

Calif. hits milestone in crafting water regs

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — State officials say they have reached their first milestone in carrying out groundwater regulations passed by lawmakers last year, setting up a way to resolve discrepancies over the boundaries of basins that will be affected by the new rules.

Beginning on Jan. 1, local agencies will have 90 days to apply to the state Department of Water Resources for changes in maps that outline California's most important groundwater basins and sub-basins.

Establishing that process now will give local entities more than six weeks to prepare their appeals, DWR spokeswoman Lauren Hersch said.

"If you as a local agency have reason to think the boundary isn't correct ... the regulations spell out what you need to do," she said.

Identifying basins and sub-basins is a key provision of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, a package of bills passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov. Jerry Brown last fall.

The companion bills by Assemblyman Roger Dickinson, D-Sacramento, and Sen. Fran Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, will give the State Water Resources Control Board sweeping oversight over groundwater use and empower local agencies to regulate extraction from aquifers through "groundwater sustainability plans" while charging fees to implement the new rules.

The three bills require local groundwater management agencies to be set up by 2017, sustainability plans for over-drafted basins to be in place by 2020, plans for other high- and medium-priority basins to be established by 2022 and sustainability in all high- and medium-priority basins to be achieved by 2040, the governor's office explained.

In addition, the legislation identifies objectives and milestones for achieving sustainability and enables the state to intervene when local agencies are unable or unwilling to adopt management plans, according to Brown's office.

According to maps unveiled last year, the state has designated 127 of California's 515 groundwater basins and sub-basins as high or medium priority. These basins account for 96 percent of the state's annual groundwater pumping and supply 88 percent of the population that resides over groundwater basins, the DWR explains.

High- and medium-priority basins stretch through most of the Central Valley as well as parts of the coastline and the Los Angeles area. A basin doesn't necessarily have to be overly depleted to be considered high-priority, Hersch said.

"The reason a basin might be listed as high priority could be the size of the population that overlies that basin, or if a community relies on groundwater for 100 percent of its drinking water," she said.

The groundwater-control measures came as environmentalists have long maintained that California was the only state in the country not to regulate use of groundwater, which accounts for 30 percent of total water usage and 43 percent of residents' drinking water, according to state water officials.

The legislation elicited a mixed reaction among farm groups, with some, including the California Farm Bureau Federation, expressing concerns about the rules' broad scope and specific impacts.

The DWR is writing regulations for how local groundwater agencies must be established and what they must do. It expects to have those rules available for public review in January, Hersch said. Final regulations for local entities must be in place by June 1, she said.

Idaho, NW potato production drops

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

Potato production is down about 2 percent, both in Idaho and throughout the Northwest, even though growers planted more acres, according to a Nov. 10 USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service report.

The NASS report also shows a significant decline in the percentage of high-quality potatoes. Upon learning that the crop might be smaller than many believed at harvest, industry sources say fresh sheds have slowed down shipments, contributing to price increases.

Idaho growers planted 325,000 acres of potatoes, up 4,000 acres from last season, but challenging weather conditions reduced yields by 13 hundredweight per acre to 402 hundredweight per acre. Idaho production dropped to 132.32 million hundredweight, down from 132.88 million hundredweight last season.

Washington growers increased their spud plantings by 5,000 acres to 170,000 acres, but their yields per acre



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Potatoes are hauled from the field during the 2015 harvest in Idaho Falls. Potato production in both Idaho and the Northwest was down this season, despite an increase in planted acres.

dropped by 25 hundredweight to 590 hundredweight, lowering total production from 101.475 million hundredweight to 100.3 million hundredweight.

Oregon's potato crop held steady at 39,000 acres, but average yields per acre dropped by 20 hundredweight to 560 hundredweight. Oregon's total production dropped from 22.562 million hundredweight to 21.784 million hundredweight.

The overall U.S. crop was up slightly, at 445.602 million hundredweight compared with 442.17 million hundredweight.

Further reducing the supply of top-quality potatoes, the percentage of Idaho spuds that met No. 1 specifications dropped from 80.1 percent in 2014 to 73.7 percent this season, and the percentage of culls increased by 0.2 percent to 1.5 percent, according to NASS.

Washington's No. 1 spuds, at 74.9 percent, were down 3.7 percent, and its culls increased by half a percent. NASS estimated 75.5 percent of Oregon spuds graded No. 1, down 3.1 percent, and culls increased by nearly a full percentage.

Randy Hardy, chairman of

the Magic Valley, Idaho, fresh potato cooperative Sun Valley Potatoes, said the NASS numbers are in line with prior estimates recently released by United Potato Growers of America. Based on the United's numbers, Hardy said growers approached fresh sheds and asked them to ease shipments, and many companies slowed processing or shut down briefly. As a result, Hardy said the grower return increased from about \$4.50 per hundredweight just after harvest to about \$6.84.

"There were some growers in Eastern Idaho who approached the sheds and said,

"We're not going to do this,"

Hardy said. Hardy was surprised that the state's production shrank, but now he's "cautiously optimistic" it will be a good year for potato growers.

"We're hoping to hold the prices up a little better than they were a year ago and make a little bit of money," Hardy said.

Paul Patterson, a retired University of Idaho agricultural economist who still tracks potato production costs, said for every percentage change in potato supply, prices adjust roughly 7.5 percent, as a rule of thumb. Potato production costs will be up significantly this year, Patterson added.

Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir believes the production drop may prove to be even greater than USDA estimated, and he's confident his organization's new commercial and its programs are bolstering demand.

"I think the market is finally reflecting where prices should be going rather than how they started out at the beginning of the season," Muir said.

Oregon, Washington urged to spray for gypsy moths

Asian variety increases risk, experts say

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A science panel has recommended Oregon and Washington spray more than 18,000 acres to combat Asian gypsy moths, seen as a major threat to the timber, nursery and Christmas tree industries.

The states' agriculture departments are reviewing the recommendations and haven't announced their plans. In the past, both states have taken a hard line against gypsy moths and sprayed insecticides from the air, even in the face of urban protests and court challenges.

The panel, made up mostly of U.S. Department of Agriculture officials and academic advisers, has recommended aerial spraying 8,641 acres in north Portland in response to two Asian gypsy moths trapped last summer near the port.

The area includes the St. Johns neighborhood and Forest Park, the largest city park in the U.S. and almost seven times as large as New York's Central Park, in Portland.

"If it got established in that park it would really be a problem," Oregon Department of Agriculture spokesman Bruce Pokamey said.

Both states have routinely battled European gypsy moths, which are established in 19 Eastern and Midwest states and annually defoliate thousands of acres, according to USDA. Media reports often focus on the insect in caterpillar form littering picnic tables and cars, and dropping on people.

The science panel was convened in response to the trapping in Oregon and Washington of Asian gypsy moths, rarer and more dangerous than their European counterparts. Asian gypsy moths feast on a wider variety of plants and are more mobile.

Until trapping 10 this sum-

Asian gypsy moth



Binomial name: *Lymantria dispar asiatica*

Appearance: Adult males have grayish-brown wings with darker bands and a wingspan of 1 1/2 inches. Adult females are white and much larger with a wingspan of 3 1/2 inches.

Diet: More than 600 species of trees and shrubs, including larch, oak, poplar, alder, willow and some evergreens.

Life cycle: Four stages; egg, larva, pupa and moth. Eggs are laid between June-September and remain dormant through winter to hatch the following spring.

Origin: Far East countries such as China, Russia and Japan.

First observed in N. America: 1991 near Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.

Source: USDAAPHIS

Capital Press graphic

mer, WSDA had not caught an Asian gypsy moth since 1999.

The two caught near the Port of Portland were the first found in Oregon since 2006.

In response to Asian gypsy moths caught in Washington, the science panel recommended spraying 6,979 acres near the Port of Tacoma, 1,280 acres in Nisqually, 807 acres near the Port of Vancouver and 640 acres in Kent.

Agencies spray for gypsy moths in the spring as eggs hatch and caterpillars emerge. An area is typically sprayed three times over about two weeks with *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*, commonly referred to as Btk and sold under the name Foray.

Besides the 10 Asian gypsy moths, WSDA trapped 32 European gypsy moths, the most since 2006. Some 22 were caught in the densely populated Seattle neighborhood Capitol Hill. The science panel recommended spraying more than the 28 acres tentatively planned by WSDA.

WSDA spokesman Hector



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A gypsy moth traps sways in the wind last summer at the Port of Kalama along the Columbia River in southwest Washington. The Washington State Department of Agriculture is planning a two-year campaign to stamp out Asian gypsy moths.

Castro said the agency has not decided whether to revise its plans.

Oregon trapped 12 European gypsy moths, mostly near Grants Pass in Southern Oregon. ODA hasn't decided how it will respond to those gypsy moths, Pokamey said.

WSDA has asked Gov. Jay

Inslee to include \$5.3 million in his supplemental budget proposal to the 2016 Legislature for a two-year campaign against Asian gypsy moths. The governor's office is evaluating spending requests from all state agencies and has not made any funding decisions, an Office of Financial Manage-

ment spokesman said.

WSDA hopes most of the money actually will come from the federal government. A USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service spokeswoman said the agency will work with the states on a response, but has not made a proposal.

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