

# Oregon wild horse roundup canceled

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

A planned roundup of wild horses from the Three Fingers herd in Malheur County, Ore., has been canceled due to a rangeland fire in the area.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management decided to withdraw its decision to gather 100 of the herd's 200 horses near Jordan Valley, Ore., in late August, forestalling at least temporarily an animal rights group's lawsuit seeking to block the action.

Of the gathered horses, the BLM planned to remove half for eventual adoption and release the remainder after treating females with a contraceptive to slow the herd's growth.

Friends of Animals, a New York-based nonprofit, filed a lawsuit against the agency, arguing the roundup was ordered without an environmental review, as mandated by federal law.

According to the complaint, BLM relied on an outdated environmental analysis from 2011 that didn't take into consideration new information about the negative impacts of the fertility control drug Porcine Zona Penicillin, or PZP.

The planned August roundup was also aimed at protecting sage grouse habitat and fire restoration projects, neither of which were studied under the 2011 analysis, the complaint said.

Since then, a study has found that PZP can remain effective longer than expected, causing foals to be born outside the normal birthing season, and is associated with ovulation failure, according to Friends of Animals.

The nonprofit group asked U.S. District Judge Michael Simon to issue a temporary restraining order blocking the roundup, which BLM opposed in court documents.

The BLM argued that it was permitted to rely on the 2011 analysis in forming its most recent decision to gather horses and that Friends of Animals hadn't followed the proper administrative process to stop the roundup.

If the horses continue to multiply, they will spread out and damage areas that are only now beginning to recover from fires last year, the BLM said.

"That will lead to further degradation of the range, ultimately destroying the habitat on which they and numerous other wildlife rely," the agency said in a court document.

Before oral arguments in the dispute could be held, however, BLM issued a notice that the roundup won't take place because a wildfire had burned much of the area where it was to occur.

The BLM apparently referred to the Cherry Road Fire near Jordan Valley, which ignited on Aug. 21 and burned more than 35,000 acres before firefighters contained it on Aug. 28.

Friends of Animals has withdrawn its motion for a temporary restraining order, though it's not dismissing the lawsuit while it weighs its options, the group said in a court filing.

# Idaho seeks growers' input on pollinator plan

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho State Department of Agriculture is forming a committee of agricultural organizations and other stakeholders to help devise a statewide plan protecting the health of pollinating insects.

The first meeting is scheduled for Sept. 27, and 17 organizations have already been invited, including the Idaho Potato Commission, the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association, Treasure Valley Beekeepers Club and the Idaho Honey Industry Association.

ISDA will welcome any other organizations interested in participating in the discussion, said George Robinson, administrator of the agency's Division of Agricultural Resources.

ISDA staffers have created a "straw-man" draft, drawing heavily from North Dakota's state pollinator plan, to spur discussion, Robinson said. He explained the draft is a guidance document, outlining best practices for each interest group to benefit pollinator health, with an emphasis on strong communication.

"(Plans) vary a lot from state to state," Robinson said. "I think that is a reflection of those states going to their stakeholders and asking them, 'What's best for our state?'"



A hive of honeybees is displayed. Idaho is convening a group that will write a state pollinator plan.

Pollinator protection plans have been adopted or are being drafted in 45 states, according to Dudley Hoskins, public policy counsel with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, a leading advocate of state pollinator plans. Hoskins explained five states, includ-

ing California, implemented the first plans in response to concerns about the rising mortality of pollinators such as bees and monarch butterflies.

In May 2015, a pollinator task force convened by the federal Environmental Protection Agency and USDA

issued a report, recommending that states draft pollinator plans.

"These are not meant to be a regulatory vehicle," Hoskins said, adding effective plans have prioritized "sharing information about each other's practices and challenges."

Hoskins said the initial states that implemented plans have made great progress for pollinators.

"These are clear returns on investment we've seen in a handful of states already," Hoskins said.

Oakley potato farmer Randy Hardy will represent the IPC on Idaho's committee. Hardy said virtually all of Idaho's conventional potato producers use the systemic insecticide imidacloprid to protect their crops from diseases such as potato leafroll virus. The chemical is in the neonicotinoid class, which has been targeted for regulation due to possible impacts on pollinators. Hardy said spud growers apply the chemical as a seed treatment or in-furrow, having no effect on bees.

"If (regulators) know states are watching (pollinator health) and monitoring and coming up with their own procedures, it will go a long way," Hardy said.

Scott Hamilton, a Nampa beekeeper who is vice president of the Idaho Honey Industry Association, believes pollinator declines have been caused by several factors, including harmful mites and pesticides, but improving communication and education is the best approach to address the problem.

"Farmers aren't out to kill pollinators," Hamilton said. "A lot of farmers use bees to pollinate their seed crops."

# Pistachio growers eye record crop after light last year

By TIM HEARDEN  
Capital Press

After a couple of seasons of disappointing crops, pistachio growers appear poised to shatter a 4-year-old record with production that could weigh in at as much as 800 million pounds.

Trees are loaded with nuts after achieving sufficient chill hours last winter for the first time in three years and winter rains diminished drought conditions in many California orchards, said Richard Matoian, executive director of American Pistachio Growers in Fresno.

As a result, growers and processors expect to easily surpass the record 2012 crop of 555 million pounds, more than 551 million of which came from California, Matoian said.

"The range will likely be somewhere between ... 650 and 800 million pounds" this year, he said.

The projection comes as the harvest has started for the earliest varieties and is expected to be in full swing in September. Pistachios are grown on more than 300,000 acres, according to APG.

The apparent bumper crop follows a 2015 season in which the drought and a lack of winter chilling hours caused growers to encounter an inordinate amount of "blanks" — fully formed shells in which a nut never developed.

In a typical season, blanks might make up 10 percent of a crop, but in some orchards last season the number was closer to 70 percent.

With the short crop, growers expected to receive considerably more for their nuts. But the main overseas com-

petitor, Iran, had two large crops in a row, which enabled the country to gain market share in American export destinations such as China, Matoian said.

This year, growers have been initially guaranteed between \$1.70 and \$1.80 per pound, down from the roughly \$3.50 per pound growers received for their 2014 crop, he said.

However, the price could end up increasing via a negotiated "marketing bonus" that growers usually receive at the season's end, Matoian said. One factor that could push prices up is a frost in Iran that cut into that nation's production, which could enable the U.S. to regain markets it had lost, he said.

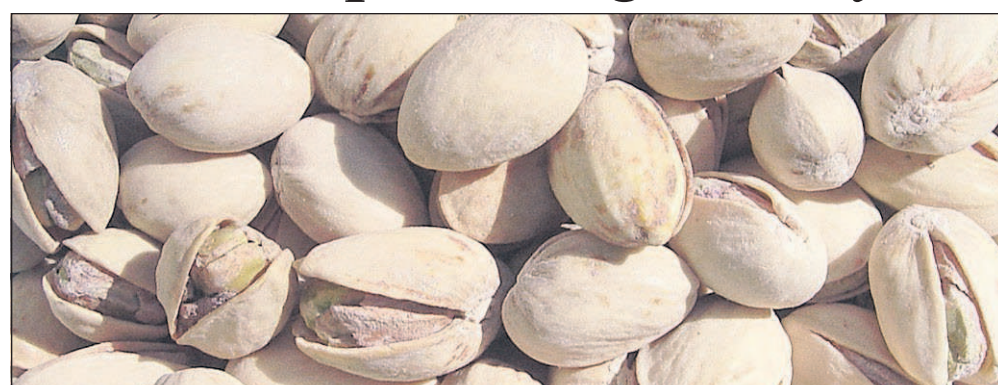
Last season's light yields were a blip of sorts amid a winning streak for pistachios, whose popularity has increased in recent years while acreage has ballooned from 105,000 acres in 2005, Matoian has said.

Nearly all of the U.S. pistachio production is in California, and 97 percent of that is in the San Joaquin Valley.

The acreage has continued to boom despite the drought, largely because pistachio trees have a longer life span than other nut trees and can survive several years in a row of water stress even if they don't produce nuts.

Growers believed that they would produce a big crop once enough chilling hours mounted and rains fell in the previous winter.

"As I talk with growers ... they're still very positive and very high about pistachios in comparison with other commodities," Matoian said. "We're still doing pretty darn well."



Roasted pistachios from Paramount Farms in Lost Hills, Calif. This year's pistachio crop is progressing well as orchards are being prepared for harvest.

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