

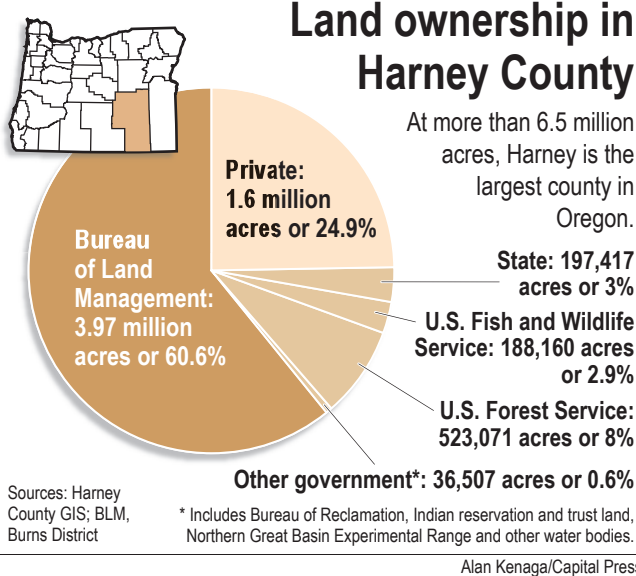
Brown calls for more engagement on land issues

Governor proposes \$3.8 million in Harney County drought assistance

By HILLARY BORRUD
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown said Tuesday the federal government should do more to engage with people about how to manage federal lands.

Her comments came before federal and state authorities arrested eight suspects and killed another who had been among mostly out-of-state protesters who had occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County since Jan. 2. They had demanded that federal lands be turned over



to state and county governments, and that two ranchers serving five-year prison sentences for burning Bureau of Land Management property be released.

While many local resi-

dents, farming and ranching groups and elected officials have criticized the occupiers' actions, they say the underlying anger over federal land management policies and their impact on local

communities throughout the West is real.

"I certainly believe that there needs to be a higher level of federal engagement around federal management of public land," Brown said. "I do think our first priority is to end this occupation swiftly and peacefully. I think it's extremely important that wrongdoers be held accountable to the full extent of the law."

The governor spoke during a press briefing, where she also announced her plan to seek \$3.8 million from the Legislature to pay for drought assistance targeted at Harney County.

It was not immediately clear why Brown was targeting Harney County when drought has affected much of the state for several years. In 2015, Brown issued drought declarations in 25 counties and the federal government

declared a drought in the remaining 11 Oregon counties.

"It is just near coincidence, the package was in development before this incident occurred," Brown said, referring to the occupation by armed activists of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Harney County. Brown said her funding plan would call for a "roughly \$3.8 million package, both emergency funding and staff to make sure that we are prepared for a drought this coming year and in the years to come."

Brown said roughly \$3 million would be "emergency funding" and the balance would pay for staff to assist a task force that would "prepare for drought resiliency."

Most of the money — \$3 million — would go to drought emergency assistance so the state could help municipal water systems, agricul-

tural water users and others, according to a document from the Oregon Water Resources Department. The agency noted that Washington set aside \$16 million for emergency assistance during the current biennium, while Oregon has not identified any such assistance.

The governor also wants to pay for a study of groundwater in Harney County, where state regulators mostly stopped issuing agricultural well permits in 2015 pending further study because they were worried about depleting the aquifer.

Finally, a small portion of the funding would pay for a staffer to assist with the creation of a Drought Emergency Response and Resiliency task force to study how the state "anticipates and responds to drought," according to the state Water Resources Department.

Tree fruit industry grapples with FSMA water testing

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — The level of testing required on orchard irrigation water is the main issue facing the tree fruit industry as it seeks to comply with the Food Safety Modernization Act.

Whether growers can test water at a single point in a canal or must test it at multiple diversion points is the question the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has no generic answer for, says Kate Woods, vice president of the Northwest Horticultural Association in Yakima.

"The FDA says it depends on individual circumstances depending on the potential for contamination between one point and another," Woods said.

FSMA's Produce Safety Rule requires growers to establish a microbial water quality profile by conducting 20 tests on each surface water source



Granny Smith apples float in water at the start of a Zirkle Fruit Co. packing line in Selah, Wash., on Dec. 8. Water in packing houses and in orchards is regulated by the new Food Safety Modernization Act.

Dan Wheat/Capital Press

over two to four years, Ines Hanrahan, postharvest physiologist with the Washington Tree Fruit Research Commission, told growers at an industry educational day in Wenatchee on Jan. 21.

Second, growers must annually conduct five tests near harvest on each water source to update the profile, she said.

"This will be the most dras-

tic change from current operations. Growers will need to look at the definition of each water source," she said.

Whether water flows through a closed conduit or open canal probably will have a bearing on what's allowed, Woods said.

The rule was made public Nov. 27. Growers and packing houses that own the majori-

ty of the fruit they pack have until Jan. 26, 2018, to comply, Woods said. Packers that don't own a majority of the fruit they pack fall under the Preventive Controls for Human Food rule, released Sept. 17, that requires different paperwork, she said. Compliance is required by Jan. 26, 2020.

The FDA is taking an education approach to enforcement

but that could change with a change in administration after the 2016 presidential election, Hanrahan said. Enforcement in Washington most likely will fall to the state Department of Agriculture, Woods said.

It's hard to gauge the impact of FSMA on the tree fruit industry, Woods said.

"It's impossible to put a number on (the cost). It will

vary depending on what programs growers and packing houses currently operate under and how much more they will have to do," she said.

Many growers and packing houses have been involved in Global Gap or other private food safety auditing programs through which they are already 80 to 90 percent in compliance with FSMA, Hanrahan said.

Oregon begins wolf plan review accompanied by legal wrangling

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon's wildlife officials begin a required review of the state's controversial wolf management plan with three months of stakeholder meetings starting in February, followed by a revision, draft and final adoption process expected to last into October.

The process might seem like overkill for managing a wolf population that might reach 100 to 120 animals this year, but it is likely to be heated and lengthy as environmental, hunting and ranching groups have their say.

The Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission voted in November 2015 to remove gray wolves from the state endangered species list. In a 4-2 vote, commissioners agreed with an ODFW staff report that said wolves have expanded in number and range to the point that they no longer need protection under the state Endangered Species Act.

A trio of environmental groups — the Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands and Oregon Wild — sought a judicial review a month later, claiming the commission hadn't used the

best available science on wolf recovery. Among other things, the groups believe ODFW should have gone through the management plan review before taking any action on de-listing.

Oregon's wolves remain covered under the federal ESA in the western two-thirds of the state. ODFW officials say the state wolf management plan remains in effect and will protect wolves from illegal hunting.

The political and legal fight over wolves took another turn recently when state Sen. Bill Hansell and state Rep. Greg Barreto, both Republicans, backed legislation that would ratify the commission's action and make a lawsuit moot, the Associated Press reported. Hansell and Barreto plan to introduce bills when the Legislature convenes in February. The bills also would prohibit re-listing wolves as threatened or endangered unless the population falls below a certain level, the AP reported.

Oregon's wolf population has grown from 14 in 2009 to a minimum of 85 in July 2015. Three have died since then, leaving the confirmed population at 82. State wildlife biologists believe there

are more; the population count represents only documented wolves. An updated population survey will be completed in March.

In other wolf news, ODFW designated a new Wallowa County pack, the Shamrock Pack, which denned up, produced an unknown number of pups in April 2015 and carved out territory in ODFW's Chesnimnus Unit north of Wallowa Lake.

The new pack previously was designated only a male-female pair. It operates in a wildlife unit adjacent to where the Sled Springs pair was found dead of unknown causes in late August. Oregon State Police investigated and said there was not sufficient probable cause to believe humans caused the deaths.

Another wolf, wearing a tracking collar and designated OR-22, was shot and killed in Grant County last fall. A hunter, Brennon D. Witty, notified ODFW and state police Oct. 6 that he'd shot the wolf while hunting coyotes on private property south of Prairie City.

Witty is charged with two Class A misdemeanors: Killing an endangered species and hunting with a centerfire rifle without a big game tag. Each

is punishable by up to a year in jail and a \$6,250 fine.

Witty is scheduled to enter a plea Feb. 3 in Grant County Justice Court, Canyon City.

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