

# Key committee approves Oregon wolf delisting

Environmental groups fear bill will hamstring lawsuit

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — The removal of wolves from Oregon's list of endangered species has been approved by a key legislative committee, potentially jeopardizing a lawsuit that challenges the delisting.

Last year, Oregon wildlife regulators found that wolves had sufficiently recovered to delist them under the state's version of the Endangered Species Act.

Because wolves remain protected by the federal Endangered Species Act across much of Western Oregon, the state delisting only has effect in the eastern portion of the state.

Several environmental

groups, which worry that delisting will eventually lead to wolf hunting, filed a legal complaint accusing the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission of ignoring the best available science.

That lawsuit prompted two lawmakers from Eastern Oregon to propose House Bill 4040, which would ratify the commission's delisting decision as having properly followed the state's endangered species law.

On Feb. 9, that bill passed the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources 8-1 and is now heading for a vote on the House floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

Chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, noted that H.B. 4040 was amended from its original version to eliminate language that would require wolf populations to decline substantially before the species could be re-listed as endangered.

Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Medford, said that worries the delisting will lead to "automatic slaughter" of wolves are unfounded.

"This does not mean we're going to hunt wolves to extinction again," he said.

Rep. Chris Gorsek, D-Troutdale, was the committee's only member to vote against the bill.

While he doesn't have a problem with the delisting, Gorsek said he was concerned about the precedent set by the Legislature inserting itself into the process.

Environmental groups that are fighting the delisting in court — Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands and the Center for Biological Diversity — fear that a ratification by the Legislature will hamstring their lawsuit.

Sean Stevens, executive director of Oregon Wild, recently argued that if the commission's decision was scientifically sound, there is no reason to pass H.B. 4040.

While the plaintiffs groups seek judicial review to determine if the commission acted correctly, they have not asked for an injunction and so the delisting will remain effective while the litigation is pending, he said.

Laurel Hines, a member of Oregon Wild, said that wolf management in Oregon has emphasized the protection of the livestock industry, so conservationists should be allowed to proceed with the lawsuit to protect their interests.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association disagrees with the claim that H.B. 4040 will preclude environmental groups from obtaining judicial review, said Rocky Dallum, the group's political advocate.

H.B. 4040 would not prevent the plaintiff from filing a lawsuit, and since their complaint has already been filed, its merits will still be decided in state court, Dallum said.



Dean J. Koepfler/The News Tribune via AP

This photo taken March 13, 2015, shows U.S. Forest Service land near Greenwater, Wash. A controversial fund in the federal budget allows federal agencies to purchase parcels of land.

## Federal land acquisitions get budget boost

Critics of controversial \$450 million fund oppose automatic appropriations

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Federal agencies got more money to spend on land acquisitions in the 2016 federal budget, which hasn't satisfied either supporters or opponents of a controversial fund used for such purchases.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund, initially authorized in 1965, was recently resurrected by Congress.

After initially allowing it to expire after 50 years, and then considering major reforms, Congress reauthorized the fund for three years.

Lawmakers appropriated \$450 million for the fund in 2016, which is a 47 percent increase over the prior year but only half of what the Obama administration and conservationists wanted.

Nearly \$227 million will be divided among federal agencies for land acquisitions, while the rest will go to state parks and conservation projects.

The fund's reversal of fortunes wasn't welcomed

by opponents such as the American Land Rights Association, which considers it a "slush fund" to buy private property for the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service — often at the behest of environmental groups.

"They never saw a piece of land they didn't want to own," said Chuck Cushman, the group's founder and executive director.

With LWCF receiving temporary re-authorization, the next three years will be spent in a battle over whether to make the program permanent and set a mandatory funding level of \$900 million per year, as environmentalists want, Cushman said.

In its 2017 budget request, the Obama administration has again requested \$900 million for the fund.

Cushman said the fund has been a "boondoggle" for private landowners since its inception.

Rather than create parks for people near urban areas, the fund has been focused on the expansion of federal territory in rural areas, often taking land out of production to the detriment of local economies, he said.

## Vilsack: USDA budget down, but still ample

Plan cuts \$9 billion from current USDA expenditures

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

President Obama has proposed \$130 billion in mandatory spending and almost \$25 billion in discretionary funding of the Department of Agriculture in his FY 2017 budget, a cut of \$9 billion from the current budget.

But during a conference call with reporters Tuesday, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the agency will do more with less.

Nonetheless, the budget expands funding for agricultural research and infrastructure, conservation and export opportunities and continues

investments in rural communities, food safety, and supplemental nutrition, he said.

It cuts funding for crop insurance by \$1.26 billion.

While the budget proposal might not result in fewer farmers with crop insurance, its going to cost them more. USDA has been criticized in reports by the Government Accountability Office for its management of crop insurance programs and has received requests to improve prevented planting coverage, he said.

Vilsack said USDA crop insurance should be a balanced partnership between taxpayers, farmers and insurance companies. Federal crop insurance costs the government an average of about



Tom Vilsack

\$9 billion a year, \$3 billion for private insurance companies to administer and underwrite the program and \$6 billion in premium subsidies to farmers and other expenses.

The proposed budget includes two proposals to reform the program, according to USDA's fact sheet on the budget.

The first would reduce subsidies for revenue insurance policies that insure the price at harvest. The second would reform prevented planting coverage, including removing optional buy-up coverage.

The reforms would still provide a strong safety net for farmers while saving an expected \$18 billion over 10 years, according to USDA.

Nutrition assistance, always the biggest piece of the

USDA budget pie, is expected to garner 71 percent of USDA's outlays in FY 2017. The budget will put more focus on elderly participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) and boost USDA's summer feeding program for children.

The budget puts emphasis on export opportunities and invests in establishing trade relationships with Cuba, which imports 80 percent of its food. The budget will provide for USDA in-country staff to cultivate relations Cuba and work through issues, Vilsack said.

At home, the budget will better support agricultural research, with \$700 million appropriated for competitive, peer-reviewed research targeted at such issues as climate change, pollinator health, anti-microbial resistant bacteria and bioenergy, he said.

## Idaho House, Senate panels split on wheat commission name rule

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — A proposed rule that would help the Idaho Wheat Commission better educate and inform growers has been accepted by the Idaho Senate but rejected by the House.

The rule's future is uncertain, and House and Senate lawmakers are trying to determine how to resolve their disparate decisions.

The pending rule would require purchasers of Idaho wheat to provide the commission with the names and addresses of wheat growers who deliver wheat to them each year. Only about half of the businesses that purchase wheat from Idaho farmers do that right now, said Idaho Wheat Commission Administrator Blaine Jacobson.

One of the commission's main statutory duties is to educate Idaho wheat growers, but "it is difficult to fulfill that part of our charge without knowing who the growers are," Jacobson told Capital Press in an email.

"If we are able to get this information down the road, we will be able to provide more information about markets and where premium prices are paid for certain classes or proteins of wheat," he said. "We can also get information on fast-moving diseases out quicker."

Estimates of the number of wheat farmers in Idaho vary widely, from 2,500 to well over 3,000.

"The commission is trying to figure out better ways to communicate with growers," said Rich Garber, governmental affairs director for the Idaho

Grain Producers Association.

The rule, which includes technical amendments to the state statute that governs the wheat commission, was approved by the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee, but the House Agricultural Affairs Committee rejected the part that would require wheat purchasers to report the names and addresses of wheat growers.

Several House ag committee members said they were uncomfortable with that requirement since the information would be subject to the state's public records law.

"It seems like there should be another way for the commission to get grower names," said Rep. Steven Miller, a Republican farmer from Fairfield. "I'm uncomfortable with this method of obtaining names."



## Oregon Aglink Take a new look at an old friend.



Lori Pavlicek, Oregon Aglink President

Lori is a 4th generation farm girl and co-owns 4 B Farms, Inc. with her parents, Jim and Donna Butsch, and brother Jeff. The farm grows garlic, hops, hazelnuts, grass seed, and a variety of row crops on 2600 acres around the Mt. Angel, Gervais, and Hubbard areas.

Lori is a member of NORPAC and the Nut Growers Society of Oregon, in addition to being a past Marion County FSA Board member. After an 18 year run on the Mt. Angel Oktoberfest board she continues her community work by being the President of the Mt. Angel Community Foundation Board and Secretary of the Providence Benedictine Nursing Center.

Lori and her farm became members of Oregon Aglink because "We believe the 'Link' between rural and urban consumers is the education and use of our natural resources. Oregon Aglink is the voice of the Natural Resource community, and we need to spread the word."

Become a member today!

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