

# NOTES FROM AN OLD STUMP JUMPER

*Rural America is falling prey to a subtle form of eco-terrorism. By Jim Hurst*

Look out my office window at a site similar to a bombed-out munitions factory in World War II Germany and I have to ask myself, "What went wrong?" Seeing a once productive and efficient mill destroyed by the cutting torches of dismantlers is a gruesome sight witnessed far too often in rural communities adjacent to our national forests.

Rural America is falling prey to what I call a subtle form of eco-terrorism. These covert operations are perpetrated by a wide array of environmental groups in conjunction with their attorneys, do-gooder bureaucrats, liberal judges, a biased media, and urbanites who buy into the propaganda spewed forth by all the above. This menagerie of nonproducers is eroding the cultures and customs of rural America by taking away our ability to make a living and enjoy our surroundings. They do their damage primarily by using the courts to stop or delay worthwhile projects such as timber sales, oil and gas development, mining and grazing.

This form of eco-terrorism doesn't manifest itself in burned-out ski facilities, destroyed tree plantations, torched SUV deal-

erships or vandalized logging equipment. It's subtle, but nevertheless just as painful. It affects main-street rural America by eroding our lifestyles and taking away our ability to control our own destinies. It capitalizes on our independent values and our ability to handle adversity by ourselves without help from others. This admirable trait is in a significant way destroying us.

We go about our daily tasks, heads down and butts up, and our rural world continues to deteriorate. We can do our work in oblivion and allow this to happen, or we can make a stab at changing the direction we're heading. To me, rural Americans are the most unappreciated and underrepresented segment of our society. If this is true, then we're either indifferent or lackadaisical for not using the power we possess to effect positive and significant change.

After years of promoting rallies and letter-writing campaigns, testifying at senate hearings and generally raising hell, I have come to

the realization that if we are to improve our lot, it is going to have to be at the polls on election day. Rural America has the votes to swing any presidential election in a direction favorable to what we deem important. As a voting bloc we can impact most senatorial races as well.

There are rural areas in every state and candidates should not ignore us. They should seek us out. While reducing crime in urban areas is important, reducing poverty in rural America is just as important. It's high time decision makers come to us for our input instead of caving in to a rural economic-development group holding a hand out for a federal grant.

In our case, what went wrong is the fact that we had no control over our own destiny and no help from Washington. Environmental groups, many funded by green trusts and foundations, torpedoed the timber program on the Kootenai National Forest. Our case is not unique. It illustrates what happens when outsiders make decisions and we are powerless to intervene. Rural

dweller who own private property should also beware, as government takings "for the good of the nation" will most likely accelerate in the coming years. And don't forget who covets our water. The effects of the Endangered Species Act will continue to jeopardize ranching, farming, timber and extractive industries. The environmentalists hang their hats on that rack while ranches, farms, mines, and mills hang a foreclosure sign on the same rack. And we let it happen over and over and over.

Personally, I don't care who represents me in Washington as long as he or she has rural America's interests at heart and is willing to fight for us. Rural Americans want what's best for this country—security, a livable wage, social justice, a clean environment, high moral standards, equal representation in Congress, and a president who can hear us. What we don't need are federal laws, mandates, and executive orders that take decision making away from us.

Rural America must organize or face oblivion. How it'll be done and who does it remains to be seen. One thing I know is that there is no room for extremists, self-promoters or large egos. Reasonable people with strength in numbers can effect positive change for rural Americans. That's the rack I'm willing to hang my hat on. ■

*Jim Hurst lives in Eureka, Mont.*



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*Desolation—both literal and figurative—characterizes this photograph taken in the winter of 2005 following the Owens & Hurst auction. Most of these buildings have now been sold for salvage. Little remains on the site other than the office. Jim Hurst has yet to decide what he will do with the acreage. Most of his former employees are reportedly still living in the Eureka area. Each got around \$30,000 in shared profits from Jim when he closed the plant.*