many weeks. The fact that huge areas in Nevada have also burned this year where no changes to grazing practices have occurred underlines that fires will spread very rapidly when wind and super-heated landscapes are ignited. As global climate change heats up the earth, we will see more and more fires in arid landscapes regardless of human efforts to prevent them.

This is not to say that we should avoid making hard decisions to reduce the impact of wildfire to protect wildlife habitat. We should, and among the many actions

READER COMMENT

Jon Marvel

we can take is to ensure that livestock grazing impacts stop creating landscape changes that contribute to the spread of fires and the destruction of wildlife habitat.

Cattle and sheep are vectors for the spread of non-native annual cheatgrass, one of the most flammable of annual grasses. Cheatgrass often dries out in May and remains as a source of fuel for fires for the rest of the year. By trampling soils and destroying soil crusts that prevent non-native plants from establishing themselves, cattle and sheep create the seedbed for the spread of cheatgrass. Cattle and sheep also prefer to graze native bunchgrasses over cheatgrass and gradually reduce and eliminate the native species.

In addition, at ranchers' direction, 600,000 acres of the Jarbidge Field Office has been totally altered by the planting

of the non-native perennial crested wheatgrass that has destroyed all native wildlife habitats while providing more fire fuel than existed prior to the introduction of cattle and sheep.

Cattle have also degraded and destroyed nature's fire-breaks, the streamside riparian areas. Across the Jarbidge Field Office from China Creek to Columbet Creek, ranching has dewatered and trampled watercourses that could provide a refuge for wildlife and fish when fires burn across the landscape.

Finally, the installation of thousands of miles of fencing to benefit ranching on the Jarbidge Field Office has fragmented wildlife habitat and prevented the recovery of antelope herds and sage grouse.

The Murphy Complex fire has burned thousands of acres of sage grouse and wildlife habitat that will recover over time, but the sage-steppe acreage burned this year still pales in comparison to the destruction of wildlife

habitat by ranchers and the Bureau of Land Management over the last 100 years.

This century-long reign over public policy and our public lands is thankfully drawing to a close, and this fact may explain the desperate tone of Bert Brackett's comments. His efforts to browbeat the BLM into doing ranchers' bidding will become more and more difficult as the attitude of the public about public lands changes in favor of conservation of wildlife and fisheries.

Citizens who are concerned about having excellent wildlife habitat, clean water and healthy native fisheries across the Jarbidge Field Office should join with Western Watersheds Project to ensure that future management of public lands reflects the vision of all of us.

Jon Marvel of Hailey is the executive director of the Western Watersheds Project.