

Environmentalists appeal despite victory in 'cattle drift' case

Plaintiffs want to block grazing along Oregon-California border

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Environmental groups are challenging a court ruling in which they prevailed because it doesn't go so far as to block grazing along the Oregon-California border.

For five years, the Klamath Siskiyou Wildlands Center and

the Klamath Forest Alliance have been fighting against grazing on three allotments that total 48,000 acres along the Siskiyou Crest.

They claim that cattle from the Klamath National Forest in California cause environmental problems when they "drift" onto unauthorized allotments in Oregon's Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest.

Their lawsuit was dismissed in 2013 by a federal judge who found there's little evidence of serious resource damage from cows, but that ruling was recently overturned by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court

of Appeals. The 9th Circuit found that the U.S. Forest Service decided that cattle drift caused minimal harm even though the agency "provided essentially no information about the environmental impact."

Forest Service officials argued there's no quantitative data about the effects of cattle drift, but the 9th Circuit ruled that it's "exactly the point" of an environmental assessment to attempt to find such information — especially since "the record was replete with anecdotal and photographic evidence suggesting impact

from drifting cattle, which should have been discussed."

Due to this oversight, the 9th Circuit ordered the Forest Service to reconsider its environmental assessment and "develop sufficient evidence to determine the likely environmental impact of its plan" on the national forest in Oregon.

If the effect is determined to be significant, the agency will have to conduct a more comprehensive analysis known as an environmental impact statement, the appeals court held.

The plaintiffs have now asked the 9th Circuit for a re-hearing of the case, arguing the

Forest Service's authorization of the 10-year grazing project in the area should be vacated, which would effectively end grazing until the environmental analysis is revised.

Federal projects approved in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act due to an insufficiently "hard look" at environmental consequences must be vacated except in "rare circumstances," the groups said in a court filing.

Such plans may only remain effective if they have dire environmental effects or otherwise cause catastrophic disruptions, which does not apply to stop-

ping grazing along the Siskiyou Crest, the plaintiffs argue.

Allowing the grazing authorizations to stay effective would allow the Forest Service to rationalize its decision in the new environmental analysis and undermine "the purpose of NEPA to foster informed, democratic decision-making," the groups said.

The Forest Service will only lose a nominal amount of grazing fees if the authorizations are vacated and ranchers can buy hay or lease private pastures while the allotments are unavailable, the environmentalists claim.

Bingham Co-op plans new fumigant facility

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BLACKFOOT, Idaho — Bingham Cooperative will break ground soon on a \$1 million fumigant storage facility here that should enable the company to keep more product on hand for growers and reduce freight costs.

Bingham Cooperative General Manager Mike Jensen said work on the project should be underway by early February, with completion expected by mid-May.

The planned 375,000-gallon Blackfoot storage facility will supplement the existing 125,000-gallon facility. The extra capacity will make it feasible for Bingham to haul in fumigants by rail, which should result in a significant freight savings over truck transportation. Jensen has made no estimate of the exact savings. Jensen said the Blackfoot storage facility will also be used to restock tanks in American Falls, further spreading the freight savings to growers.

"With margins decreasing and becoming tighter and tighter, you've got to find different ways to keep your production costs down, and if this is one of the avenues that helps us to reduce costs, great," said Kevin Christensen, chairman of the board for the cooperative and a grower in Firth.

Christensen said the extra storage will also enable the cooperative to respond more promptly to growers planning to fumigate fields for potatoes.

Jensen explained potato growers have a tight window from mid-September through late November to fumigate fields to control nematodes and certain soil pathogens, and new



Jensen

buffer-zone requirements have forced growers to shank fumigants into their soil with an implement rather than applying it with irrigation water. Jensen said shanking must be done before the soil freezes, and chemicals must be available when custom applicators need them.

"The logistics of getting that much product in place and available was a real challenge," Jensen said. "With our building of a new fumigant storage facility, we can accept fumigants by rail throughout the year."

Despite declining commodity prices, Jensen said 2015 was a strong year for Bingham Cooperative and its parent company, CHS. CHS will give back \$516 million in cash, plus additional stock, to its growers worldwide, based on its 2015 earnings.

In late February, the Bingham Cooperative will return \$2.3 million in patronage to grower members based on 2015 profitability, plus another \$800,000 in stock. Bingham Cooperative's patronage will be down from 2014, when \$4.1 million in cash was returned to growers, counting \$400,000 in equity the company allowed growers to retire early.

Jensen said Bingham Coop's 2015 refined fuel sales were up about a million gallons, or roughly 10 percent of total sales from the prior year. The reason for the gain, Jensen said, is that Bingham Cooperative expanded its territory into new areas, including Grace, Soda Springs, Rexburg, Terreton, Burley and Rupert. The cooperative also bought a small propane business in Grace, he said.

Brown's budget includes boost for CDFA

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed a more than \$70 million boost in the next fiscal year's budget for food and agriculture programs, including new money for "climate smart" agriculture, addressing antibiotic use in livestock and licensing medical marijuana.

In his preliminary ledger, Brown proposed \$485.1 million for the Department of Food and Agriculture, including \$45.9 million in one-time funds for infrastructure needs as his \$122.6 billion overall budget for 2016-17 envisions a continued economic recovery.

The \$439.2 million for the CDFA's regular expenditures would still be a sizable boost from the \$414.4 million budgeted for the department in the current fiscal year and includes more funding for a trio of initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gases, Secretary Karen Ross said in a blog post.

"It's called climate-smart agriculture because it represents a set of practices that sustainably increase productivity and resilience while reducing greenhouse gas emissions," Ross said.

In all, \$75 million from the state's cap-and-trade program would be set aside for:

- A dairy digester research and development program (\$35 million).
 - Financial incentives for growers to put in more efficient water systems (\$20 million).
 - A program to increase carbon levels in California's agricultural soils (\$20 million).
- "CDFA is honored and pleased to have the opportunity to maintain these programs for the people of California," Ross said. "We already have success stories to share."



AP Photo/Rich Pedroncelli

Gov. Jerry Brown answers a question concerning his proposed 2016-17 state budget at a news conference Jan. 7 in Sacramento. Brown unveiled the \$122.6 billion spending plan that calls for increases in spending on education, health care and the state infrastructure.

The water program — called the State Water Efficiency and Enhancement Program, or SWEEP — has already allocated nearly \$18 million, and more than \$11 million has been provided for five new dairy digester projects in the state, she said.

Brown's ledger would also provide \$1.3 million and eight positions to implement Senate Bill 27, which introduces new limits on agricultural use in livestock. The bill requires that CDFA develop antimicrobial stewardship guidelines, including antibiotic selection and

administering policy for veterinarians and best-management practices for producers, and track antibiotic use.

Nearly \$3.3 million and 18 workers would be used to implement a package of bills passed last year that require the CDFA to license and regulate the cultivation of medical marijuana, including regulations to minimize grow sites' environmental impacts, according to a budget summary.

The budget also includes \$40 million for an agricultural lands program administered by CDFA

and six other agencies, which aims to keep farm and ranch land in agriculture through easements. In all, Brown's budget envisions 1,490.3 positions for CDFA in fiscal 2016-17 — a decrease from the 1,578.7 currently funded.

The CDFA's portion comes amid a budget that would also devote \$9.5 billion to the Natural Resources Agency, including \$323.1 million for continued response to the drought and an additional \$215 million for drought-related wildfire suppression costs.

Idaho farm cash receipts, net income down significantly in 2015

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — For the first time in six years, University of Idaho agricultural economist Garth Taylor had bad news to report to lawmakers about total revenue from Idaho agriculture.

During UI's annual report to Idaho legislators on the health of Idaho agriculture Jan. 8, Taylor projected farm cash receipts in Idaho were down 9 percent in 2015 compared with 2014.

The 2015 decrease follows five straight years of increases in Idaho farm cash receipts.

According to projections by Taylor and UI ag economist Ben Eborn, farm cash receipts in Idaho totaled \$7.87 billion in 2015, down \$800 million from 2014's record total of \$8.66 billion.

Idaho net farm income totaled a projected \$1.34 billion in 2015, down 31 percent from 2014. Net farm income in Idaho reached a record \$2 billion in 2013.

Those forecasts, which are based on the calendar year, are included in UI's annual "The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture" report, which was released Jan. 8.

According to the report, revenue from milk, Idaho's top farm commodity in terms of cash receipts, totaled \$2.3 billion in 2015, down 27 percent from 2014's record total of \$3.2 billion.

But revenue from cattle

and calves reached a record \$2.2 billion in Idaho in 2015, 8 percent more than in 2014.

On the crop side, Idaho wheat revenue dropped 17 percent to \$506 million, hay receipts totaled \$485 million, a 12 percent decline from 2014, and potato revenue was off 3 percent, to \$871 million.

Cash receipts for sugar beets increased 19 percent to \$300 million and barley revenue rose 7 percent to \$286 million.

Total crop revenue was \$3 billion in 2015, down 3 percent from 2014, and livestock revenue totaled \$4.8 billion, off 13 percent.



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Opportunities in a Changing Beef Cattle Industry
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9:00 - 9:15 Workshop Introductions & Overview

9:15 - 10:15 Opportunities for a Cow/Calf Operation in a Changing Industry; *Nevel Speer; VP, U.S. Operations, AgriClear, Bowling Green, Kentucky*

10:15 - 10:45 Break (provided by sponsors)

10:45 - 11:45 Current and Future Economic Outlook for the US Beef Industry; *David Anderson; Texas A&M Livestock and Food Products Marketing Economist, College Station, Texas*

11:45 - 1:00 Lunch (provided by sponsors)

1:00 - 2:00 Sustainable Rangeland Grazing for Western Rangelands; *Chad Boyd; Rangeland Ecologist, USDA Agricultural Research Service, EOARC Burns Station, Burns, Oregon*

2:00 - 3:00 Opportunities for More Efficient Cow/Calf Production; Padlock Ranch Perspective; *Cody Peck; Operations Analyst, Padlock Ranch Company, Rancheater, Wyoming*

3:00 - 3:15 Break (provided by sponsors)

3:15 - 4:15 Ranching in the Presence of Wolves; *Casey Anderson; Ranch Manager, OX Ranch, Bear, Idaho*

Note: For more information, please contact
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