



On a Changing Land

QUOTES FROM INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS

REFLECTIONS ON THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LAND

There is just the openness in the landscape. Also - You travel 5 minutes and you are in the forest ecosystem. You travel 5 minutes another direction and you are in a desert ecosystem. There is a diversity of vegetation. So depending on what your interests are, there's a lot the county offers. There's also sunstones, the sand dunes, the Lost Forest, the Green Mountains, Crack-in-the-Ground. All the areas have their distinct qualities.

The individuals who live in Lake County are connected to their natural resources. Maybe there are people in the city who don't have a chance to explore the natural landscape like we do. Maybe they are disconnected from the natural resources and the separation becomes larger and larger. People want to do their part to save the planet and they can be surprised when they hear our side of relating to nature. In ranching and farming life depends on maintaining what you have. You are a steward of your resources and land. We rely on the land for income and food.

Water is a limiting factor.

Seeing beautiful trees growing up and then seeing a moonscape made me want to do something. We're having larger, more severe, uncharacteristic fires.

The livestock producers today do absolutely know they have to manage their grass or they'll go broke. Cattle and wildlife are tied together. The folks learn about plant ecology in. Learn about being responsible stewards of their land in grade school and on.

Every wildlife population group responds to changes in habitat, to changes in other wildlife, humans, domestic animals. I can go to the Chewacan River, Deep Creek, Guano Creek and the

riparian health is significantly improved so little birds respond to that – nesting in these areas. More grasses and less shrubs in the forests affect the mule deer because they eat shrubs. Huge change in predator dynamic. Used to be amazing to see a cougar in 1988. All of a sudden, now the cougar population has increased. That effects other populations of wildlife. It is interesting to watch the changes. You can be shocked and awed by all what you see.

I love the quiet, the peace and the beauty of the high desert. It's gorgeous. One of my favorite views is when you start up towards Fremont Point. You can see the whole Thompson Valley – it's so picturesque. The whole drive is just fantastic. The vastness of the whole area and seeing such long distances is amazing. You couldn't ask for more beautiful country. We have the most amazing sunrises and sunset here. And the stars at night – Wow. Oh the things you can see makes you wonder about the things you can't see.

I love autumn with the cold crisp nights. I hear the honkers overhead. The skies and colors are beautiful. The harvest moon. The aspens in the forest turning yellow.

Most people would think the landscape is stark. Isolated. But it's full of grandeur. The geology too is so interesting. Abert Rim is a spectacular escarpment. On top you see the whole valley. Fort Rock looks like a nature-made geologic fort. It's famous because of the sagebrush sandals dated 9000 years ago. Paisley Caves has dated people living there over 14,000 years ago. When I was a kid we went to Crump and Hart Lake areas to look for arrowheads. We just explored a lot. My dad and I hiked as far up Abert Rim faced as we could. I started to slip and my dad said – "Time to quit". Instilled an interest in geological things – that history of how landforms happened.

I never thought of juniper as an invasive species. It's hard to see dead junipers lying on the ground. I get the science of it. For me though, they are a heartstring to the land. Always knew they took a lot of water but didn't think it created a problem for the landscape. There's an evolution in everything if they are taking over. I know they are trying to save the grasses for wildlife and ranching.

Our landscape is difficult to change. Bit I've seen changes because of wildfire. Especially Winter Rim. Then there was a terrible windstorm up on top of the Rim that devastated an area several years ago. Now there's a mish mash of downed timber.

It's odd about this country. You either love it and if you leave you come back. Or you hate it and once gone never come back. You can fall in love with the expanse and just the beauty. Trees, mountains, clouds, the constant movement of life that's around you.

I love when the desert is green. The ground is still soft, pliable. Trees are shooting out new buds. The very first life after winter, the first green thing that starts to come up is the buttercup. It's the first flower that blossoms in spring. Nothing else is alive. Of course there's sage and rabbit bush. But one morning you go out and there's this little flower – the symbol of renewal.

The winters are exceedingly hard. They're long. In the spring for a brief moment you get to relax and then immediately you start preparing for winter in June. Things that will need tending to get through the coming winter. Barns to protect animals. Fix water lines so they won't freeze. Fix fences for the animals.

The summers are long, hot and dry. Once the rain stops, it dries up and is hard as a rock. If there is drought, the grass seed and stems the cows eat don't fully mature. Cows count on seeds of grasses for nutrition late summer/early fall. Without rain, the grasses don't mature and when cows come in from summer feeding they are already behind and not as healthy. Come in bony. They have to be fed good feed right away.

I would describe the character of this land by saying it is like a crusty, weathered person. On the outside they look hard, but inside they cry over their dog. You need to really look underneath and closely at this land to see everything about it.

We spent a lot of time outdoors in nature – camping, fishing, hunting. As kids we could spend our free time up in the foothills of the mountains in Lakeview that were close to our house. We'd be out there all the time.

Now there are so many places I know to go. They offer different things. One of my favorites is Can Springs. I love this area because there is a transition zone between the forest and the desert. It has large ponderosa pines. A spring flows down into a canyon with Honey Creek at the bottom. Literally within a couple of miles you are in the desert with sagebrush. The transition is magical to me. So many different species of trees and plants. Seems like the wildlife like these transition zones as well.

The month of June is a favorite. We have the melt off of snow and all the intermittent creeks are running. Also great for wildflowers. Everything is green and lush. I like the lupine, Indian paintbrush, yellow arrowroot that turns whole areas yellow. It depends on the amount of rain what you see.

The forest experience feels very close. The trees obstruct your view.

In the desert I focus on the panorama. It's pretty amazing. In the desert area, Crack-in-the-ground is awesome. In some parts it's 70 feet deep and you can touch both walls. It can be in the 90's outside and you step into the crack and it's 20 degrees cooler. There is different vegetation. Lush green plants on the walls. Derek Cave is a lava tube. You can hike back in and as you go deeper into it, there is no light at all. One spot has a skylight. You can get the weather coming in. If you're in there in November and it starts to snow, the snow is falling down through the skylight which is pretty cool!

Nature is part of our life everyday. I see more deer on the way to work than people. Every window feels like you have an amazing view. When I was away from here I realized what I took for granted. The thing I really came to value is the solitude. You get to go out into a beautiful, amazing canyon and you are by yourself.

In spring the sandhill cranes come. They make the most beautiful sound in the whole world. A couple of winters ago we had the worst winter in 70 years. The sound of the cranes meant spring was here.

There are places you can get where it get so dark, pitch black dark, you can see so many stars.

We have pretty short seasons. Seasons are tied to activities. Haying. Hunting. Then there is winter. Winter starts sometimes really early. The weather turns and the snow starts. The winters are really cold. Lots of wind.

It's timeless out here. It changes but doesn't change. You look at what nature has done here. Land sinking and rising. Remnants of what was a large lake. Now there are timber areas, wetlands and just different ecosystems and wildlife. Slide Lake is one of my favorite places. This huge landslide created a spring and a nice little trout lake. I think the wildlife refuge is also really special. The amount of birds and the variety of types is amazing. My favorite is the yellow-headed blackbird. They sound like a rusty gate. I know when I see and hear them spring is coming. And Anna River you can see the geology. Sometimes you can see fossils in the banks.

It's just painful to go to Campbell Lake now because of the beetle kill. It was so beautiful and is decimated now. Then there's the 2001 fire. The damage is hard to look at. It'll never be the same. At least not in my lifetime. That's part of the deal of living out here. As we change things, it's going to be more of an issue.

We are managing this area better. We are protecting the land. We're more drawn together and are working together too. Helping manage the land so feed crops don't burn. My house doesn't burn or my neighbor's. Or we don't burn up habitat for deer or sage grouse so hunters can come in. Everyone working together helps the environment for everyone.

There's a camas meadow out there in the upper area – Coyote Meadow. Native Americans came here every year to gather camas. This used to be a lake and playa. Another lake on the land fills every spring and dries up after 7 months or so. It's slowly changing to become like Coyote Meadow over the next many years. Humans think their lifetime is forever. Everything has a lifespan. For some trees its 1000 years. For humans it's 100 years. All these cycles.

That's what this country is about – water.

On that ridge over there you can look to the west and see the forest, the Chewacan River basin. It's green. Turn around 180 degrees and you see the desert. Abert Rim, sage and rim rock. Seems like you see forever that way. Shows the diversity of Lake County and what is significant.

Spring is my favorite time of year – the wildflowers, the green. Another month and a half things will start to turn brown – or I say golden. We have lots of wildflowers. You'll see meadows that are solid blue with camas. I do like the fall too. The cooler air, wild plum leaves turning red, aspens turning yellow. A real cold day in winter is the worst. I go out and feed the cows and come back in and stoke the fire.

Ridge of timber, desert, ridge of timber, desert. Pretty much what it's like here. That's our diversity. If you live here you have to be willing to get in touch with yourself and the land. It's a different way to live.

We're very much interested in natural resources – wildlife, grass, forest, rangeland, water, fish – it's all in one package here. We try to manage the land with all this in mind. This creek here, made in the '64 and '92 floods – we're going to rehabilitate it. Right now there is no fishery in it –

not the right habitat. We're going to fill the gully and divert the channel. Do some ponds for waterfowl. We'll save the meadow doing this. It's a big project.

Sunrise and sunset are my favorite times of day. They are amazing and never the same. I've been all over Oregon and there is nothing quite as "wow" as those times of day here.

The weather changes fast too.

You just stop and listen and hear no constant noise.

Just the wind and you.