



## *From the Inside* **Strong Views**

*Can the rural West survive nature while being suffocated by government?*

*By Stephen M. Studdert*

**T**he cherished American spirit envied by the world is alive, but endangered, on ranches and farms from sea to shining sea, where traditional American values are embodied by those who love family and freedom, live quiet lives of dignity, compassion, accomplishment, and courage, and who stand for what is decent, honorable, and right. The memorials to these good hardworking men and women are not statues, but rather generations of family ranches and farms feeding this nation.

Life in the magnificent American West has always been tough, but has that grand adventure hit an ominous tipping point? As 2021 has already proven, these are insecure times and the West is in crisis while unfathomable threats from nature, government, and foreign affairs perilously converge.

Our country, in its longest war ever, just spent 20 years, two trillion dollars, nearly 2,500 Americans killed, and over 20,000 Americans maimed to stabilize Afghanistan. Now, in stunning leadership failure, we humiliatingly bugged out as Taliban extremists recaptured Afghanistan, leaving a shameful stain on this nation—while China, Russia, Iran, and ISIS delight. Our president ended an American energy pipeline, yet authorizes a

Russian pipeline. Our ideologically driven president wallops American fracking and coal production, yet pitifully begs Saudis to produce more oil. Our imbecilic federal government closes our northern border because of COVID, yet allows unprecedented numbers of illegal immigrants across the southern border, at least 25 percent of whom test COVID-positive. Dictatorial feds advocate national mandatory vaccinations and mask wearing.

As personal responsibility and civility dwindle, civil society is frighteningly divided and violently contentious. Our fellow citizens on school boards and town councils require armed police guards. Overwhelmed medical professionals and hospitals teeter on the precipice of outright collapse. Supply chains are imperiled, inflation is erupting, crime is feverish, infrastructure is deteriorating, and electricity shortages multiply. And beginning next year, radical California regulations may annihilate its entire pork industry. It is not the American people who are failing, it is failure of political leadership.

The West is plagued by a megadrought of

unprecedented duration and severity—the gravest water crisis in generations, requiring authorities to airlift water to wildlife. Oregon’s Klamath Basin is experiencing its driest year in 127, as bureaucrats enact draconian water restrictions cutting off irrigation water for farmers’ parched soils. Dwindling snowpack has decimated the Colorado River, which irrigates millions of acres of essential crops and supplies over 40 million people in seven western states, with its lowest flows on record. Lake Mead and Lake Powell—the Colorado River’s two largest reservoirs—have drained at such an alarming rate that the feds have now curtailed irrigation water to Nevada and Arizona farmers. California hydroelectric plants have run dry. Over 80 small rural California towns that rely on wells or streams are in danger of running out of water; larger towns with reservoirs are in danger too. Thousands of home wells have dried up. For one large six-generation family cattle ranch straddling the Utah-Arizona border, every one of its 200 ponds and reservoirs providing water to livestock and wildlife is dry.

Abetted by blundering forest management, wildfires rage in unprecedented magnitude and number in several western states where ranchers are tragically forced to shoot cattle rather than helplessly watch them incinerate. Summer range has burned, winter feed supplies are being destroyed, and mother cows are being sold to buy feed.

The rural West has been under economic and authoritarian siege for a long time, but is 2021 the year the apple cart finally gets upset? Insanity has taken hold of “the system” as federal lackeys ensconced in their

plush Washington hideouts want us all living in a “woke world.” Can the rural West survive nature while being suffocated by government?

As our history is under attack and our values called

into question, I am here to say that the threatened western way of life is valuable and worth defending. Rural America feeds the nation and safeguards our food security—without which a free and independent country cannot survive.

When do we say enough is enough? Does the government exist to serve the people, or does the citizenry exist to serve the government? It’s time for a major recalibration. ■

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