

Washington



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A horse eyes a passerby while standing in a field Aug. 25 in southwest Washington. State Veterinarian Joe Baker is urging horse owners to vaccinate their animals against West Nile virus. This summer, 18 horses in the state have been infected, the most since 2009.

West Nile virus makes a comeback

Get your horse vaccinated, state veterinarian urges

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington State Veterinarian Joe Baker, a horse owner and self-described “retired horse doctor,” suspects one reason for this summer’s high number of equine West Nile virus cases is complacency.

“I really, really wish peo-

ple would think twice before skipping the vaccine,” Baker said Monday. “This is not a disease to be taken lightly.”

West Nile virus cases are up this summer for both humans and horses. Baker said he suspects that the drought has forced virus-carrying mosquitoes to scout for water and that they are finding it near animals, including horses. “Being survivalists, mosquitoes will go to wherever the moisture is,” he said.

But he also said he thinks some horse owners have let their guard down.

The state Department of Agriculture has confirmed 18 horses with West Nile virus so far this summer. WSDA confirmed only eight cases in the previous five years combined.

Horse owners may have forgotten the 41 cases in 2008 and the 73 cases 2009, Baker said.

None of the horses that contracted the virus this year were up to date with vaccinations against the disease, he said.

“Animal owners tend to have amnesia after a few

years,” Baker said. “I think that’s playing some role in what we’re seeing.”

Baker, who spent a decade early in his career exclusively treating horses, urged owners to vaccinate their horses yearly against the virus.

A horse given its first shot this month will need a second dose in about four weeks to bolster the immunity, he said. Vaccinations given now will guard a horse through most of next year’s mosquito season, Baker said.

A dose of vaccine costs \$25 to \$30, he said.

Farmworker camp will likely remain open

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

MONITOR, Wash. — A 380-bed migrant farmworker camp in this small town west of Wenatchee likely will be kept going by the state and Chelan County for another two years.

County and state Department of Commerce officials say they are close to a deal for the state to pay less than it has in the past.

The camp has been funded by the state and operated by the county in a county park in Monitor since 2001. In May, Janet Masella, managing director of the Housing Finance Unit of the Department of Commerce, said she informed the county a couple of years ago that 2015 would be the last year of state funding since the camp was never intended to be permanent and equipment replacement costs would be looming.

Also in May, the Washington Growers League in Yakima opened a new, 200-bed migrant farmworker housing facility, called Brender Creek, in the neighboring town of Cashmere.

There was a question if both facilities would be needed. It now appears both facilities are needed during cherry season, said Jesse Lane, Growers League housing program manager.

Brender Creek was full



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Residents of the Monitor, Wash., migrant farmworker camp are seen at late afternoon, Aug. 19. They pick fruit at area orchards from sun up to early afternoon.

most of June during cherry harvest, he said. The Monitor camp was full and turned people away, as it has in past years, said Keith Goehner, a Chelan County commissioner and a Dryden pear grower.

The Monitor camp usually is about half full during pear and apple harvest, he said. Brender Creek is about half full now and probably will be 75 percent full during pears and apples, Lane said.

The county doesn’t have the money to fund the Monitor camp alone but is committed to farmworker housing, balancing need and cost, Goehner has said.

The Monitor camp cost \$420,352 to operate in 2014 with \$289,850 coming from the state, \$99,915 from nightly per-bed fees paid by occupants or growers and \$30,587 from other county sources, Masella said.

The plan now is for the state to stop paying the county \$60,000 for camp management and \$108,000 to lease the grounds annually, said Cathy Mulhall, county administrator. The lease fee made up for the loss of county revenue because the portion of the park used by migrant workers was closed to public campers, she said.

The plan is for the state to

pay annual operating costs up to \$200,000, minus bed-rental revenues, Mulhall said.

The state offered to give the county tents, trailers and mobile kitchen and laundry facilities at the end of two years, Masella said. The county has turned that down so far because it doesn’t yet know if it will keep the camp open beyond two years, Mulhall said.

If growers still want the camp after two years, the county would look to partner with a group of growers, the Growers League or a housing authority to keep the camp open, Goehner said.

McFerson hired to run WSU tree fruit center

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Washington State University has hired Jim McFerson as director of the university’s Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center in Wenatchee.

McFerson begins the job Aug. 24 and a contract has been written to avoid conflicts of interest while he continues as manager of the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, also in Wenatchee, for 18 months, said Ron Mittelhammer, WSU interim co-provost.

McFerson, 64, has been hired for his tree fruit knowledge and because “WSU is one of the nation’s leaders in partnering with industry and the agricultural sector of the economy,” Mittelhammer said.

“This is an exciting and unique opportunity to explore how we can make our public-private partnership more productive and even stronger for our industry and WSU,” McFerson told Capital Press.

Close collaboration between

WSU scientists and the tree fruit industry is one reason WSU has been successful in obtaining external funding in recent years, McFerson said.

“I see this appointment as a manifestation of a commitment by both organizations. This isn’t a common model. We’re trying to build on what we’ve done,” he said.

The center needs more staff and more office, lab and field work space, he said.

The commission is a state agency but is governed by industry members. It collects about \$4 million annually in assessments from growers for tree fruit research and awards about \$1.5 million to \$2 million annually in research grants to WSU.

The Tree Fruit Research and Extension Center operates with a \$4 million annual budget. It has 50 full-time and 20 seasonal employees and more than 100 research and extension projects involving many aspects of growing, harvesting, storing, grading and packing tree fruit.

Commission sticks with linking cougar hunts to wolf recovery

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington will increase cougar hunting in wolf territory as a sympathetic gesture to communities concerned about the increasing presence of predators, the Fish and Wildlife Commission confirmed Friday.

The commission voted 7-1 to reject a petition submitted by the Humane Society of the United States and several conservation groups challenging the stepped-up cougar hunts in about 29 percent of the state.

They argued that shooting cougars to shore up support for wolf recovery was a rash move by the commission. The groups asserted the policy was not subjected to public comment and likely to backfire by killing older cougars that keep juvenile males away from livestock and humans.

Commissioner Jay Kehne, an Omak resident who works for one of the petitioning groups, Conservation Northwest, agreed on most points. He said it was a “far stretch” to link cougar hunt-

ing with wolf recovery.

The rest of the commission stuck with its decision in April to increase harvest limits in 14 game units that overlap with wolf packs.

Commissioner Miranda Wecker, a Naselle resident, said Friday that the commission should defend its right to “tweak” harvest levels. She said in an earlier interview that the change was an empathetic signal to Eastern Washington residents unhappy with a growing wolf population. Wolves are a state-protected species and can’t be hunted.

Kehne said the public never got a chance to comment on the policy. He said public outreach focused on extending the cougar hunting season by one month. “There was no discussion of increasing (harvest) numbers in all of that process,” he said.

The move will change harvest limits statewide by about 25 cougars. Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife officials say the state has approximately 3,600 cougars and 163 were harvested in 2014.

S.E. Washington irrigation district to fight state fine

Fine worth more than annual budget of tiny district

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A southeast Washington irrigation district has been fined \$73,530 — more than its entire annual budget — for renegeing on a pledge to leave more of the Touchet River for steelhead in exchange for state money for irrigation pipes, according to the Washington Department of Ecology.

The Touchet Eastside Westside Irrigation District drew 90 acre-feet of water it wasn’t entitled to over 21 days in October 2014, said Keith Stoffel, water resources manager for DOE’s Eastern Regional Office.

District board member Mike Buckley said Thursday the penalty exceeds the district’s annual budget and that it will appeal the fine to the Pollution Control Hearings Board. The district’s annual budget is about \$63,000.

Technical problems with meters caused the district to struggle tracking water use, he said.

“This district is very much pro saving of water for fish,” he said. “We absolutely want to be in compliance.”

The district irrigates 1,972 acres of hay, alfalfa, onions, corn and other crops in Walla Walla County. The district has water rights dated 1882, and it gave up some water in 2010 in exchange for \$2.56 million to replace open canals with pipelines.

The district retained full or nearly full rights for the

spring and summer. But it agreed to reduce its withdrawal from the river in the fall by more than two-thirds. “We probably were a little too generous,” Buckley said.

The district didn’t provide DOE with metering reports between 2010 and 2013, Stoffel said. When the district in early 2015 submitted records for 2014, DOE discovered the district withdrew too much water during a three-week period in October, sometimes up to 50 percent more, Stoffel said.

DOE says the district failed to pay attention to the limits and that the fine shows the agency is serious about protecting fish and other water users.

In setting the penalty, the agency calculated the public had spent \$817 on pipelines for every acre-foot illegally diverted.

Buckley said the water-efficiency project has worked well for the district, but the struggle to accurately meter water has been frustrating.

The district had hoped to make amends and settle with DOE by being warned instead of fined.

“We told them, ‘Gosh, it’s going to break us,’” Buckley said. “We were asking for a good hand-slapping and maybe more help.”

The irrigation district’s board chairman, Stephen Ames, said meter readings remain a problem and acknowledged that the district failed to track its water use. Nevertheless, the district hopes to show the hearings board it has been meeting its overall obligation to forgo about 3,100 acre-feet of water each year, he said. “We made a mistake, and we are correcting it.”

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