

Oregon

Proposed bill would boost Oregon juniper harvests

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon's work to improve rangeland habitat and jumpstart rural economies by removing western juniper could get a boost when the Legislature opens its 2015 session in February.

Legislation drafted by the Western Juniper Alliance would allocate \$900,000 for a loan and grant program for juniper harvesting and manufacturing businesses. The money also would fund business planning help for small mills or logging outfits, provide worker training and map the location of high-quality juniper stands. The Western Juniper Alliance is a coalition of industry, government and environmental representatives convened by Sustainable Northwest, a Portland nonprofit that works to resolve environmental and rural economic problems.

Dylan Kruse, Sustainable Northwest's policy director and manager of the alliance,



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Milling western juniper trees into lumber products provides jobs and improves rangeland ecology and sage-grouse habitat.

said District 27 Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton, will sponsor the bill. Kruse said a broad coalition now supports the idea of speeding the pace and scale of juniper removal.

Junipers encroach on much of the arid West, crowding out sage and native grasses and sucking up prodigious amounts of water, according to experts. Cutting western

junipers has a cascading benefit: It makes more water available and it improves grazing for cattle and habitat for greater sage grouse, which is a candidate for listing under the Endangered Species Act this year. Multiple cattle ranchers in Eastern Oregon have signed on to voluntary habitat conservation plans that include provisions for juniper removal.

Meanwhile, at least three small mills in Eastern Oregon have found fledgling markets for juniper poles, posts, decking and landscape timbers. Sustainable Northwest Woods, an offshoot of the nonprofit, buys from the mills and operates a specialty lumber yard in Portland.

Kruse said adding mill or logging jobs in Eastern Oregon, combined with the range and wildlife habitat benefits, make juniper projects a "no-brainer."

"It's a holistic approach for land management," he said. "This is one of the rare win-win situations that we have."

Oregon ag director says food safety is top priority for 2015

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

In the second part of an interview carried on the Oregon Department of Agriculture website, Director Katy Coba said food safety and consumer protection remains the department's most important program for 2015.

"We focus very hard on food safety issues," Coba said in the interview with department spokesman Bruce Pokarney.

"Our whole goal is to minimize the potential for food illness outbreaks. So there is a lot of up front education and outreach, and we prioritize our limited resources to focus on



Katy Coba

those licensed facilities whose activities represent the greatest risk to food safety. These are facilities that handle food products before they even get to grocery stores. Even within the many retail stores we license and inspect, we prioritize by risk, focusing on those with a history of problems."

Coba said the department has a "very good" track record of preventing food-borne illnesses and responding quickly when outbreaks occur.

"Also in the new year, there is more work to be done on the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act," Coba said.

Sudden freeze causes major damage to fruit orchards

By GEORGE PLAVERN
EO Media Group

Fruit orchards aren't expected to blossom for another several months, but some growers near Milton-Freewater have already started pulling trees killed by last fall's sudden and severe cold snap.

Temperatures dipped from 60 degrees to as low as 5 degrees in a matter of days during the mid-November freeze, killing a large number of young trees and damaging fruit buds before they could become acclimated to the conditions.

Clive Kaiser, extension horticulturist with Oregon State University, said he doesn't expect much of a crop off the area's stone fruits in 2015 — including cherries, plums and peaches. The apple harvest should also see a reduced yield.

"I would testify this is a disaster across the region," Kaiser said. "A lot of (producers) have pulled out orchards."

A similar freeze was last reported in 2011, when temperatures plummeted to minus 12 and minus 15 degrees. At the time, Umatilla County commissioners asked the governor to declare a state of emergency.

Milton-Freewater's fruit industry generates about \$85 million per year, and is the leading producer of apples in Oregon, Kaiser said. There are roughly 60 commercial growers and 3,500 acres of trees across the valley.

Now, about 130 acres of trees — those less than two years old — have been uprooted as growers assess the damage to their orchards. Many older trees were not as affected by the freeze, Kaiser said, but the full extent of damage won't be known until later in the spring.

There is a program in the 2014 Farm Bill, known as the Tree Assistance Program, or TAP, that can help cover growers if they lost more than 15 percent of trees in a stand. Darcy Sexson, Umatilla County executive director of the Farm Service Agency, said producers have the option to rehabilitate or replant trees based on the extent of the damage.

Rehabilitating trees is more costly than planting new ones, Sexson said, but new trees won't start producing fruit for another three to four years, which sets the grower back on profit.

"That's the hard thing about tree losses," she said. "That's why TAP comes in and pays for those damages."

One producer has been approved so far for TAP benefits from last fall's freeze, Sexson said. Others will continue to wait until they know the extent of damage in their orchards.

Growers could start replanting trees by spring, Kaiser said, if replacements are available from commercial nurseries.

"Hopefully, the nurseries will have some leftover stock they can supply the growers," he said.

Milton-Freewater wasn't the only fruit-growing region hit hard by freezing temperatures. The Mid-Columbia's pear and cherry crop also sustained damage, said Lynn Long, OSU Extension Office in Wasco County.

"I think we can say there is going to be some replanting of fairly young orchards," Long said. "We're just trying to figure out the extent of the damage,

and what it will mean to the industry."

Statewide, cherries were worth \$91.2 million in 2013; pears were worth \$83 million,

and apples \$49.8 million.

Kaiser said fruit growers in Washington weren't as harmed by brutal cold. Consumers can still expect to find their favorite

fruit on supermarket shelves, though not as much at local fruit stands or farmers markets.

Ron Edwards, of Edwards Farm north of Milton-Freewater,

said his cherry crop looks all but wiped out. As for the other trees in his small orchard, it will depend if they had gone dormant before the bitter cold set in.

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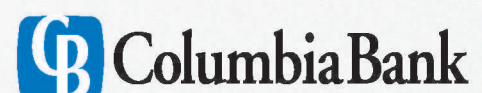
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