

Lone wolf spotted in wheat field

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

ADRIAN, Ore. — A castoff wolf from a Northeast Oregon pack has taken up temporary residence in Malheur County in Eastern Oregon and has been seen by several farmers and irrigation ditch workers.

Two of those farmers told the Capital Press they were stunned to see a full-grown wolf lying in a wheat field west of Adrian on April 21.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife officials confirmed that they weren't imagining things.

"Everybody is correct in what they saw," said Philip Milburn, a district wildlife biologist in ODFW's Ontario office.

The male wolf, which has a tracking collar, entered Malheur County around April 10 and has been hanging out west of Adrian in sagebrush country for



Courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

OR 22, a male wolf that separated from the Umatilla River Pack in February, is pictured walking through a Northeast Oregon forest on Jan. 26. The lone wolf has recently been spotted by several farmers near Adrian in Malheur County.

more than a week, he said.

"On (April 21), for some reason he decided to come down and visit ... farm

country," Milburn said.

On that day, two farmers in a pickup truck saw the wolf lying in a wheat field, apparently napping.

"We were just sitting there in shock," said Casey Kuenzli, one of those producers. "He stood up and cut in front of us across the road about 20 feet away."

Kuenzli, who is also a professional guide, said he was certain the animal was a wolf even before the ODFW confirmed the animal's presence in the area to the Capital Press.

"There's no mistaking what it was," he said, adding that the wolf was black on top and "brown going down the sides."

Marvin Seuell, another farmer who was in the truck with Kuenzli, said the wolf appeared to weigh about 150 pounds.

"He came within 20 or 30 feet of us," he said. "I was shocked."

During the wolf's visit to farm country on April 21, it also swam across a canal in front of some ditch workers, Milburn said.

He said the wolf, known as OR 22, separated from the Umatilla River Pack in Northeast Oregon about Feb. 13 and has "been wandering around in a dispersing pattern" since then.

There have been a few reported wolf sightings in Malheur County in the past, as well as some confirmed wolf tracks, and a collared wolf crossed briefly from Baker County into Malheur County last May, Milburn said.

But OR 22 is believed to be the first wolf that has spent more than a short amount of time in the county, he said.

"We're just letting him be; he hasn't done anything to indicate he's going to be a problem," Milburn said. "We keep expecting he's not going to stay here ... but he's been proving us wrong."

Artificial beaver dam bill advances

Legislation would streamline permitting

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A bill intended to promote artificial beaver dams in Oregon's Malheur Lake drainage basin has crossed a key legislative hurdle despite misgivings from some environmentalists.

Artificial beaver dams are meant to slow quick-running streams, improving riparian habitats for wildlife and forage conditions for ranchers.

House Bill 3217 would ease the permitting process for landowners who want to build such structures in the region as part of a pilot program.

The Oregon Natural Desert Association urged lawmakers to pass the bill but other environmental groups — WaterWatch of Oregon and the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited — feared the consequences of exempting artificial beaver dams from fish passage requirements.

Proponents argued that the pilot program would only apply to streams that currently dry up in summer and don't contain any fish.

Recent amendments to HB 3217 provide more details on the fish passage exemption, providing for the possibility of retrofitting structures once habitats are restored.

Rep. Brian Clem said the changes have tempered environmental groups' objections to the bill, which was recently approved 5-2 by the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

Washington asparagus industry eyes comeback

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PASCO, Wash. — The Washington asparagus industry may be starting a slow comeback as production slows in California and Peru. But the lack of labor is a hindering factor.

U.S. production, a lot of it in Washington, shrank by two-thirds from 1990 to 2010 because of free trade agreements and U.S. resources spent to establish an asparagus industry in Peru in hopes of weaning growers away from producing cocoa leaves for cocaine.

Washington lost its asparagus canning, but maintained a limited crop for fresh sales, pickling and freezing.

"Last year, we got down to 16 percent of what our production was in 1990. I hope that's the bottom," said Alan Schreiber, administrator of the Washington Asparagus Commission.

Some growers, concerned about consistent quality and lack of pickers, are not plant-



Photo by Phil Clouse

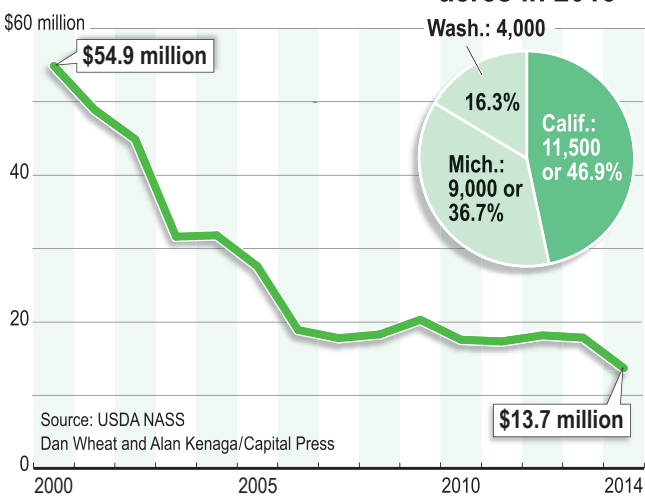
A Gourmet Trading Co. asparagus near Pasco, Wash., is shown on April 24. This high-density crop was planted last year and is being let go to seed to better establish the crowns. The crowns are irrigated and fertilized by an underground drip tape using 30 percent less water than overhead irrigation. It promotes faster growth by keeping the surface dry and getting water directly to the crowns.

ing replacement beds and continue to leave asparagus, Schreiber said.

But others who think they can find labor are expanding and there may be a net gain in

Washington asparagus production

Washington's annual crop value has plummeted more than 75 percent in the last 15 years, according to NASS statistics.



acreage for the first time in 24 years, he said.

Asparagus is grown around Pasco, in the Yakima Valley and Grant County. Harvest started early this year with first packing on March 23 versus a normal April 1 start, Schreiber said. It will end in mid-June.

Gourmet Trading Co., Redondo Beach, Calif., has been

packing Washington fresh asparagus for 10 years and last year planted 150 acres. It is planting another 150 this year, said Phil Clouse, the company's Washington representative.

"We weren't getting the volume we wanted so we rented a couple farms and are planting our own," Clouse said.

Instead of planting crowns from a nursery, the company is direct seeding for 40,000 plants per acre, double the old way, and with drip irrigation instead of center pivot, the company hopes to improve yield from 5,000 to 6,000 pounds per acre to at least 10,000 to 15,000 pounds per acre, he said.

Growers' price was 47 cents per pound 10 years ago, peaked at 94 cents two years ago and remains around 90 cents, he said.

In today's market, consumers prefer fresh produce over canned, he said.

The biggest impediment is the lack of skilled labor, he said. The company is considering using the H-2A guest-worker visa program next year to bring some of its pickers from Mexico after harvest there, he said.

Asparagus growers in Washington haven't used the H-2A program because they haven't felt they needed workers long enough, just two months, Schreiber said. They also have to provide housing.

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