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THE WATER 'THIEF'

In Central Oregon, landscape benefits from removing juniper trees

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

PRINEVILLE, Ore. — Removing intrusive Western juniper trees from the landscape is the buzz among researchers, ranchers and government land managers.

Cutting juniper can improve greater sage grouse habitat, restore rangeland for grazing cattle and even provide jobs in struggling rural communities, the experts say.

John and Lynne Breese have a 30-year jump on them. In the draws and slopes outside Prineville, the Breeses have been cutting juniper since the late 1980s.

Walking a section of what's called the Stump Puller Pasture, John Breese explains the rapid impact of cutting juniper. Trees on a 16-acre parcel of the pasture were cut a year-and-a-half ago and the branches trimmed and scattered as part of an on-going experiment.

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Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

John and Lynne Breese of Prineville, Ore., have advocated juniper removal as a way to improve stream, soil and range health. They've been at it since the late 1980s, and policymakers have come around to their way of thinking.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

A mature juniper tree lies where it was cut. While the tree might have supplied marketable lumber, hauling it to a sawmill is problematic.

Idaho aquifer agreement finalized

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Idaho surface and groundwater irrigators have finalized terms of an agreement aiming to reverse declining Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer levels.

The agreement, reached on July 1,

provides a potential longterm solution to a water call filed a decade ago by irrigation companies with the Surface Water Coalition against junior well irrigators with Idaho Ground Water Appropriators, Inc.

Surface users say they've been injured by declining spring flows into the Snake River from Blackfoot

to Milner Dam, due to the increase in junior well use.

The sides now have until Aug. 1 to convince member districts to participate, or continue facing the risk of curtailment during future dry years.

The agreement seeks to stabilize the aquifer within the next five

years and meet its longterm goal of restoring levels to the average fill from 1991-2001 by 2026, according to IGWA attorney Randy Budge. Aquifer levels during the target period were roughly between current lows and peak levels from the early 1960s.

"We were struggling to work out

the recovery goal over the last few days," Budge said. "The experts looked at it and concluded trying to look at one year is probably not the way to do it."

Under the final terms sheet, well users will be expected to reduce their

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Washington vet sees chance for worse bird flu season

WSDA prepares for second season with virus deadly to poultry

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Bird flu could return next winter with new strains that are more prevalent in wild birds and more deadly for chickens, Washington State Veterinarian Joe Baker said Monday.

"We have to be ready for the worsening scenario," he said.

The Washington State Department of Agriculture has been reviewing last year's outbreak and planning to prevent and respond to a reoccurrence.

One lesson from last year: It could have been worse.

The virus in Washington was limited to a small per-



A goose flaps its wings last winter in the Coweeman River in Washington. Migratory birds brought bird flu to Washington in mid-December 2014. State Veterinarian Joe Baker says officials need to be prepared for another outbreak this coming winter. Don Jenkins/Capital Press

centage of wild ducks and raptors, four mixed-bird backyard flocks and a game bird farm of mostly pheasants. The outbreaks were spaced apart geographically and chronologically, keeping WSDA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture from being overwhelmed as they quar-

antined infected premises.

"Frankly, compared to what happened in the Mississippi Flyway, we got off pretty easy," Baker said. "We can't necessarily count on that good fortune the next time it hits."

The first U.S. detection of highly pathogenic bird flu was in mid-December at a lake in

northwest Washington. The disease appeared over the next two months throughout the West, including at two commercial poultry farms in California.

The Western outbreaks stopped in mid-February, but the virus resurfaced in early March in the Midwest, with much more disastrous consequences. More than 48 million birds in 15 states have been culled, according to the USDA. The last case was confirmed June 17 in Iowa.

The USDA investigated outbreaks at more than 80 commercial farms and concluded that while migratory birds introduced the virus, biosecurity lapses spread it.

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