

Biologists: Taking wolves off Oregon's endangered species list

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

The wildlife biologists in charge of Oregon's gray wolf recovery program believe wolves should be taken off the state endangered species list.

The recommendation goes to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission, which will decide Nov. 9 whether to delist wolves. Livestock producers, especially those represented by the Oregon Cattleman's Association, favor delisting.

Conservation groups oppose the idea. In a joint statement released Oct. 29, the Pacific Wolf Coalition said the staff recommendation is flawed and has not been peer reviewed as required by state law. The coalition includes Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands and the Center for Biological Diversity.

Michael Paul Nelson, a College of Forestry professor



Courtesy of ODFW

OR-3, a three-year-old male wolf from the Imnaha pack, is shown in this image captured from video taken by an ODFW employee on May 10, 2011, in Wallowa County, Ore. The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Commission, which will decide Nov. 9 whether to delist wolves.

of environmental ethics and philosophy at Oregon State University, called delisting "logically indefensible" when wolves are present on only 12 percent of their potential range in the state.

"Dropping state protections for wolves right now would suggest that politics, rather

than science and law, are guiding wildlife management decisions in Oregon," Nelson said in a statement issued by Pacific Wolf Coalition.

ODFW disagrees. "We have reviewed and used documented and verifiable information to formulate our results," ODFW spokes-

woman Michelle Dennehy said. "We are confident in our process and that we are following statutory and regulatory requirements."

If the ODFW commission agrees with the staff recommendation, it would mean wolves in the eastern third of the state are not protected under either state or federal endangered species laws. Federal ESA protection would still be in force in the rest of Oregon.

That wouldn't mean open season on wolves, however. The state wolf plan would remain in force, and it allows ODFW-approved "controlled take," or killing, of wolves in cases of chronic livestock attacks or if wolves cause a decline in prey populations, chiefly elk and deer. Ranchers, as they do now, would be able to shoot wolves caught in the act of attacking livestock or herd dogs. None have been killed in that manner.

Oregon's wolf plan does

not allow sport hunting of wolves in any phase of the recovery timeline, Dennehy said.

The ODFW staff recommendation was not a surprise. A biological status review completed earlier this fall said gray wolf recovery in Oregon has met the delisting criteria in every instance.

Under the state plan, wolves can be delisted if:

Wolves aren't in danger of extinction in any portion of their range; their natural reproductive potential is not in danger of failing; there's no imminent or active deterioration of their range or primary habitat; the species or its habitat won't be "over-utilized" for scientific, recreational, commercial or educational reasons; and existing state or federal regulations are adequate to protect them.

State wildlife biologists, headed by ODFW's Russ Morgan, believe the criteria have been met. Morgan describes

Oregon's wolf population as steadily increasing in number and geographic distribution.

The first wolves migrated to Oregon from Idaho, where they had been released as part of a national recovery program coordinated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The first Oregon pack was documented in 2008, and the confirmed wolf population stood at 85 as of July 2015. Since then, three wolves have died: The Sled Springs pair were found dead of unknown cause in Wallowa County in late August, and a Grant County man hunting coyotes on private property in early October reported shooting a wolf designated as OR-22. A district attorney is reviewing evidence in the case.

The Nov. 9 ODFW Commission meeting begins at 8 a.m. at the department headquarters, 4034 Fairview Industrial Drive SE, Salem. Wolf delisting is the only topic on the agenda.

Saving an apple orchard may graft an industry's growth

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

MOLALLA, Ore. — On a modest farm southeast of Portland, volunteers nurture thousands of cuttings taken from a world class collection of obscure apple varieties.

Their goal is to copy the eclectic collection and sustain its genetic diversity before its aging owner retires, sells or the collection falls into disarray.

The volunteers, roused through such groups as the Home Orchard Society, have found unexpected allies: Hipster hard cider makers, whose booming industry seeks the bitter-sweet or even bitter-tart flavors of old heirloom apples, not the Honeycrisp, Fuji or the half-dozen other fresh-eating varieties most commonly sold in grocery stores.

"The cider makers have found the older varieties produce the complex, multi-layered flavors they need," said Joanie Cooper, who owns the Molalla farm where the orchard collection is being established. "The new ones are just sweet and don't add character to cider."

"All of this makes sense," said Pete Mulligan, a key project supporter and partner in Bull Run Cider outside of Portland. "This is the fastest growing adult beverage in the country."

At the root of this collaboration is the renowned Botner Collection in Yoncalla, Ore., which was established by amateur horticulturist Nick Botner and his wife, Carla. Trading and exchanging with other private and public collectors over



Photos by Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Joanie Cooper, owner of Almaty Farm in Molalla, Ore., leads The Temperate Orchard Conservancy's effort to copy the Botner apple tree collection, which includes up to 4,000 varieties.

several decades, Nick Botner gathered an estimated 4,000 apple varieties from around the world, including from old pioneer homesteads in the U.S. He grows them on his farm.

But the farm is for sale. Cooper, who's long been active in the Home Orchard Society, said Botner, near 90, told her, "You need to buy my farm. Move down here and save my trees."

That wasn't feasible. In addition, Cooper said the farm is not commercially viable, because in many cases Botner has only one tree per variety.

In 2011, intending to preserve the genetic diversity represented in the Botners' orchard, Cooper and others set out to duplicate it.

In 2012, Cooper formed a

nonprofit, the Temperate Orchard Conservancy, and began the effort to plant the copied varieties on Almaty Farm, her 40-acre property outside of Molalla. Cooper said the farm will distribute cuttings to other orchardists.

"We have big and broad plans," she said. "This isn't going to be a static collection."

It is tedious work. Volunteers take cuttings, called scions, and graft them to root stock. They're grown out in pots under shade cloth before being planted at Cooper's farm. The nonprofit eventually will take over the property, Cooper said. Down the road, the conservancy may be able to help support itself by selling trees.

Each tree wears a metal tag with identification drawn from

Botner's eclectic records: Common name, planting block and row number.

The varieties range from Muscaset de Lense, a French cider apple, to Huvitus, which originated in Finland. Others are identified as Glass King, Lyman Prolific, Kensei, Harlamowski, Joy's Delight and Marlin Stephens.

"Most of these, you wouldn't know what they are," Cooper said.

So far, volunteers have copied about 3,000 of the estimated 4,000 varieties in the collection.

The USDA maintains an apple variety collection in Geneva, N.Y., but the Botner collection holds some that aren't found there. Cooper said the conservancy has a different mission.



A late-setting variety labeled "Huvitus" is among the apple trees copied from the renowned but eclectic Nick Botner collection in Southern Oregon. The Temperate Orchard Conservancy, a nonprofit, is copying the collection to sustain genetic diversity.

"They have a collection, but their goal is not to save every heirloom variety," Cooper said. "Ours is."

The work wins cheers from Joseph Postman, who curates the USDA's pear collection outside of Corvallis, Ore.

Grocery chains primarily sell four or five apple varieties, and lack of diversity is a genetic vulnerability, Postman said. Having access to hundreds opens the market to local products, he said.

The alcoholic fruit drink industry is pushing the renewed interest in varieties that aren't widely grown commercially, Postman said. Over the past dozen years, most of the requests Postman's received for pear cuttings come from "perry" makers. Perry is to pears as cider is to apples.

At Bull Run Cider in Forest Grove outside of Portland, Mulligan and partner Galen Williams make hard cider, maintain their own orchard

and sell trees to other orchardists.

It's critical the industry grow its own cider varieties as soon as possible, Mulligan said. Some cideries now make do with juiced dessert apples, he said.

Cooper, the nonprofit Temperate Orchard Conservancy founder and owner of Almaty Farm, said her interest began when she realized the rural property she owned years ago near Amity, Ore., had remnants of an orchard planted in the late 1880s. She sought identification and was entranced by the long-forgotten varieties.

She's transplanted that fervor to her new farm, Amaty. The farm name comes from a city in Kazakhstan and reportedly means "full of apples." The region is often described as the birthplace of modern apples, and so the name appeals to Cooper.

"That's what I call it," she said.

El Nino's warm and wet winter could impact 2016 prune crop, insider warns

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

YUBA CITY, Calif. — El Nino conditions are already threatening prune production in Chile and could do the same in California, an industry insider warns.

Along with fueling Hurricane Patricia's recent assault on the Mexican coast, El Nino has brought ongoing rain and cloudy weather in Chile during the spring growing season, notes Greg Thompson, general manager of the Prune Bargaining Association.

The weather phenomenon marked by warm southern storms casts doubt on California's 2016 crop, as warm and wet conditions increase the likelihood of disease problems in fruit production, Thompson asserts.

California and Chile together account for 80 percent of the world's dried plum production. While a downturn in production could push prices up, "we found out this year that things can happen globally you didn't expect," Thompson told the Capital Press.

"Several of the international markets for South America — like Russia and Brazil — are having economic problems and imports are way off," he said. "Prices were up last year because there really was a global shortfall in production.

When prices go up, there's a shift in the supply-and-demand curve."

Scientists have said this winter's El Nino could turn out to be as strong as 1997-98, which resulted in severe weather and flooding in many areas of the United States.

Prune producers that season were expecting a 170,000-ton crop, but the rain and gloomy skies that extended into the summer led to a crop of only 102,000 tons.

A warm early spring this year diminished fruit sizes in California, leading to an esti-

mated 100,000-ton crop, down 4 percent from the 104,000 tons pulled from dryers in 2014, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

A big crop in South America in 2014-15 combined with the economic slump to put

downward pressure on prices, Thompson said. If money is tight, some growers may want to cut back on "cultural inputs" such as pruning, fertilizers and fungicides, but such cutbacks could lead to disaster in a warm and wet winter, he said.

Grower should "just try to

keep a good, healthy orchard as best you can and try to weather the storm," he said.

Formed in 1968, the Prune Bargaining Association is a grower-owned cooperative that negotiates with buyers to establish the industry's raw product price for prunes.

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