

As the COVID-19 virus runs amok are government agencies going overboard?

By JIM MATTHEWS

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Did I miss the memo? Are we living under some sort of undeclared, quasi martial law?

Please don't misunderstand me. This is a potentially deadly disease and we should all take seriously the precautions that have been recommended by our medical, scientific, and government officials. Until a few weeks ago, most of us had never heard of the term social distancing; but today most people with an IQ higher than a hubcap are following all the precautions. I wash my hands so much I've had to start using hand cream to keep them from cracking and hurting. Some people live in dread of going to the store and buying groceries.

But does COVID-19 really warrant the incredible government intrusions that have taken place across the country. The actions are telling us that government officials believe we are too stupid to self-regulate our behavior. So they are trying to force public safety by mandating business closures, sweeping restrictions on personal activity, and many things are just plain stupid.

Nowhere is the stupid more apparent than in what agencies involved with natural resources are implementing.

Just this week, our California Department of Fish and Wildlife announced that it was going to continue stocking trout, but it was suspending it stocking website which provides the public information where the stockings were going to take place. What?

Maybe this is just in the spirit of Easter. Trout fishing will be like hunting eggs. It's simply a bad idea on a number of fronts. The DFW's data shows that if those trout aren't caught within a week of when they are planted, they are never caught. This is the equivalent of saying we are going to dump them in a ditch somewhere, assuring that their intended use – being caught and eaten by anglers – is not fulfilled. It is a waste of time and money.

The rationale is that anglers are too stupid to keep a safe distance apart when fishing at locations where trout are planted. Not telling people where they are planting will reduce those crowds. That is the DFW rationale. It doesn't hold water or make any sense.

The DFW doesn't tell the day of the week when waters are planted, just the week of the plant. In this era of social media, most anglers will still find out when and where plants are made quickly by word or photo

post. The DFW decision is just a brain dead, knee-jerk reaction with no rational motive that further degrades the DFW's public service element.

The agency should be touting the health benefits of getting outdoors and safe social distancing during the pandemic. They should be telling people to go fishing and wildlife watching and give lists of places they can go while off work or with the kids out of school.

In the same knee-jerk vein, the California Parks Department closed many popular locations completely this week, including the California Poppy Reserve. Really? I don't care how crowded it may have seemed, it was certainly a far safer place to be than a COSTCO store buying toilet paper. Parks also closed all road access into and through to all other state parks. It closed all parking areas and campgrounds. The spacious parking lots and beaches at Lake Silverwood, which has *not* been busy, and Lake Perris are now closed.

The rationale is that too many people were congregating. Really? How many times have you seen anglers closer than six feet apart? Is it wrong for a family living in the same house to now go to a park and share a blanket and have a picnic and toss a baseball around? Tell people all facilities are closed (go to the bathroom at home before you go!). But, nooooo. We are managing to the lowest common denominator because you and I are too stupid to safe distance. (I have spoken to more than one park superintendent who thinks the rule is absolutely insane.)

Parks bureaucrats are quick to say that people can still walk in and use most parks. I took a drive all the way around Lake Silverwood on Friday (paved Highway 138 and 2N33 dirt forest service road) and there were about 20 vehicles parked in various pullouts. Most were sightseeing, hiking, or walking down to the lake

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to fish. If the park had been open, those people might have been on one of the vast parking lots (after paying an entrance fee and adding some revenue into a state bound and determined to bankrupt itself and most of its businesses).

Then late in the week the National Park Service closed Joshua Tree. Why? Panic.

I can't even talk about how Los Angeles County's sheriff has mandated the closure of all gun stores, rescinded the mandate, implemented it again, and rescinded it again. It's political pin-pong that has little to do with containing the disease. The reality is that all of the gun stores were mandating safe distancing of customers, limiting the numbers in their stores, and cleaning constantly so they could try and serve the incredible demand for firearms.

According to the FBI, there were more background checks for firearms purchases in March than an month ever before at 2.5 million, and more than double the sales compared to March, 2019. Why that is happening is an entirely different discussion, but the government certainly has no authority to tell people they can't purchase a firearm or ammunition. And those purchases must be made in face-to-face sales and involve background checks.

Other states have gone even further off the deep end on restrictions on outdoor activities. Washington state bureaucrats actually banned all fishing (under what authority and guise?). Do they not understand fishing *is* social distancing? The Idaho Game and Fish Department has temporarily suspended the sale of all non-resident hunting licenses for this coming fall. Fall! If the CO-

VID-19 virus is still rampant come September, people coming to the state to go hunt will be the last thing Idaho will need to worry about. But the bureaucracy is tanking one of the agencies primary income sources.

While I understand the fears over this virus, a number of politicians (from the vice-President to the mayor of New York City) are supporting laws or personal and business restrictions on the grounds that "if they save just one life, they are worth it."

That is a frightening criterion.

Can you think of all the restrictions and mandates that could be implemented by government that could save literally hundreds of lives? We could ban all alcohol. We could mandate drivers don't exceed 20 miles per hour. We could outlaw abortion. Banning backyard swimming pools would save thousands of children's lives.

Overboard solutions or common sense?

We sometimes forget that banning murder has not stopped it from happening. We can make recommendations on how to stay safe during this pandemic, but if people don't follow the guidelines and recommendations, forcefully closing their business and stores and restricting our activities (especially ones that are completely safe when practiced sanely) is not legitimate or helpful. I hope we remember this when the crisis is over.

Please, be safe everyone. Go fishing. Go wildflower viewing (our foothills and deserts are amazing right now). Get outdoors. Get a bird book and identify all the birds in your neighborhood. Build a few bird houses with the kids. This will end soon.

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