

MYSTERIOUSER & MYSTERIOUSER

Nature and astonishing non sequiturs. Words & photos by Steven H. Rich.

Mystery is the great and abiding refuge of the incompetent. Nature is in danger because of the emotionally charged influence of a few hundred academics who lack the skill to solve real problems in nature so they reduce everything to an antihuman mind game. The quality of logic from this group is silly. The same absolutist reasoning would require humanity to give up love, music, sex, art, religion, thinking, commerce, theatre, parenting, policing and anything else people have done clumsily or unethically.



ABOVE: Root plowed to thin sage in the 1960s, this land has been grazed since the 1960s. Native grasses and flowers coexist with sage and other woody species. There is no erosion. BELOW: Rested since the 1940s, biodiversity is minimal. Most perennial grasses and flowers are gone. Mysteriously, activists still expect biodiversity to increase from prolonged rest.



You can easily tell when a professor, bureaucrat or activist has become a priest or acolyte of the mystery religion of nature. Nature, they grandly tell us, is too complex for humans to understand. We should strive for knowledge (i.e., keep paying for their collection of “supporting evidence”) but wisdom lies in human noninterference.

Mystery priests speak in global symbolisms, which they apparently believe contain all possible truth. For scientists, on the other hand, a very complex entity like livestock grazing manifests many effects. Lots of them are wonderfully beneficial: services like increased seedling production and survival; greater biodiversity; improved nutrient cycling; better forage quality and habitat, closer plant spacing; and better watershed and soil fertility. They are created by carefully managing timing intensity and frequency of grazing and other factors. Here’s how the mystery gang handles all this: “Livestock grazing is bad and not natural!” (No matter how much good it does.)

Fire is another complex entity with effects ranging from selective healing to horrendous destruction. These vary according to timing, duration, frequency and intensity, and the species and soils being burned along with moisture content and other factors. To the mystery cultists, fire is always good! And natural (even if they light it). Management is bad! Not natural. All human influences are bad, not natural, and alter nature! Altering is bad and not natural. Nature is good and natural. Any disagreement is a sentimental human-value judgment.

The above pretty much sums up the whole mystery religion of nature—other than its desire to get rid of humans entirely. These global symbolisms allow their adherents to speak with all the scientific and managerial precision inherent to grunts, burps and blows with blunt objects.

You may notice that speaking in simplistic global symbolisms is common to a lot of nasty radical all-or-nothing notions and “isms”—like racism, sexism, fascism, communism. The mystery religion of nature and other hallucinatory philosophies share the trait of having vast bodies of so-called “supporting evidence.” All one does to accept this evidence is plug one’s ears, close one’s eyes and hum loudly when critics want to discuss the actual governing principals (like timing, intensity, frequency, etc.) or objective standards against which to evaluate the supporting evidence.

The actual purpose of the supporting evi-

dence is to hijack science. They create an appearance of order and deliberate thought by rhetorically focusing on isolated facts. They use these data outside the context of the study or make points through studies structured to give only one possible result.

It's actually pretty slick stuff. Since only "they" get to say what's natural, they can alter nature and whatever happens is natural. "They" can slather fire all over the place and call it "hands off," especially if blessed by the great mystery with a lightning strike. Their "protected" wildlife can overgraze like crazy. No problem. This logic also magically means that hundreds of millions of tons of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases emitted by forest fires



Wildflower seeds concentrate in a cow track. Hoofprint seedbeds in dropping-fertile, active soil is a powerful restoration process. Further trampling covers seeds and creates compacted microsities which hold water.

should not ever be considered in thoughts about global warming. If one does consider this, the mystery types just smile tolerantly and point out the reflective and shading properties of ashes and soot. (Honest, they really do.) It is sacrilege at such moments to ask why we all don't just burn raw coal then.

Scientists who object to the destruction of nature by these hands-off policies are condescendingly shouted down for wanting to use objective scientific standards (human value judgments?) to assess the consequences of hot-season fire, long-term livestock removal, no management and other like disasters. How dare these scientists question the mystery with their feeble minds? Of course biological diversity, ecosystem health and function are to be fiercely defended—from human contamination! They should never be defended from the sacred mystery. Fire, drought, disease, insect infestations, floods and the like are all blessings and judgments of the unquestionable mystery. Aggressive species may do



TOP: Grazed 150 years, this 8" rainfall grassland has cool and warm-season grass and many forbs and shrubs. Pronghorns, deer, rodents, reptiles and many birds use this land. Without water and management provided by quality ranching, there would be less wildlife. Mysteriously, activists can't see any of this. BOTTOM: Foreground has been rested for 60 years. Despite being showered with seeds from grazed areas, little grows there. The reproduction rate is much slower than the death rate. Behind the fence, the presence of humans, their livestock and science has blessed nature on this well-managed ranch, grazed 150 years.

whatever they do as long as they are native! This is exactly the logic of the activists who want to kill Knute, the baby polar bear, to spare him from being pampered by humans in the Berlin Zoo. The non sequiturs in all this are far too many to count.

Look, folks, nature is and may remain for the foreseeable future too complex for us to fully comprehend. It does *not* follow, however, that humans cannot beneficially interact with nature. The abundant pre-Columbian or pre-European settlement condition was in

almost all areas created and defined by large numbers of native humans making a living directly from the land and managing nature for their economic, safety, security, spiritual and esthetic needs. Biodiversity and ecosystem health and functioning are in great danger when left to "naturalness"—i.e., mercilessly random abiotic forces like fire, floods, droughts and the equally merciless competition of aggressive species.

What is really natural—in the sense that species and ecosystems are actually adapted to



ABOVE: Pinion/juniper woodland once crowded out all other plants on this site. Using bulldozers and cool-season fire, this gambel-oak grassland “alternate state” opening was created for wildlife and livestock. It has remained healthy and increasingly diverse since the 1960s.

INSET: Paintbrush, penstemon, grasses and a florist shop of other wildflowers grow in pinion/juniper woodland creatively altered from a barren state by progressive ranchers.

RIGHT: The foreground Interstate 15 right-of-way north of Scipio, Utah, has been rested since 1983. Planted perennial grasses have mostly died out, replaced by cheatgrass and annual mustard weed.

Western wheatgrass, needle and thread, and other perennials dominate ranch land grazed since the 1850s (far side of fence). A wildfire swept both sides of the fence. Grazed perennials lived, overrested perennials covered with years of hot-burning decadent material died.



it—is large numbers of native well-adapted humans (not idiots) managing prehistoric America for their cultural and economic needs, as in Australia, Africa, Europe, Asia and almost everywhere else. For many prehistoric Native Americans, spiritual and esthetic requirements were at least as important as economic and other values. Their needs were viewed holistically. Life was impoverished without all of them.

People with no notion of microbiology still manage to make babies, brew beer, fertilize crops with dead fish or manure, create

probiotic, intensive, high-production gardening and farming methods, and develop hundreds of food-crop and livestock strains. Organic farmers and gardeners, for example, can perceive by experience (and a good sense of smell) the carbon/nitrogen ratios, inoculants, aeration methods and amendments to make good compost. Of course, scientists can add refinements and sophistication to the process. Soils, beneficial soil organisms, plants and wildlife respond positively to the compost. If the amended soil is later turned to pasture or forest, the legacy of years of com-

posting remains as a blessing whether anybody along the way really “gets” how the tiny bugs did it or not.

For two generations of primarily urban Americans—with almost no direct life-and-death knowledge of nature—to force the abandonment of the experience and knowledge our ancestors paid so dearly to gain, is unspeakably mindless and arrogant.

Human beings have for centuries and are at this moment successfully managing forests, farms and grazing lands, enhancing and protecting biodiversity and all ecosystem values.



Using mysterious logic, activists' lawsuits allowed beetles to kill millions of trees in Dixie National Forest near Cedar City, Utah. They prevented both therapeutic beetle removal and salvage logging. Billions of dollars worth of logs will rot and fall in tangles. Inevitable fire will sterilize everything.

Their methods should be studied and emulated because these people pay their own way. They deliver healthy ecosystems to future generations.

Land and living communities benefit from experienced management with clear, comprehensive goals and a solid feedback loop. Look at South Africa. South African Web sites claim there are more wildlife there than before European colonization. They

claim over 10,000 white rhinos (not long ago almost extinct) in South Africa alone. The government accomplished this at no cost to taxpayers. It simply gave the wildlife to both private and communal landowners. Suddenly the incentives lined up. The rarer the animal was, the more value there was in raising more of them. Fish, wildlife and habitat conservation among private ranchers and other landowners in the United States is an acceler-

ating, rip-roaring success as well.

The Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service budgets and missions could be geometrically leveraged by creating a climate where federal-land ranchers dare to invest their own money on federal-land habitat improvement, without the fear of pennies-on-the-dollar confiscation. If these ranchers then get a share of buck and bull game tags like private landowners do, both game and nongame wildlife would be utterly secure on great habitats.

Until we acknowledge that nature is by definition a natural/socio-political/economic/esthetic-spiritual system and cannot be anything else we will fail as a society and mess up nature. Our country and the world would be blessed if we cut off all funds to political types until they've read "The Unsettling of America" by Wendell Berry, and gotten some notion what the depopulation of the rural United States continues to do to this country.

What nature needs is more people on the land behaving according to the values just described. Nature is not and cannot be safe without them. The terrible irony is that rural America was just getting really good at living with and blessing nature. If things don't change, in another generation there will be a pitiful few remaining who know much about that. ■

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ABOVE: Terribly severe but politically correct "fire-use policy" killed everything. Now completely destabilized, new washes are cut in formerly beautiful and stable watershed/habitat. Canyon bottoms had no washes in this area before bungled "fuel reduction" fire under "mystery" policy. RIGHT: With enough force to roll boulders and cobblestones and cut new washes where none existed, fire-caused flood waters from huge fuel-reduction burn traveled 28 miles several times. Some saw this as beneficial because it "added carbon" to about 10 acres in Houserock Valley. The proportions in this logic are mysterious.