

Oregon

SWD pressure mounts in Willamette Valley

By CH
rt e Capital Press



T.J. Hafner, agronomist for AgriCare, is seen spraying a blueberry field in Jefferson, Ore., to control spotted wing drosophila. Hafner said the pest is seen in open areas of the valley.

T.J. Hafner, agronomist for AgriCare, said spotted wing drosophila pressure on the company's Jefferson, Ore., blueberries this year is three or four times heavier than he's ever seen.

And, Hafner said, trap counts on AgriCare's Jefferson acreage have been lower than elsewhere.

As blueberry harvest swings into full gear, growers throughout Western Oregon have their hands full battling high populations of the spotted wing drosophila.

Oregon State University entomologist Vaughn Walton compares this year's SWD pressure to 2013, when growers treated blueberry fields 10 and 11 times for the pest, compared to a typical six- or seven-spray regime.

"The input costs this year will be way higher," Walton said, "both for the earlier crops and for production costs in general."

Walton said Western Oregon's mild winter and warm spring — conditions that helped blueberry crops get off to a fast start — were ideal for

the spotted wing drosophila.

"If you have a cold winter, it takes a long time for those SWD populations to build up, and the early fruit can usually escape damage," Walton said. "Now you don't have that."

SWD populations survived the winter on alternative hosts, Walton said. When the pest moved to fruit crops, it did so in large numbers and with overlapping generations.

"That is why you have to space your sprays so close to each other," Walton said. "It

is not as if you are getting discrete generations. You are getting overlapping generations at this stage already, and so you have constant egg laying.

"And preventing that egg laying is what growers are trying to do," he said.

Hafner, who oversees agronomic activities on certified organic blueberries for AgriCare, said he started treating the early-season Duke variety with organic crop protectants in late May, well ahead of a nor-

mal treatment regime.

And, he said, any thought of stretching intervals between treatments have been tossed aside.

"Early on, you can usually get a little gap between sprays," he said. "But we're tightening up the intervals and getting back over the fields quicker than we have in the past."

Hafner said he's using electrostatic sprayers from On Target Spray Systems of Mount Angel to apply the organic protectants. The electrostatic component of the sprayers attracts material to leaves, providing good coverage in the shady under-part of the canopy, which is where the flies tend to hang out, he said.

To date, Hafner said, he's confident that he's staying ahead of the pest, but only time will tell.

"We're doing everything we can and I'm optimistic right now, but we'll see how the season goes," he said.

"I think conventional guys are going to have a hard time later on in the season," Hafner said, "and I think organic guys are going to have a really hard time."

Harney groundwater worries halt new well permits

Groundwater pumping is exceeding recharge in Harney basin

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Water regulators have largely stopped permitting new agricultural wells in Oregon's Harney Basin due to concerns about groundwater depletion.

Groundwater pumping is exceeding the rate of recharge in the area, which has prompted the Oregon Water Resources Department to deny most new permits until it conducts a multi-year study of the situation, said Ivan Gall, the agency's groundwater section manager.

"You can see these declines occur over a fairly broad area of the valley," Gall said during a recent meeting of the Oregon Water Resources Commission, which oversees the department.

Preliminary data indicates the basin is experiencing an overall downward trend in groundwater levels, but the agency hopes to gain a better understanding by measuring a larger number of wells and conducting detailed geological mapping, Gall said.

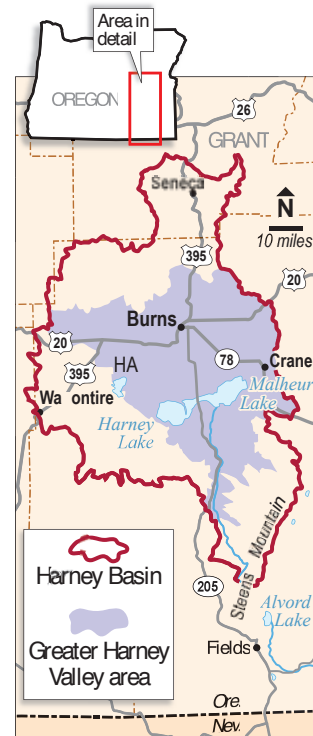
"We have some significant holes in our data," he said. "We don't think it's at a crisis right now, but that's also based on not a lot of information."

The agency estimates that 201,250 acre feet of groundwater rights are used each year, while only about 170,800 acre feet are available for use.

Heavy rains only offer a temporary reprieve from the problem, Gall said. "A really wet year helps for a period of time, but then it rolls over and begins its downward trend again."

Once the agency completes the study, it may continue denying new well permits for agriculture and only allow "exempt" domestic uses, he said.

However, the OWRD will establish rules for the region that may allow an existing



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

permit to be canceled — likely in return for money — so that a new well can be drilled, Gall said.

OWRD's decision to halt new well permits came after WaterWatch of Oregon, an environmental non-profit, protested several approvals last year.

The group became concerned after seeing the agency issue multiple well permit without determining if water is available or whether the wells would affect surface water, said John DeVoe, its executive director.

"This was happening over and over," he said.

Even so, it was becoming apparent that groundwater pumping in the basin was unsustainable, which would require action to prevent the area from developing more severe problems such as those seen in the Umatilla Basin, DeVoe said.

"I think it's an area that was going to get some scrutiny whether we were involved or not," he said.

The Harney Basin experienced a major increase in well drilling over the past decade for farm uses, said Gall.

However, it's difficult for OWRD to deny permits unless it has data to support such a decision, and the agency's resources are limited, he said.

"The development got ahead of the data collection," he said.

Oregon legislators make final push on ag bills

By A W
Capital Press

As the 2015 legislative session winds down in Oregon, lawmakers are making their final votes on agricultural bills that have undergone extensive review in various committees.

Meanwhile, final action on other legislation that's critical to farming — such as \$50 million in additional funding for water projects — isn't expected to take place until the last days of the session in late June or early July.

The following is a summary of bills that have won approval from lawmakers or appear likely to pass the legislature:

Unimproved land

Two bills that provide more than \$1 million in financial assistance for juniper harvesting and processing are awaiting a signature from Gov. Kate Brown after passing the House and Senate.

Juniper is a native species in Oregon's dry regions but is behaving like an invasive due to fire suppression and other effects of European settlement. Its spread depletes water and threatens the habitat of sensitive species, such as the sage grouse, that can impact livestock grazing.

While there are economic uses for lumber from juniper, its extraction and processing are complicated and expensive.

House Bills 2997 and 2998 aim to help juniper companies overcome these barriers by providing them with \$900,000 in loans and grants, technical assistance and mapping services, as well as \$250,000 in funding

for cooperative efforts led by Portland State University.

The goal of the legislation is to simultaneously increase the removal of juniper trees, which have taken over 10 million acres in Oregon, and assist new companies that make products from the wood. Both bills passed the House unanimously on June 10 and passed Senate 26-2 on June 18.

Predator control

Livestock producers will be able to raise funds for increased predator control under a bill that's headed for a vote on the Senate floor after recently passing muster with environmental and finance committees. The bill previously passed the House 56-2.

Under HB 3188, landowners could petition county governments to create special districts where they'd be charged fees that would compensate the USDA's Wildlife Services for enhanced predator control.

Landowners with more than 10 acres would be charged \$1 an acre while smaller ones would pay a flat fee of \$25. If they chose not to pay the fees, they wouldn't benefit from the program.

USDA's Wildlife Services already hunts coyotes and other predators but the amount of county funding for this program has shrunk due to reduced federal timber payments.

Opponents of HB 3188 said that decisions about predator management should not be made at the local level and urged lawmakers to consider non-lethal methods of control, but those objections have not impeded the bill's progress thus far.

Biotechnology

Disputes over cross-pollination between biotech, organic and conventional crops would be encouraged to seek mediation through state or federal farm regulators under HB 2509.

The original version of the bill introduced and passed in the House had much sharper teeth, as farmers who refused mediation would be liable for the opposing party's legal bills in the event of a lawsuit.

After quietly passing the House, HB 2509 encountered a strong backlash from critics of genetic engineering, which prompted lawmakers to significantly scale back its scope in the Senate.

The Senate unanimously passed an amended version on June 11, the language about liability for legal bills was eliminated. The bill now simply allows a judge to consider a farmer's reluctance to mediate when imposing sanctions or considering an injunction.

Before HB 2509 heads to Brown for a signature, the House must first sign off on the changes made in the Senate. Those amendments were scheduled to be considered on the House floor on June 22.

Fertilizer fees

The House and Senate have approved increased fees on fertilizers, veterinary products and nurseries, with the bills awaiting the governor's signature.

HB 2443 creates a new 5-cent fee per ton of lime and increases the evaluation fee on new fertilizer products from \$50 to \$500. The Oregon Department of Agriculture expects the bill to raise \$70,000 during the 2015-2017 biennium to pay for fertilizer and water research.

SB255 raises the maximum registration fee on veterinary products from \$75 to \$150, which could generate up to \$225,000 in revenue for ODA. However, the agency must still complete the rule-making process for the rate increase and it's unclear how much registration fees will actually rise.

SB 256 hikes the maximum annual fee on nurseries \$20,000 to \$40,000 and from a half-percent to one percent of their revenues. The annual cap on fees for Christmas tree growers would increase from \$75 to \$110 and from \$3 to \$4.50 per acre, with the total not to exceed \$7,000. The increased caps would allow ODA to raise \$436,000 in additional revenues during the next biennium.

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