

OPINION

Keepin' it real on land rights

When a road closes in a forest and nobody hears about it, does that mean it's *really* closed? Yep. Sadly, it does. So much for philosophy! More and more these days, roads in our national forests, backcountry and deserts are blocked off with boulders and barricades. I listen to the accounts of red stakes, fences and signs prohibiting access to our public lands — all too often and usually too late.

As miners, we can cuss the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, but the truth is that in most cases the people who work for these federal agencies are just doing their jobs. They're not real the problem. It's their bosses. Yep, Congress. So, when people tell me that politics have nothing to do with prospecting, I can only shake my head in disbelief. No wonder our rights are being trampled and our land rights are being lost. We've buried our heads too deep in the black sand!



Brad Jones

It's not my intent to pick sides in politics. That's your right and responsibility as a voter. I'm on the side of prospectors, miners and those who believe in keeping public lands open to the people, period. No, you don't *have* to vote. It's a free country. You don't *have* to choose sides. But, unless we get off the couch and get active, we're willingly sacrificing our rights and the rights of our children and grandchildren to access public lands, prospect and mine for gold. Yes, we all go prospecting to get away from the aggravation of polarized and partisan politics, but what happens when we lose that right — the right to escape and go prospecting? Now, tell me again that prospecting has nothing to do with politics. Say what you will about discussing politics and religion at the dinner table, but the fact is we are on a collision course with the political ideology, if not the religion, of environmental extremism. It's happening all around us — road closures, EPA raids on miners and the new religion of wildlife worship under the Endangered Species Act.

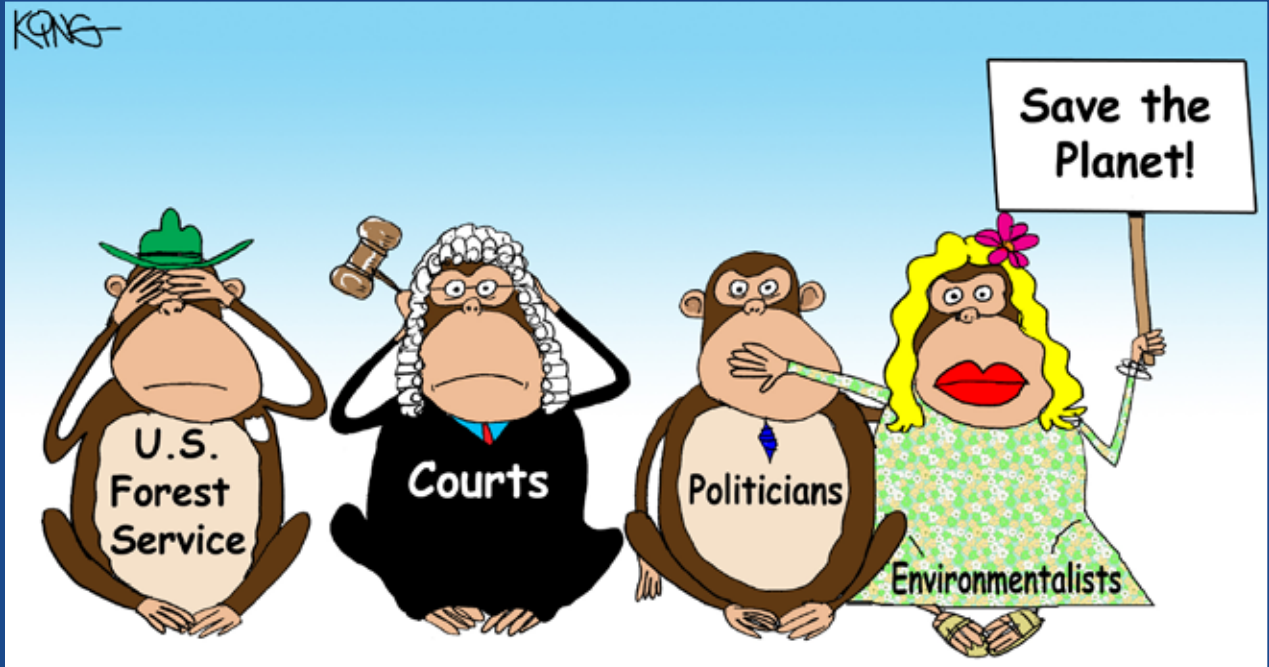
As a member of the rare human subspecies, *panasaurus fergoldust*, which is prone to fever and subsists mainly on canned beans and sourdough, I should have just as much right to camp in the wilderness, dig a hole, scratch my back on a tree or fish for salmon as any grizzled ol' bear. I'm curious about what the EPA has to say about the bears, though. After all, bears leave a big footprint and we all know what they do in the woods. For shame!

The BLM and Forest Service are not in the business of making access to the outdoors any easier. Their federal mandate is to gradually limit our access to the outdoors — less roads, fewer campgrounds, fewer people. It all began with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, which led to an edict to each and every U.S. Forest Service district to map out and target roads for closure. These are called Travel Management Plans and every national forest has one. **Catch 22:** The problem with miners is they are always out mining, off the grid and not slumped over a computer reading U.S. Forest Service websites to see how their rights are being eroded.

Of jackasses and mules: Recently, when a U.S. Forest Service officer suggested "reasonable access" to mining claims could be interpreted as mules rather than motorized vehicles, I almost fell on my ass ... errr donkey. The first thought that entered my mind was: "When is the last time a U.S. Forest Service ranger saw a miner going to his claim by foot or by mule?" Yes, we prospectors have nothing but reverence for beasts of burden — jackasses, burros and mules, but we also respect cacti and the soles of our feet. We have enough thorns in our boots. Mules? Are you serious? Now, can we keep it real?

— **BRAD JONES**, Managing Editor

See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil ...



does no good! Take a stand on land rights.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Road closures irk GPAA member

Dear Editor;

Re: December 2013 / January 2014 *Pick & Shovel Gazette* article, "EPA plays chicken with miners," by Kristi Waterworth and Brad Jones.

I just read your article in the *Pick & Shovel Gazette* about the heavy hand of the EPA. Although many of the articles in the *Pick & Shovel* cover events mostly in the west and I reside in South Carolina, I am outraged by the actions of our government.

Most folks living in the east are not aware of what is taking place on our public lands. The task as I see it is to make more folks aware of the actions of the environmentalists, progressives, mainstream media as well as state and national governments.

These actions close public lands to all, from bird watchers to small-scale miners. Requesting additional explanation from the EPA will most likely be a failed attempt to get the true time-line of events due the delays and false statements that will be crafted by the EPA and the Obama administration. Likewise, Sen. David Vitter's (R-La.) call to investigate the EPA raid will be completely one-sided like all hearings, such as Benghazi, Fast & Furious, IRS, Obamacare failures, NSA data mining, that have been held by Congress.

While on company assignment in Orange County,

Calif., I would head out for some trout fishing at the Kern or Owens River on long weekends. While attempting to get to the Owens River north of Bishop, I found many BLM or U.S. Forest Service access gates closed. At that time, in 1996, I was not aware of our public lands being closed to the public. I still do not know the reasons for those closed gates, but I assume I was experiencing the early overreach by activist groups and our government.

The only suggestion I could recommend as far as change to our laws is to have all federal organizations (EPA, FBI, ATF, etc.) partner with local sheriffs to conduct any raids on our citizens. Local sheriffs should be there to ensure citizens rights are not violated by the heavy-handed federal agencies.

I have written to the White House on many occasions stating the future would prove the Obama administration to be the most corrupt in our country's history. We are now living what I described as the future.

I wish more folks could read the *Pick & Shovel Gazette*.

Andy Kelleher
GPAA Member
Chesnee, S.C.

Sue-and-settle tactics are just wrong

Dear Editor;

Re: October/November 2013 *Pick & Shovel Gazette* article, "U.S. Chamber of Commerce alleges environmentalists use sue-and-settle tactics," by Sarah Reijnen:

Sue-and-settle tactics are more than a con game. It's extortion, fraud, deliberately putting people out of work, Constitutional abuse, abuse of office, misappropriation of money, hate/war mongering, shyster-ism, claim jumping and theft. It is also bringing frivolous cases into court, and perjury (false, misleading and unfounded.)

These people [radical environmentalist groups

allegedly working in collusion with government agencies] have declared war against *real* Americans while pushing their unlawful socialist agenda. The rest are misguided people who cannot and will not think for themselves and professional protesters out for profit.

Push for full financial disclosure of major funders of this anti-mining action and environmental groups. Who is driving these organizations? I doubt these groups are really non-profit; that's just a smokescreen. Let's bring criminal charges with our counter suits!

John Ruckman
GPAA member
Yreka, Calif.

Have your say. Send us your thoughts.

Do you feel strongly about a subject affecting gold prospectors, small-scale miners, gem hunters, treasure seekers metal detectorists or your access to public lands. Did you agree or disagree with a story you read in the *Pick & Shovel Gazette*? Share your thoughts with us by writing a letter to the editor. Send your letter to content@goldprospectors.org. Be sure to write Letter to the Editor in the subject line. Please include your full name, city/town, state and whether you are a GPAA, GPAA Lifetime or LDMA member. (Please include your address and phone number for verification purposes only. Your address and phone number will NOT be published.) We want to hear from you!