

Washington

Inslee cites wildfires as state costs swell

Budget proposal targets gypsy moths, apple maggots

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee's budget proposal to the 2016 Legislature includes more than \$200 million related to Washington's record-smashing 1 million-acre wildfire season.

The spending plan, presented by the governor at a press conference Thursday, also includes money to spray gypsy moths, control apple maggots and test raw milk.

Wildfires burned 1,005,423 acres this year, according to the state Department of Natural Resources. The total far surpassed the record-setting 372,137 acres that burned in 2014.

To cover fire suppression costs left over from last sum-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee listens to a question Dec. 17 at a press conference where he rolled out his budget proposal for the 2016 Legislature. The proposal includes more than \$200 million related to fighting or preventing wildfires.

mer, Inslee proposes to dip into reserve funds for \$178.2 million.

He also proposes to increase the Department of Natural Resources budget by \$14.7 million to prepare for the 2016 wildfire season. The money would pay for equipment, training, supervisors and

fire-prevention programs. The proposal is less than the \$24 million proposed by Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark to beef up firefighting capabilities.

The budget proposal also includes \$9.2 million to help landowners and livestock operators repair wildfire damage.

Most of the money would be administered by the State Conservation Commission.

Wildfires damaged irrigation systems and hundreds of miles of fences, and damaged crops and forage.

The governor requested \$183,000 toward a \$5.3 million campaign to spray for Asian gypsy moths. The state hopes the U.S. Department of Agriculture will contribute the rest, though state budget and Washington State Department of Agriculture officials say they have no firm federal commitment.

WSDA trapped 10 Asian gypsy moths last summer. The moths pose a risk to the Christmas tree, nursery and forest industries. A scientific panel has recommended the state spray more than 9,000 acres in Western Washington.

WSDA has not drawn up a final plan. The department also likely will propose spraying in the Seattle neighborhood Capitol Hill, where

WSDA trapped 22 European gypsy moths.

Inslee asked for \$122,000 to keep apple maggots from harming the state's tree fruit industry.

WSDA proposes to use the money to regulate composting facilities in Eastern Washington that take yard waste from Western Washington, where apple maggots are established.

The governor included \$125,500 to expand WSDA's raw milk testing program.

WSDA requested \$252,000. The department tests raw milk for illness-causing pathogens that would be killed by pasteurization.

Budget officials cited the wildfires as one reason state government costs are rising faster than tax revenues. The two-year budget that Inslee signed just six months ago has a \$500 million hole, even though tax collections are surpassing expectations, according to budget officials.

Besides spending reserve funds, Inslee proposed filling the hole by ending four tax exemptions, none of them related to food production.

Inslee said his proposal "makes modest adjustments" to the state budget.

Republican leaders criticized Inslee, saying he failed to balance the budget without resorting to ending tax exemptions related to bottled water, oil refineries, foreclosures and sales taxes paid by out-of-state residents. Closing the exemptions would raise an estimated \$91.3 million.

"At first glance, we're pleased to see emergency money allocated for fire suppression efforts across the state," Rep. Bruce Chandler, R-Granger, said in a written statement. "However, in his proposal for additional policy changes, we find it disappointing that Gov. Inslee has decided to trot out four tax increases we've all seen before."

DOE: Not all manure lagoons will need permit

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

LACEY, Wash. — The Washington Department of Ecology definitely will drop its assumption that all manure lagoons pollute groundwater, but still has suspicions about most lagoons, an agency official, Kelly Susewind, said Wednesday.

The position may mean that while some of the state's 425 dairies would be excluded from additional pollution-control rules, many would have to comply.

"We can envision a situation where (groundwater pollution) doesn't occur," said Susewind, the agency's special assistant on water-quality policies. "We've also said we think that's going to be a rare situation."

DOE alarmed the dairy industry several months ago when it asserted all lagoons, even those built to Natural Resources Conservation Service standards, seep nitrates into aquifers.

The proposal meant all dairies with lagoons would need a confined animal feeding operation permit, a set of pollution-control rules now required of 10 livestock operations. The 10 either have polluted surface water or have the permit to reduce the risk.

The Washington State Dairy Federation called the assumption "stunning" and challenged DOE to provide the proof.

DOE says its still compiling the evidence, but it concedes that in some cases nitrates may take "centuries" to reach groundwater, Susewind said.

By dropping the blanket indictment against all lagoons, DOE has taken on the more-complicated task of developing handbook-style criteria for judging which lagoons are polluting and which aren't.

DOE will not test groundwater at each dairy to judge whether a particular lagoon pollutes, Susewind said. Instead, the agency likely will look at factors such as the lagoon's design, location of groundwater, soil types below the lagoon and climate.

Susewind said testing the water at every dairy will be difficult and expensive.

The dairy federation's executive director, Dan Wood, said Thursday that DOE should compile on-site evidence of pollution before requiring a dairy to obtain a CAFO permit.

"I'm glad they realize that not everyone will need a permit, but it's still fundamentally wrong to assume guilt without evidence," he said.

"We think site-specific evidence is not only prudent, but absolutely necessary to make a sound determination whether there's pollution," Wood said. "If there's actual pollution, that needs to be addressed. No one questions that."

Puget Soundkeeper Alliance lobbyist Bruce Wishart said Wednesday that he was



Susewind

concerned that DOE has been paying too much attention to the dairy industry and giving environmental concerns short shrift.

Environmental groups are lobbying for DOE to require dairies to double-line lagoons with synthetic materials and install wells to monitor groundwater quality. DOE has not shown an interest in adopting those proposals.

"We continue to be concerned. We'd like to see the CAFO permit go a bit further," Wishart said.

DOE officials said that they expect to release a formal proposal by early spring. The proposal will revise the state's CAFO permit, a state-federal partnership to keep livestock operations from violating state and federal laws. DOE has taken the position that the permit should be used to protect groundwater. In the past, the permit has regulated surface water pollution.

The dairy federation argues that DOE's tentative proposal would be hard to implement, financially crippling and duplicate manure-handling rules already enforced by the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

State fines Simplot for wind-blown manure

Company disputes agency's findings

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Simplot Feeders has been fined \$50,000 by the Washington Department of Ecology for letting dried manure blow off the company's feedlot in southeastern Washington, the agency announced Dec. 16.

A spokesman for the Idaho-based J.R. Simplot Co., Ken Dey, said the feedlot disputes DOE's interpretation of observations recorded by a feedlot employee.

"Our contention is that (DOE) is misrepresenting the logs," he said.

The company is re-

viewing DOE's allegations and hasn't decided whether to appeal the fine to the state's Pollution Control Hearings Board, Dey said.

The 500-acre feedlot, 15 miles southeast of Pasco, had 45,000-head of cattle on it last summer, according to DOE records.

The feedlot has a DOE-approved plan to control dust, and DOE alleges the company failed to follow the plan.

Blowing particles of dust and manure from the company's beef cattle operation in Walla Walla County violated air-quality rules, DOE said.

According to a penalty notice DOE sent Simplot on Dec. 15, the agency re-

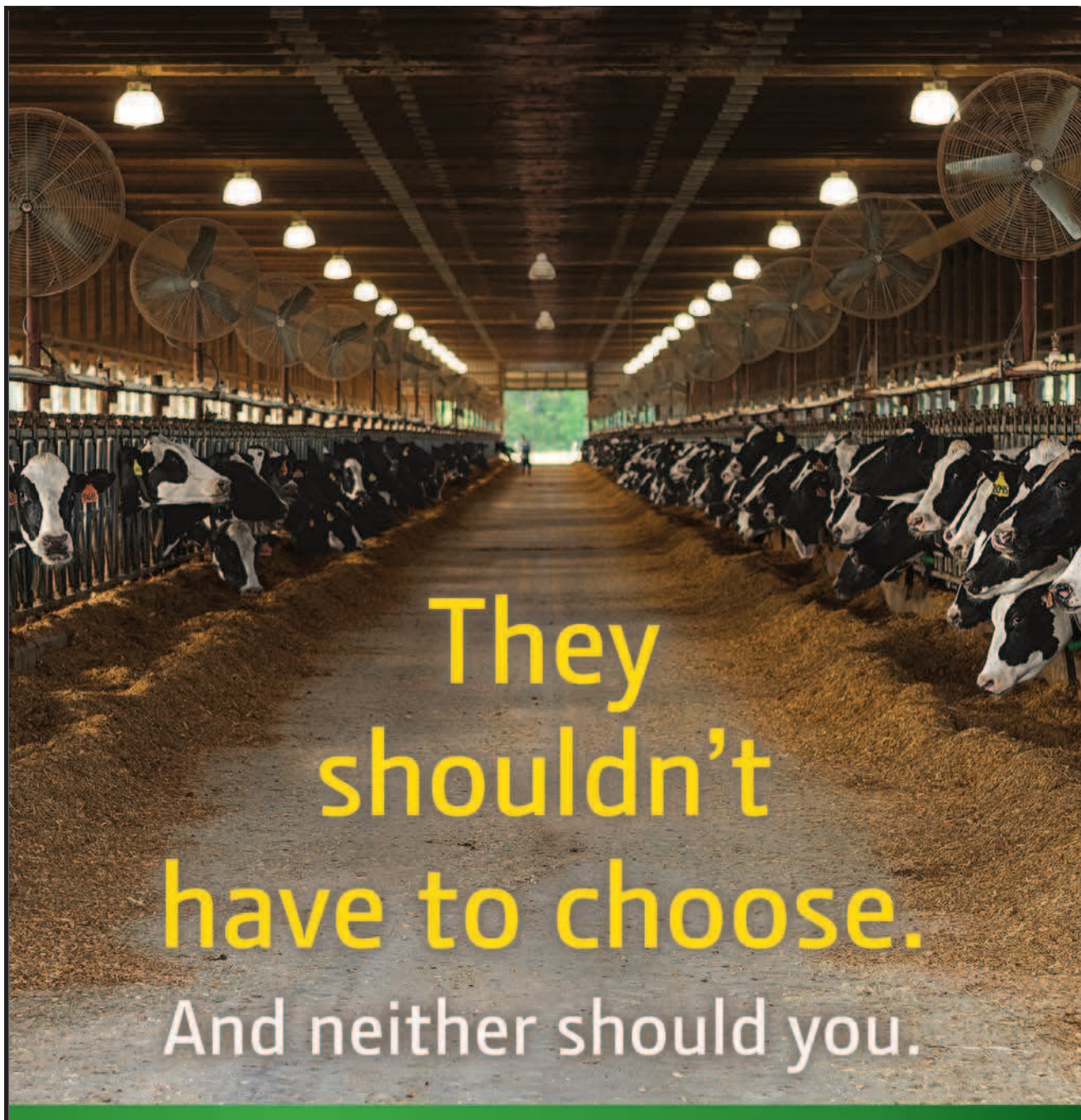
ceived complaints in early April about dust from the feedlot.

DOE officials reported seeing dust blowing from the feedlot in April and June.

DOE officials said they reviewed written observations made by a Simplot night watchman who reported seeing dust blowing on 67 evenings between April 7 and June 28. DOE alleges Simplot failed to follow up on the observations and control the dust.

The feedlot was fined \$24,000 in 2014 for releasing particle air pollution while grinding hay. Simplot did not appeal that fine.

Dey said the company has recently invested \$1 million to reduce emissions.



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