New wildlife fence aims to keep wolves out of ranch

Crews wrap 276-acre pasture in 3-mile-long fence in SW Oregon

By George Plaven
Capital Press

PROSPECT — Ted Birdseye has tried seemingly everything to keep the wolves out of his ranch in southwest Oregon.

Fladry, guard dogs and even inflatable dancing tube men — similar to those seen outside of used car lots — have all failed to keep the predators at bay, Birdseye said. Now a $46,000 wildlife fence might be the last hope for protecting his cattle in an area where gray wolves remain listed as a federally endangered species.

Crews finished installing the 5-foot-tall, 3-mile-long fence on Nov. 4, wrapping around 276 acres of pasture at the Mill-Mar Ranch about 35 miles north of Medford. The property borders the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, home of the Rogue Pack which has at least six known wolves as of 2018.

Made from recycled steel posts spaced 90 feet apart, with eight strands of high-tensile electric wire running between 1-inch fiberglass rods, Birdseye said anything that touches the fence "is supposed to get the shock of its life." It is powered by a 3-foot-by-3-foot solar panel and battery.

"My big concern is I just hope it works," Birdseye said. "If it doesn't work, I don't know what the other options are."

Birdseye bought the Mill-Mar Ranch near the small community of Prospect roughly four years ago. The sixth-generation rancher has been frustrated by the Rogue Pack repeatedly attacking and killing his livestock and pets, including eight calves and two guard dogs.

Whereas the state can authorize shooting wolves that meet the definition of "chronic depredation" in Eastern Oregon, the animals are still listed as endangered and managed by the feds west of highways 395, 78 and 95.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has worked extensively with Birdseye to set up non-lethal deterrents such as flashing lights, alarm boxes and fladry — lines of rope strung up along fences with red flags that flap in the wind, intended to scare away wolves.

Defenders of Wildlife, a nonprofit environmental group, also donated two neon green and yellow waving tubes to stand guard over Birdseye's cattle in February. Yet the Rogue Pack keeps coming back, he said, with the latest incident in March where the wolves took down a 5-month-old, 400-pound calf.

In response, Birdseye decided to build a more sturdy wildlife fence around the entire pasture. The project received a $25,000 grant from the USFWS, as well as $15,000 from the Jackson County wolf depredation compensation committee.

Counties are awarded money from the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Wolf Depredation Compensation and Financial Assistance Grant Program for non-lethal deterrents.

A second environmental advocacy group, the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center, or KS Wild for short, also launched a GoFundMe campaign to raise $6,000 for the fence, which it accomplished over three weeks in June.

Joseph Vaile, who until recently served as executive director of the Ashland-based group, said the Mill-Mar Ranch is at a crossroads of wolf movement in the region.

"We felt it was a very important place to put some energy," Vaile said.

What's more, Vaile said he hopes the effort will show that ranchers and conservationists can put their differences aside and work to come up with solutions to protect wolves, while ensuring that producers can keep their operations profitable.

"It's something that we need to do a lot more of, I think," Vaile said.

The Rogue Pack has garnered much attention since it was established by Oregon's famous wandering wolf, OR-7, traveling more than 1,000 miles from the Wallowa Mountains to the southern Cascade Range. The pack was first recognized in 2014, and has produced pups every year since then, according to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Oregon in Brief

From wire reports

Oregon tribal hemp plan under review by federal officials

BEND — The Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs has submitted a plan to the federal government to administer hemp production on its lands.

The Bulletin reported Tuesday that if the U.S. Department of Agriculture approves the plan, the hemp jobs could fill employment gaps caused by the closure of tribal entities.

Warm Springs is one of 11 tribes listed on the USDA website with a hemp plan under review.

Officials say the reservation has been considering some form of cannabis business since it became legal in Oregon in 2015.

Portland must stop charging excessive public record fees

PORTLAND — A Multnomah County judge has ruled that Portland must stop charging excessive fees for routine email and document searches to fulfill public records requests.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reports Circuit Court Judge Shelley D. Russell's ruled Monday that the city's current system for determining records search costs is unreasonable.

Russell's order stems from a September 2018 lawsuit filed by attorney and activist Alan Kessler.

Crater Lake road system listed in historic register

CRATER LAKE — Officials say the Army Corps of Engineers Road System at Crater Lake National Park is among Oregon's latest entries in the National Register of Historic Places.

Park officials said Tuesday that the National Park Service accepted the nomination Aug. 12.

The nomination centered on a previously little-known effort by the Army Corps of Engineers in highway engineering and construction that happened from 1910 to 1919 in the park.

The Army Corps of Engineers Road System, a precursor to the historic Rim Drive, is significant for its association with the earliest period of highway engineering in Oregon.

The road system was the first federally funded and supervised highway project in Oregon and is the only road project in Oregon attributed to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Parents who starved 5-year-old daughter to death sentenced

BEND — Parents who starved their 5-year-old daughter to death have been sentenced to life in prison.

The Bulletin reported 33-year-old Sacora Horn-Garcia and 35-year-old Estevan Garcia were sentenced Monday in Deschutes County Circuit Court in the 2016 death of Maliyha Hope Garcia.

The couple was found guilty by a jury of murder by abuse and criminal mistreatment after a weekslong trial. They'll be eligible for parole in 25 years.

Maliyha was adopted by the couple shortly after the girl was born and tested positive for methamphetamines. She weighed 24 pounds at the time of her death.

Garcia expressed regret but stopped short of admitting intentionally starving his daughter. Horn-Garcia said she's not a murderer but a person who made a terrible mistake by not taking the child to the hospital. She also blamed the media for making her look bad.

— The Associated Press

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