

E. Oregon ranchers get more latitude to kill wolves

Annual survey shows population milestone met

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

An annual wolf population survey shows seven breeding pairs in Oregon, enough to meet the state's conservation objective in Eastern Oregon and to give ranchers more leeway to protect livestock.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, which regulates the state's wolf recovery plan, said the survey count is a milestone.

"In the past seven years, Oregon has gone from no known wolves, to resident and reproducing wolves, and now to meeting our conservation objective for the eastern part of the state," ODFW



Courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
OR-7, the wolf that wandered to the Rogue River drainage from northeastern Oregon, is seen in this file photo. An annual wolf population survey shows seven breeding pairs in Oregon, enough to meet the state's conservation objective in Eastern Oregon and to give ranchers more leeway to protect livestock.

wolf program coordinator Russ Morgan said in prepared statement.

The count moves Oregon's

wolf plan, at least in Eastern Oregon, to Phase 2. Livestock owners are still encouraged to use non-lethal means to pro-

tect livestock, but now may shoot wolves that are chasing livestock. Previously, producers could shoot wolves only if they were "biting, wounding or killing" livestock or working dogs, and then only if other conditions were met.

Todd Nash, a Wallowa County rancher and chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association wolf committee, told the East Oregonian it is highly unlikely for producers to actually catch a wolf causing trouble in the pasture. The rule does, however, make them feel a little more empowered than they were before.

"We didn't want wolves to begin with," Nash said. "We're trying to get along as best we can in the political climate we live in."

The next step in Oregon's wolf management may include removing wolves from

the state endangered species list. Nash said the state Fish and Wildlife Commission will consider that at its April meeting, take public comment and vote on the proposal in July or August.

"I'm confident that the commission will vote for it," Nash said. "I have confidence that the department (ODFW) supports delisting."

The state listing covers wolves only in Northeast Oregon. The federal Endangered Species Act covers wolves in the rest of the state.

Cascadia Wildlands, an environmental group that took part in developing Oregon's wolf recovery plan, said the survey result is encouraging but "it is not the time to let up."

"It is our hope that (ODFW) continues to implement the state's landmark wolf management plan and rules that have served as a re-

covery model for other states while preventing burdensome conflict," legal director Nick Cady said in a news release.

Under the state wolf plan, a breeding pair is defined as a pair of adult wolves that produce at least two pups that survive to the end of the year. Of Oregon's nine known packs, only the Imnaha pack does not have a breeding pair. The Umatilla pack has not yet been surveyed. Six of the seven breeding pairs are in Eastern Oregon; the other is the famous wanderer, OR-7, his mate and their pups in Southwest Oregon.

The Cattlemen's Association passed a resolution at its annual meeting in December that supports lethal control of wolves in three cases: livestock losses, human health or safety and when game populations dip below management levels.

Expert: Rising blueberry tide no reason for panic

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Farmers grew 1.2 billion pounds of highbush blueberries in 2014 — 20 percent more than two years earlier — but a global production expert says that's no reason to panic.

The size of world's blueberry crop has continued to swell due to a past surge in plantings, but the growth in new acreage is slowing down, said Cort Brazelton, director of business development for Fall Creek Farm & Nursery near Lowell, Ore.

In the Pacific Northwest, many farmers who are still planting blueberries often have better "alignment" with the supply chain, he said.

In other words, their production is based on forecast demand from particular buyers, rather than speculation.

"It tends to be a more vertically integrated plan," he said.

Brazelton compiles global production data for the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Commission and presented his latest findings at the annual Oregon Blueberry Conference in Portland on Jan. 27.

Farmers must increasingly manage complexity to be successful, he said. For example, export markets offer great opportunities but require discipline in adhering to various protocols.

"What we have is a maturing industry," Brazelton said. "It's not a niche industry anymore."

Another consideration is ris-

ing usage of blueberries around the world, he said.

Between 2010 and 2014, usage grew from about 600 million pounds to 900 million pounds in North America, 123 million pounds to 215 million pounds in Europe and 34 million pounds to 115 million pounds in Asia and the Pacific, Brazelton said.

Based on current trends, projections indicate usage will nearly triple over the next decade, he said. "This is a conservative projection of the opportunity for our industry."

In the short term, however, fluctuations in supply and demand will generate mixed results for growers.

Blueberry harvests in major North American growing regions overlapped in 2014, driving down prices for the fresh crop during that period of time, said Rod Cook, president of Ag-View Consulting, who tracks supply and demand data.

Higher frozen inventories also reduced prices for the processed crop compared to the previous year, he said.

Packers are receiving roughly \$1.20 per pound of premium frozen blueberries — less than growers would like to see but nonetheless a price that moves product, Cook said.

Cold storage supplies are hefty, but with healthy global consumption, those inventories don't suggest "a gold mine era but they don't look devastatingly horrendous either," he said.

House panel hears from ag reps on carbon tax

Producers, processors warn about economic change

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Agricultural representatives Tuesday criticized a proposal to cap and tax carbon emissions as a House committee held the first hearing on the centerpiece of Gov. Jay Inslee's climate change agenda.

"Our maker gave us dominion over this earth, which means we need to be good stewards and take care of his creation, but that doesn't mean we have to subordinate our life to environmental utopianism," National Frozen Foods Corp. General Manager Gary Ash said.

House Bill 1314 would limit how much carbon some 130 industries could release. The industries, which include a fertilizer manufacturer and several food processors, would have to bid for permits to emit greenhouse gases.

Inslee and other proponents say the program would curb greenhouse gases while raising roughly \$1 billion a year for government services. The Office of Financial Management has not released a fiscal analysis of the bill.

The legislation has a remote chance of passing the Republican-controlled Senate, where a bill has been introduced but no hearing scheduled.

The House hearing was an



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Mary Hath Spokane of Rainier, Wash., joins demonstrators Jan. 27 on the Capitol Campus in Olympia before a House committee holds a hearing on Gov. Jay Inslee's proposal to require industries to buy permits to emit greenhouse gases.

opportunity for opponents and proponents to pack a hearing room.

Supporters included environmental groups, renewable energy developers and ski resorts.

The bill's prime sponsor, Environment Committee Chairman Joe Fitzgibbon, said the effects of climate change include less irrigation water.

"The threats of a changing climate are real. We are already seeing them. They demand we act on this issue," said Fitzgibbon, a Burien Democrat.

Opponents — which included manufacturers, small business owners, fuel distributors and workers — largely steered clear of debating climate change science. But many testified about potential financial hardships if manufacturers are forced to absorb or pass along the cost of buying carbon-emission permits.

would be hurt if transportation and feed costs rise.

Ash said Frozen Foods' three Washington plants consume a lot of energy as they process vegetables from nearly 40,000 acres in the Columbia Basin. The plants have a full-time workforce of about 500, which usually doubles during harvest, he said.

"We are in a very competitive global market with slim profit margins," he said. "Every time a new regulation or tax is imposed, our costs increase, forcing us to reduce other expenses, like wages or jobs."

Ash said the company already spends heavily to comply with environmental laws.

"Regulatory agencies continue to raise the bar, increasing onerous requirements that are often unreasonable and costly. Because of this, we find ourselves forced to invest in mitigation systems instead of production machinery," he said.

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Deal on Oregon water fund struck

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

An agreement about the key functions of a \$10 million Oregon water supply fund was struck recently, but the specific rules have yet to be ironed out.

Two task forces spent five months negotiating over the basic operations of the fund, which state lawmakers approved in 2013.

The groups have now answered fundamental questions about the level of environmental scrutiny for water storage projects and the process for developers to obtain money.

In the coming months, though, a new committee must turn those concepts into detailed rules that meet the approval of state water regulators.

Only then can the \$10 million fund begin disbursing grants and loans to water projects in the state.

The funds were originally supposed to become available by the spring of 2015 but that timeline now looks onerous under even the most optimistic scenario.

A rulemaking advisory committee, which is expected to consist of former task force members, will try to hammer out the specifics by early April, then receive public comments and submit its proposal to the Oregon Water Resources Commission in June.

This schedule is particularly challenging because the rulemaking process will coincide with the upcoming legislative session, a busy time for task force members who lobby for

various interest groups.

While task force members have outlined concepts for governing the fund, tricky details must still be haggled over.

For example, the system for determining whether projects are worthy of funding is subject to further debate.

During the final task force meeting on Jan. 16, members agreed they have not yet reached consensus on scoring and ranking methods and decided to temper recommendations for such a system in a report to legislators.

They also decided to shelve discussions about handling projects that request a disproportionately large portion of the \$10 million in available funds.

Recommendations for how

lawmakers should vet future state-funded water projects were scrapped from the report after some members said such suggestions exceed the scope of the task force.

"We can't tell folks in the capitol how to do things," said April Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Commission.

The most contentious aspect of the water supply fund pertains to the amount of water that can be withdrawn from streams during peak flow periods.

The topic is controversial because irrigators don't want burdensome environmental hurdles to discourage developers from using the fund.

Most task force members

have agreed that projects will be analyzed based on a "matrix" of possible environmental impacts and available stream data. Those with major potential effects on streams that haven't been closely studied will receive the most scrutiny.

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