

Washington

Mathisons continue quest for more cherry ground

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — It may take years, but the Mathison family is pursuing its desire to acquire or lease a section of state land high in the Stemilt Basin south of Wenatchee for future cherry orchard.

West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers Inc. of Wenatchee, talked about more conservation easements with the Stemilt Partnership on March 4

as a means of moving the project forward.

The partnership, a coalition of people and interest groups wanting to preserve Stemilt Basin, indicated a willingness to learn more but wants a transfer of the land between state agencies to occur first, said Mike Kaputa, Chelan County Natural Resources director. That may take five years, he said.

The partnership endorsed an agreement between the state departments of Natural Resources

and Fish and Wildlife to transfer Sections 16 and 22 from DNR to WDFW within five years, Kaputa said.

"It may take several state funding cycles and land availability to come up with the right deal," he said.

The agencies agree over doing it, but are just trying to figure out the best way in keeping with their different missions, he said.

Mathison said he has no defined timeline and will continue to engage the partnership.

"Some areas are best for elk and some could be suited for cherry orchards with proper mitigation," he told Capital Press.

"We will continue to develop our private land into cherry orchards with assistance from wildlife biologists to properly mitigate impacts to the land," Mathison said.

A year ago, the Mathison family wanted to create 450 acres of cherry orchard on Sections 16 and 22. Last October, the family revised its plans to

trade 218 acres of prime elk habitat on Section 21 for 218 acres of flatter, more open terrain on Section 16 to develop 134.5 acres of cherry orchard there.

Orchard on part of Section 16 would fit with orchard the family is planning on portions of adjoining Section 9 that it bought from a private owner. Section 21 is better elk habitat than Section 16 and would consolidate land uses to create larger areas of habitat, Mathison said.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press
West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers Inc., is shown at the Stemilt Partnership meeting on Oct. 20, 2014.

Beekeepers lobby for lower taxes, more forage

Bills stem from study commissioned by Legislature

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Full-time beekeepers and hobbyist apiculturists were on the Capitol Campus Thursday to draw attention to the plight of the honeybee.

The good news, according to Central Washington beekeeper Tim Hiatt, is that only alarmists think honeybees will go extinct and humankind will follow. The bad news, he said, is that bees in Washington lack forage, which has economic consequences for pollinators and their customers.

Hiatt said he's spending more than ever nourishing his bees, \$205 a year on each hive. He has 12,000 hives.

If the Washington bee industry falters, it will show up in the cost of pollinating services, he said. Right now, his bees are pollinating almonds in California, where the demand is high and hives will fetch \$160 to \$170 for the season, he said.

Soon, the hives will come north to Washington to pollinate fruit trees. Hiatt, a Ephra-

ta resident, said he expects to get \$40 to \$50 per hive.

"We would like a steady supply of beekeepers for pollinators in Washington," he said.

Toward that end, beekeepers, who set up displays outside the Legislative Building for "Honeybee Awareness Day," are lobbying for two bills.

Senate Bill 5017 would permanently give beekeepers the same favorable tax treatment enjoyed by agricultural producers. For tax purposes, beekeepers and their services and products are not defined as part of the state's agricultural industry.

The bill would cut taxes on income from pollinating services and bee products, such as honey. Other tax benefits would include being able to buy and repair equipment without paying sales taxes.

The bill, sponsored by Yakima Valley Republican Jim Honeyford, passed the Senate Agriculture, Water and Rural Economic Development Committee, but has not won approval from the Senate budget committee.

The tax exemptions would cost state coffers \$85,000 and local governments \$27,000 a year in lost revenue, according to an estimate by the Office of Financial Management.



Honeybees are displayed March 5 on the Capitol Campus in Olympia.

An argument for the bill is that out-of-state beekeepers pollinate and leave without paying business taxes, putting in-state beekeepers at a financial disadvantage.

"If everybody paid the tax, I wouldn't care," Hiatt said.

House Bill 1654, sponsored by Edmonds Democrat Strom Peterson, would require the state Noxious Weed Control Board to evaluate the advantages of replacing pollen- and nectar-rich noxious weeds with plants with similar benefits for honeybees. The bill passed the House on Friday on a 67-31 vote. Yakima Valley Republican David Taylor warned that planting forage could unwittingly introduced new noxious weeds.

Dayton beekeeper Paul

Hosticka, who has about 100 hives in the southeast corner of the state, has been producing honey for 40 years. He said his bees have been losing forage to grass and that he needs a lot more forage than small-scale planting can provide. "We're talking about square miles, not square feet," he said.

Hiatt was on a 12-member group set up by the Legislature to make policy recommendations to help the bee. The tax and forage bills grew out of the report.

The study group did not cite as a major problem neonicotinoids, a class of pesticides banned in a handful of cities because of their purported harm to honeybees. The study group concluded the scientific evidence did not warrant banning neonicotinoids.

Spokane conference promotes social media 'agvocacy'

AgChat leader: Reach out to counter different viewpoints

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Online
<http://agchat.org/PNW>

Registration is open for the AgChat Foundation's regional meeting April 27-28 at the Northern Quest Casino in Airway Heights, Wash.

Marie Bowers-Stagg, vice president of the AgChat Foundation, said the organization helps farmers tell their story on social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest.

"We have tons of legislation that could potentially majorly impact my farm," said Bowers-Stagg, a grass seed, wheat and meadowfoam farmer in Harrisburg, Ore. "If we tell the people who are on social media a little bit about why we're (farming) — we're actually feeding people and doing good for the environment — that oftentimes changes a lot of minds."

Bowers-Stagg said that through conversations, people with a different viewpoint eventually come around to being more open-minded toward

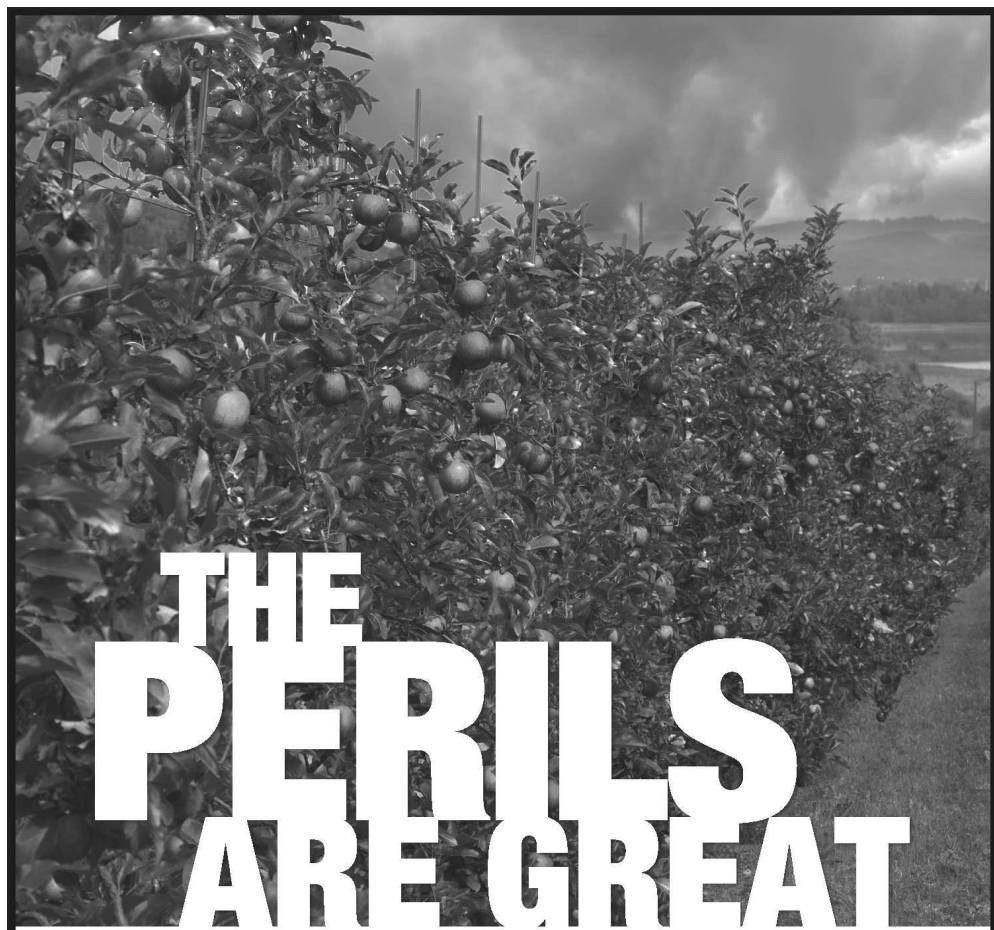
farming and ranching, she said. "It's gained awareness," she said. "The other day, there was a hearing and I was tweeting about my position and interacting with people I probably wouldn't have interacted with on a normal basis."

She's also been able to connect with other farmers who have questions about issues.

Bowers-Stagg hopes the public will seek out farmers and ranchers for more information about things they see in the media. Producers also need to reach out to consumers as well, she said.

"It makes the world smaller," Bowers-Stagg said. "I know I'm not going to reach the mommy bloggers, but I may be able to reach out to a career woman who wants to be successful in the business world, just like I do."

This will be the second regional conference for the foundation in the Pacific Northwest, following a meeting in Portland last year. The Spokane area was selected in hopes of drawing farmers from Eastern Washington, Idaho and Montana.



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