

THE WILLOWS OF LA JARA CREEK

(CONTINUED)

handiwork that I saw as I peered down into the gully that was La Jara Creek. This gully was the reason no willows grew here, along the watercourse that bore their name. The gully took the water table down with it. Deprived of water, the willows all died. Once gone, they took with them an entire ecosystem. More than a century later, the gully remained, evidence that something had been completely and irreparably broken. A century later, as I gazed down at the evidence of destruction, it occurred to me that the damage could not be fixed, not now, not ever. The very foundations had been washed away, and how could they now be replaced?

The willow was the base of the ecosystem that flourished along La Jara Creek before the shearers came, before the trappers came, even before the Navajo, Apache and Ute hunted along its marshy banks. How were the willows to be replaced? They could not grow because the gully had eroded until it had reached an impermeable stratum. Water now rushed along that substrate, and could not soak in as it once did in the softer soils above the present watercourse. The only way to restore the water table would be to retard the flow of water inside the gully. Dams or some sort of obstruction would have to be built, and who was going to build them, not just along the one hundred miles of La Jara Creek, but along the ten thousand miles of similarly eroded tributaries, all across the Southwest? The best dam builders in the world, the beaver tribe, could not do so, because there was nothing there for them to eat, and nothing for them to cut down and use as dam-building material. The willows would have to come first, before the beaver could come. And the willows could not come because the gully was too deep, and the water moved too fast. When Catch-22 reaches this place in the natural order of things, it denotes a permanent and irreparable breakdown of an ecological system.



Some may say that since humans caused the problem to begin with, it is humans who must repair the damage... Forgive me for the following evidence of my cynicism, but I do NOT think this will ever happen.

Some may say that since humans caused the problem to begin with, it is humans who must repair the damage. Humans could, indeed, build dams in the gullies, and these dams would slow the rushing water. The silt and alluvium would build up, and the water table would slowly rise until, some day, willows could find a home in the deeper sandbars, and further slow the velocity of the stream. Eventually, maybe not even that many decades later, enough willows would grow to support the first colonies of beaver, and the watercourse would be well on its way towards restoration.

Forgive me for the following evidence of my cynicism, but I do not think this will ever happen. Money is what restores ecosystems when ecosystems cannot restore themselves, and humans must come to the rescue. The money, alas, is gone, gobbled up by desert housing developments, wars, derivatives, vampire banks, and endless iterations of Quantitative Easing. But there is a deeper reason for our economic malaise, and it lies in the phenomenon called Peak Oil.

If there is any truth to Peak Oil, which means we have passed the halfway mark of our global petroleum reserves, then as our energy supplies dwindle so do our monetary resources- energy deflation equals monetary deflation. Peak

Oil and our current economic woes may actually be connected.

Imagine our monetary system as a sensitive indicator of future petroleum availability, a canary in the coal mine if you will pardon the analogy. Economic indicators, by nature more volatile than global petroleum production, are actually an advance warning system that is telling us the age of petroleum is soon to be over. A global money system of fiat debt-based currencies is staggeringly sensitive to energy supply fluctuations, because (think about it!) the ability to repay the staggering global debt load (some estimates of total debt exposure worldwide are in the multiple quadrillions of dollars) is drawn directly from energy inputs into the economy. Debt service equals energy input, and what will the bankers do, with their backs against the default wall, and given a choice between receiving usury and fixing a broken ecology?

This is why restoration of La Jara Creek is not high on anyone's list of priorities, and I think it never will be.



Take the current Wal-Mart-funded Russian Olive and Tamarisk removal projects in the Escalante, Colorado, and Dolores basins. These projects are pure petro-centrism gone wild.

I will go so far as to suggest that all ongoing environmental remediation efforts are totally doomed. Take the current Wal-Mart-funded Russian Olive and Tamarisk removal projects in the Escalante, Colorado, and Dolores basins. These projects are pure petro-centrism gone wild. The plan is to use chainsaws and powerful herbicides, as well as trucks and heavy equipment, to remove pesky Russian Olive trees from the riparian habitat. I don't know why, but chainsaws and herbicides never made it onto my list of ecologically friendly tools. Today's economic dislocations, caused by a looming Peak Oil reality tell me that Russian Olive removal will cease as soon as the current grant funds are exhausted. Does the Nature Conservancy want to buy more cattle ranches? Does SUWA want to sequester more rangeland as wilderness areas? Guess what? All dollars are petro-dollars, and the money for these projects will run out long before the last barrel of oil is sucked out of the ground.

The end of cheap oil is already heralded by the end of cheap money. The end of cheap money spells the doom of the conventional Environmental Industry. It was a good idea- to try to salvage, repair and resuscitate a landscape ravaged and misused by our species. For some, a few lawyers and lobbyists, it made for a comfortable living. As for the rest of us, our legacy will be the destroyed and ravaged landscapes that we call home. Take away our abundance of energy resources, and we lose the hubris to think we can fix what we destroyed. The new environmentalism will have to come to grips with the fact that what we have is.. well, all we have.

The toxic waste will never be cleaned up. The overgrazed ranges will never grow anything more than cheatgrass and the spiniest of Russian thistles. The uranium tailings will always continue to leach into the groundwater. The ten-thousand oil and gas boreholes will, for ever and ever, be conduits for contamination into the aquifers. The radioactive plumes from Fukushima will waft around the planet for centuries to come, as will future plumes from the other 400-odd nuclear power plants worldwide, all facing deterioration or meltdown as the money, energy, and resources to maintain them steadily diminishes.

Every morning, when I awoke to a snowstorm of hoarfrost inside my tent, and stumbled out into the frigid winter air to begin my day's walk in a silence of blue-cold skies; every day as I walked along, with only the squeak of my Sorels on the thin skim of snow to tell me sound even lived in the world, I had

no choice but to take things as they came. Where I was, was... where I was. Be here now. I couldn't change it- shit! Every mile I walked made it clearer that trying to "change it" was why things only got worse.

The spiritual masters all say that acceptance is the true pathway to change. Every supposed curse, when treated with the alchemy of acceptance, becomes a blessing. Thank God they won't be able to eradicate Russian Olives- we'll need that fast-growing hardwood for fuel, ox yokes, and shovel-handles in the not-too-distant future. Who knows what beneficial mutations will arise on a planet bathed in nuclear radiation? Ecosystems will never return to what they were, but eventually they will become something different, something just as amazing and beneficial in their delicate balances and efficient cycling of water, energy and nutrients. The keystone plants and animals may indeed be what we now call "invasives" or "exotics". I predict that the zebra mussels, Asian carp,

Attacking our environmental issues with more petroleum- whether it is in the form of a cattle ranch purchased with UnoCal petro-dollars, or in the form of a lawyer pecking at her smart-phone and FedEx-ing legal briefs, is not only foolish, it's well beyond that. It is doomed...

Russian Olives, and spotted knapweeds that make up the most-wanted list of today's petro-centric environmentalists will someday, despite all the abuse to which we have treated them, become our saviors.

Attacking our environmental issues with more petroleum- whether it is in the form of a cattle ranch purchased with UnoCal petro-dollars, or in the form of a lawyer pecking at her smart-phone and FedEx-ing legal briefs, is not only foolish, it's well beyond that. It is doomed, a relic of a bygone Gilded Age, and may not even last out the current decade. The end of cheap oil spells the renaissance of local, acceptance-based approaches to living on the planet. It sounds like a new and revolutionary concept, but it's what traditional peoples have been doing all along. "Working with" will replace "imposition on", as the new environmental leitmotif.

**The Environmentalism of today...
is the sad story of an End
that has been devoured by its Means.**

Perhaps, maybe, the acceptance of unchangeable environmental realities will bring about a shift in our spiritual development, showing us that, in this present moment, things really aren't so bad, or at least not so bad that they can't be worse. In the present moment, it becomes obvious... most of our problems really are success problems. The Environmentalism of today, burdened as it is with the "ism" of ideology, politics, and "market-based initiatives" (er, money) is the sad story of an End that has been devoured by its Means. For all that (and I speak by way of eulogy), it was an attempt to gain an Ideal. There may never again be willows along La Jara Creek. And, we will someday discover that this is ok. For an Ideal can never manifest, save through a patient process of acceptance and resilient adaptation.



Loch Wade lives in Garfield County, Utah.

CATHERINE SHANK

**ORTHO-BIONOMY
for your body & mind**

**offers profound relief from
acute & chronic pain...It
addresses both physical &
emotional trauma through
deep subtle healing.**

**79 S Main #10 in Moab
www.phoenixrisingmoab.com**

**Our Claim Stays the Same:
FART-FREE BEANS**

**WE PRIDE OURSELVES
ON OUR FOOD!**

**Our genuine Mexican Cuisine
comes from traditional recipes
& methods from
BAJA, CALIFORNIA & other
states in MEXICO.**

**51 N. MAIN ST
MOAB, UTAH
435.259.6546**

www.miguelsbajagrill.com

**PLEASE JOIN THE ZEPHYR BACKBONE
details on our home page**

FOR RENT or for SALE



IN MONTICELLO, UTAH

900 sq ft cottage on almost half an acre.
2 bedrooms, 1 bath. Affordable to heat in winter.
Shady & cool in summer.

Available in September. \$550/month plus utilities.

INTERESTED BUYERS..One of those rare homes
for sale in SE Utah for under \$100K...
Owner financing available.

cczephyr@gmail.com