

Weekly Posting of the Conservative Cow Doctor

Krayton Kerns, DVM
June 22, 2011

The Pelican Hunt

“Crap! It’s been a week and the only oily creature for the paparazzi is a stinking garter snake?” My fictitious eco-activist Charlie screamed into his cell phone. “People smash the darn things on the highway without batting an eye. Heck, even Walt Disney can’t make snakes look warm and fuzzy. How about a pelican? Remember Nigel in *Finding Nemo*? Everyone loves Pelicans. Find one, oil it up and get it in front of the cameras!”

“Well sir, we did see some pelicans with brown stains on their wings we assumed was crude oil...but they flew off before we could save them,” came the timid reply from Carl, an imaginary trust funder camped in his Subaru Outback along the Yellowstone River.

Had Charlie and Carl been real, this easily could have been their words after the first week of the Great Yellowstone River Oil Spill. A good environmental crisis is money in the bank for leftists and they are milking this Exxon spill for all its worth. Those of us on the right are minor league at media manipulation and we could learn much by watching the pros create public opinion.

This story began Friday night, July 1st. The flooding Yellowstone River east of Laurel, apparently ruptured an Exxon 12-inch crude oil pipeline previously buried six feet below the river bed. The pipeline was shut down, but not before spilling 42,000 gallons of crude into the raging torrent of spring run-off. Exactly like storm-chasers in tornado season, Yellowstone County was soon awash with spill-chasers.

Wednesday morning, July 6th, the national media flooded the property immediately downstream of the spill—40 acres owned by Montana State Representative Dan Kennedy. Wooded lagoons and back channels scattered across his land showed the black oily sheen of the spill and Representative Kennedy was asked to comment. “Well, Exxon has the experts in dealing with spills like this. They are working and I fully expect them to clean it up and mitigate damages.” Dan stated. Hoping to find a better fit for the hysterical-landowner-with-an-oily-pelican-in-the-background template, the morning news shows clicked off their cameras and Dan’s words were never broadcast.

Friday morning the media focused their attention on Montana Governor Schweitzer’s temporary emergency office in the Department of Transportation shop in Billings. In addition to other landowners, the governor’s office asked Bob Castleberry to comment on the impacts he has suffered. Bob is a big man, built more like a logger than a tree-hugger and he has worked the refineries his entire life. Whichever staffer invited Bob to the microphone violated the number one rule when staging a spontaneous press conference:

Never let anyone speak their mind, if you don't first tell them exactly what to say. Bob spoke his mind.

"I've got three things to say," Bob boomed. "Number one, no one has suffered more than me. The flood and oil slick hit my house directly and I am going to lose it. Number two, Exxon has been very upfront with me and they are putting us up in a motel and feeding us. They have repeatedly assured us they will make things right. Number three, this whole wreck was caused by state and federal bureaucrats blocking my efforts to maintain the levy which has been on my place for 25 years!" An embarrassing silence swept the room.

Suddenly, a man said, "I'll clap for that," and he did. The sound of one man clapping in a room stuffed with quietness was deafening. Cameras and recorders were clicked off because Bob's words didn't fit the media template any better than Dan's.

As the oil spill headlines flood the airwaves, ask yourself this: "How will the sponsors of the story benefit, if I believe what they are telling me?" Certain things are told for certain reasons.

Look at the numbers. With the Yellowstone flowing at 57,000 cubic feet per second, mixing in 42,000 gallons of crude is equal to dumping one gallon of oil in 18,000 gallons of river water. Every 24 hour period, another 4.924 billion gallons of water dilutes the equation further, so finding all 42,000 spilled gallons gets less likely every day. Certainly, there will be impacts but most will not be identified until a drought reveals what's hidden beneath the murky waters. Time will tell.