

Bird flu hits another flock, spreads to hawks

WSDA establishes quarantine zone near Canada border

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Highly pathogenic avian influenza has swept through another mixed-bird backyard flock in Washington. Meanwhile, authorities have confirmed the virus is afflicting native raptors.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture on Monday established a quarantine zone 6 miles around where about 100 birds, raised primarily as a youth project, were infected in Okanogan County near the Canada border.

The virus rapidly killed about half of the birds before tests confirmed Jan. 31 that they were avian flu victims. The surviving birds will be euthanized, according to WSDA.

The flock was in Oroville, about 40 miles from where 5,000 game birds were infected last week in Riverside. In that case, the virus killed 40 pheasants and 12 turkeys before it was confirmed. The surviving game birds were euthanized Feb. 3.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has yet to identify the specific bird flu strain in either case, though officials have determined the virus was highly pathogenic.

State Veterinarian Joe Baker said there was no known connection between the game bird farm and the backyard flock.

"Right now, we have to chalk it up to coincidence," he said.

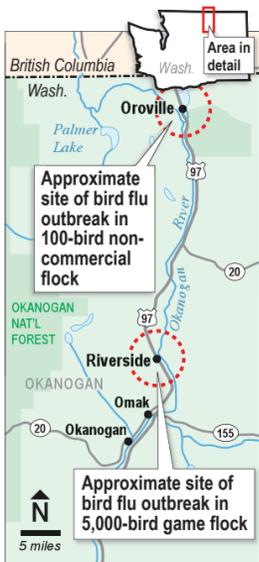
Baker said no commercial poultry farms are inside the quarantine zone.

The Oroville flock is the fourth non-commercial batch of birds to be struck by avian influenza in Washington state since early January. Two flocks were in Benton County in south-central Washington, while the other flock was in Clallam County on the Olympic Peninsula.

Single non-commercial flocks in Oregon and Idaho also have been infected.

Baker said the Oroville flock, like the others, was likely infected by migratory waterfowl, which carry avian influenza but are immune to the virus.

The virus has been found in migrating ducks in six states and at commercial poultry farms in British Columbia, Canada, and California.



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

In the first cases involving raptors, the USDA has confirmed a Cooper's hawk in Whatcom County and a red-tailed hawk in Skagit County tested positive for highly pathogenic H5N2 bird flu. The virus is a mixed of Eurasian and North American avian influenza strains.

Tests are pending on at least two other raptors collected in Washington — a red-tailed hawk from Benton County and a peregrine falcon from Grays Harbor County.

Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife veterinarian Kristin Mansfield said raptors don't pose the same threat as migratory waterfowl as spreaders of the virus. A raptor with bird flu doesn't survive long, she said. "It kills them pretty quick."

The Department of Fish and Game collected the Cooper's hawk Dec. 29 and the red-tailed hawk Jan. 9. The USDA's National Veterinary Services Laboratories on Jan. 26 confirmed that the hawks had avian influenza.

The Cooper's hawk was actually the victim of a predator, though it surely would have died soon from the virus, Mansfield said.

The falcon was electrocuted and the hawk in Benton County was killed by something that inflicted a blow, she said.

Mansfield said there's too little evidence to draw conclusions, but it's possible the virus affects their brains and makes raptors vulnerable, hastening their deaths. "It does raise the question," she said.

Mansfield anticipated avian influenza striking raptors since a captive gyrfalcon in Whatcom County in December died after eating an infected wild duck. The incident showed the virus kills raptors.

Lack of snow worsening

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — The prospect of a dry if not drought summer continues to increase in Washington with the latest measurement of statewide snowpack at 39 percent of normal.

That, as of Feb. 3, compared with 54 percent a year ago and is the lowest winter read since 26 percent in the drought year of 2005, said Scott Pattee, water supply specialist of the Washington Snow Survey Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon. The Olympic Mountains, Mount St. Helens area and central Puget Sound including the west slopes of the central Cascades are setting record-low and near record-low snowpack, Pattee said.

"It just hasn't snowed and temperatures have been sustained at 10 to 20 degrees above normal in the mountains all of the whole past month," he said.

The freezing level has been at 10,000 feet at times and the weather forecast is for a warm and wet first half of February and a warm and dry second half, Pattee said.

Warm air from Hawaii likely will prevent major snowfalls

in February and March that have been the norm in recent years, he said.

"It would take well above 200 percent normal snowfall between now and the first of April to catch up," he said.

The upper Columbia basin, mostly Okanogan County, has the best snowpack at 85 percent of normal because it received some early snow that other parts of the state did not get, he said.

ODA approves rules for Oregon hemp production

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is optimistic the state's first industrial hemp crops will be planted this spring.

The department last week adopted administrative rules that will govern production and handling, plus licensing of growers. The process culminated a long struggle by hemp backers, who maintain hemp can be used for clothing, food, cosmetics, oils and other purposes.

State approval was hung up for years by federal drug laws, which classify industrial hemp the same as marijuana. Oregon voters approved hemp production last November in the same measure that legalized recreational use, possession and cultivation of pot.

The rules define production and handling requirements while establishing a permit and licensing process for growers of industrial hemp, which includes fees associated with ODA's program. With the adoption of the rules, ODA is expecting a



File photo/Associated Press

Industrial hemp is harvested in Colorado in this file photo. The Oregon Department of Agriculture is optimistic the state's first industrial hemp crops will be planted this spring.

crop to be planted this spring as permits will soon be issued.

Under state law, licenses to grow or handle industrial hemp fiber and permits to grow agricultural hemp cost \$1,500 and are valid for three years. Hemp fields must be at least 2.5 contiguous acres,

and the crop must contain less than 0.3 percent tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) to distinguish it from marijuana, which has much higher THC levels.

Hemp production is still illegal under federal law, and the feds may still be a roadblock to Oregon produc-

tion. Oregon ag department spokesman Bruce Pokarney said hemp seed for planting is available only in Canada, and bringing it to Oregon will require approval by the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

"That's the next hurdle we need to clear," Pokarney said.

Business still brisk for Calif. large-equipment vendors

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

COLUSA, Calif. — Despite the drought and a nationwide slowdown in heavy equipment sales, vendors at a farm show here say their business has remained brisk.

The continued success of key California commodities such as almonds and walnuts has helped companies such as the Yuba City-based Orchard Machinery Corp. stay busy, said Joseph Martinez, a marketing representative for the company.

"We have essentially been running overtime for 12 years straight," Martinez said. "The nut crops have been huge. The almonds, walnuts and pistachios have just been going crazy. When farmers do well, we do well."

Erick Nielsen, who sells orchard pruning and harvesting equipment in Orland, Calif., agrees. Business has been good, although he and other vendors worry about the impact that a prolonged drought will have on farmers' ability to afford new equipment.

"I think we're OK, but we're all worried about the water," said Nielsen, owner of Erick Nielsen Enterprises. "It's going to get us if it doesn't rain."

Nielsen and the OMC salespeople were among hundreds of vendors of agricultural goods large and small at the 50th annual Colusa Farm Show Feb. 3-5 at the fairgrounds here.

The event was to include workshops on crop pollination, almond cultivation and new farm bill programs as well as the annual breakfast sponsored by California State University-Chico's College of Agriculture and its supporters, set for Feb. 4.

For Nielsen, who's been coming to the farm show since 1977, the event offers a cen-

tral place for his customers to come and check out his latest equipment or give him ideas on products to offer, he said.

"We get a combination of business" at the show, he said. "We get some new customers and make contact with old customers. We get a little bit of both. Some of them just come and say 'hi' and say 'thank you.'"

The optimism among vendors who cater to California's specialty crop farmers comes as slumping sales of large farm equipment in other parts of the country are expected to create bargain opportunities for growers.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Passers-by look at a tree pruner displayed by Erick Nielsen Enterprises of Orland, Calif., at the Colusa Farm Show on Feb. 3. Despite a nationwide slowdown in heavy equipment sales, California companies are still reporting brisk business.

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