

# Logging, grazing have decreased in past 25 years

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## 'It's a big deal'

Tucked in the corner of Washington state where its border intersects with those of Idaho and Canada, the Colville National Forest's 1.1 million acres cover nearly one-third of Stevens, Ferry and Pend Oreille counties. It's also the only part of the state with an established wolf population, another challenge for ranchers.

Logging and grazing have both decreased in the Colville over the past 25 years.

In the late 1980s, some 135 million board feet of timber was harvested annually. Today the number is about 44 million board feet, a 67 percent decrease. Under the plan, the Forest Service projects future timber harvests will be slightly higher, about 48 million board feet.

The first grazing allotment in the national forest was issued in 1911. By 1988, as many as 7,000 cow-calf pairs were permitted to graze from June to October in the Colville. The number has since declined by more than 21 percent to fewer than 5,500 pairs.

Yet the remaining grazing creates significant economic activity, generating 98 jobs and revenue of \$1.5 million, according to the Forest Service.

Hedrick acknowledged that federal grazing fees are low — this year it will be \$2.11 for a cow and calf to forage for one month — but operating costs such as labor, fuel and equipment in the national forest are substantial.

Ranchers say they depend on the national forest to maintain their livelihood. If it becomes impractical to graze cattle there, the cows won't have anywhere to go in the region because surrounding summer grazing lands are already taken, Hedrick said.

He figures his family's ranch would have to reduce its herd by 800 head — one-third of the total operation.

"Any other available land basically is tied up in agriculture, so it makes getting a lease fairly difficult," he said. "It's a significant amount of land. It's the heart-and-soul of the whole tri-county economy. It's a big deal."

## Revised plan

The Colville National Forest currently operates under a



Cows graze in Smackout Meadows in the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington. A cattlemen's association says a forest plan proposed by the Forest Service would effectively end grazing in the 1.1 million-acre forest.



In this photo from 1943, ranchers herd sheep in the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington. No sheep currently graze in the forest. If sheep return, they will have to stay away from bighorn sheep because of the threat of disease transmission.

plan adopted in 1988. Work on a new plan began more than a decade ago. The Forest Service held public meetings over the years on the plan's progress. Interest picked up in February when the plan, written under the direction of Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Pena, was released for public comment.

The comment period was extended last week to July 5.

The revised plan reflects the tension between the changing demands on federal land management in the West. Prior to 1988, forest managers thought grazing was of "little public interest," according to the old plan, in which they confessed to be-

ing surprised by any public complaints about grazing.

In the revised plan, forest managers say they have resisted calls from vocal special interests to ban grazing entirely.

The new plan, however, still blames grazing for damaging streambanks, disrupting riparian ecology and

muddying streams.

Meanwhile, according to the plan's introduction, forest managers are increasingly focused on "providing quiet, natural places for personal renewal while emphasizing planning and restoration of forest ecosystems." Such an added focus, according to the Forest Service, is vital to building public support for federal land management.

Some conservationists say the Forest Service, generally, has not acted fast enough to curb grazing, which they claim amounts to the public subsidizing environmental destruction.

"Livestock gets a very sweet deal off American public lands," said Randi Spivak, public lands director for the Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit group critical of grazing.

Cattle should be kept away from streams and grazing seasons should be short enough to give plants time to flourish, she said.

"It seems they (the Forest Service) are very accommodating to livestock, and we need better protection," Spivak said. "Livestock conflicts with a lot of other uses."

## Online

More information about the plan and how to comment is available on the Internet at [www.fs.usda.gov/colville](http://www.fs.usda.gov/colville).

## Rules are confusing

In written response to questions, Colville National Forest managers repeatedly made the point that the plan won't change grazing practices — directly. Changes could come, however, in allotment-by-allotment adjustments.

The changes could include "shortened grazing seasons and/or restricted livestock access to streams that have federally listed threatened or endangered fish spawning beds," according to the Forest Service.

The plan's mandates include:

- Grazing can't interfere with the life cycles of threatened, endangered and sensitive plant species.

- Salt blocks and watering tanks would be prohibited around rare plants.

- Grazing should be managed to maintain conditions that support snowshoe hares, a main food for Canada lynx.

- Cattle should be managed to discourage congregating on trails, destination areas and cultural sites.

- Livestock must be kept away from spawning fish.

- Stubble height of at least 6 to 8 inches should be maintained near waterways.

- Braided trails in some areas should be blocked.

- 69,000 acres of additional wilderness area would be designated, with no new grazing permitted in that area.

- Domestic sheep would not be allowed near bighorn sheep because of the potential for transmitting disease. No domestic sheep currently graze in the national forest.

The Stevens County Cattlemen's Association says the requirements, when taken together, will mean the end of grazing in the Colville National Forest.

"We do not need a plan that creates unobtainable standards like having 6 to 8 inches of stubble height in a riparian area," Hedrick said. "We need a plan that has guidelines that reflect the consistent effort ranchers make to keep their allotments in good condition."

# 'You can win the legal battle but you're going to lose the war'

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While the Grocery Manufacturers Association, which represents the industry, has successfully defeated several ballot initiatives and still hopes to prevail in court, individual companies may be less willing to put up a fight, he said.

"You can win the legal battle but you're going to lose the war because consumers have made up their

mind," said Gillpatrick. "You can be right, but you can be dead right, too. It's much easier to have the wind at your back."

Major farm groups have opposed mandatory labeling, fearing that it will further stigmatize GMOs among consumers.

Labels send the message that something is wrong with GMOs and may cause people to avoid certain products, said Barry Bushue, president

of the Oregon Farm Bureau and former vice president of the American Farm Bureau Federation.

"This effectively pits one form of agriculture against another," Bushue said.

Labeling also involves more than changes to packaging, as farmers and other suppliers will have to certify that they're providing manufacturers with non-GMO ingredients, said Ian Tolleson, director of government af-

fairs for the Northwest Food Processors Association.

"It's going to have to be substantiated throughout the supply chain," Tolleson said.

Bushue and Tolleson said the decision by General Mills pointed to the need for a national voluntary standard for GMO labeling, which would provide consistency across the food industry.

A bill creating such a system while pre-empting state

laws recently failed to move forward in the U.S. Senate.

The prospect of separately labeling foods headed for Vermont may have contributed to the decision by General Mills, since it's expensive to stop and restart production for a single state, said Michael Sansolo, a food industry consultant and former senior vice president of the Food Marketing Institute.

Trying to predict how many packages to earmark for

a specific state is also tough for manufacturers, Sansolo said.

Competing food companies, including smaller processors, will have no choice but to examine how the positions adopted by General Mills and Campbell's affect their own markets, he said.

"We're talking about two very significant companies, both of whom like to present themselves as having healthful products," he said.

# Extreme seasonal fluctuations cause the frog's eggs to dry up

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"We can't flip it to Lewis and Clark days overnight," said Beth Ginsberg, attorney for the irrigation districts.

Environmentalists risk harming the spotted frogs they want to protect by demanding major operational changes at three Central Oregon water reservoirs, according to the federal government.

Frogs actually benefit from a wetter habitat in some areas in late spring and summer, said Mike Eitel, attorney for the government.

"What the plaintiffs proposal does is takes those good conditions and ratchets them back," said Eitel. "The current conditions are enhancing the quality of the downstream sites."

The plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against the federal agency and three irrigation districts — Central Oregon, North Unit and Tumalo — earlier this year for allegedly violating the Endan-

## At a glance

### Oregon spotted frog

**Binomial name:** *Rana pretiosa*

**Appearance:** Medium-size frog ranging from 1.75 to 4 inches long. Body color varies with age. Adults appear brown to reddish brown with black spots with ragged edges.

**Range:** British Columbia, Washington, Oregon and California

**Habitat:** Found in or near perennial bodies of water that include zones of shallow water and vegetation.

**Status:** Threatened

**Reasons for decline:** Habitat loss, competition from non-native species, predation

Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Courtesy of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Alan Kenagal/Capital Press

gered Species Act.

Their complaint alleges that reservoir operations have reversed the natural hydrology in associated rivers and creeks, which experience low flows during winter while water is stored and higher flows during the summer irrigation season.

Extreme seasonal fluctuations cause the frog's eggs to

dry up during low flows and exposes them to predators during high flows, the plaintiffs claim.

Water levels differ from year to year, creating unpredictability for female frogs that would otherwise return to the same breeding sites, according to the environmentalists.

Insufficient water flows in

winter also reduce habitat for the frogs, forcing them to congregate in marginal areas where they're vulnerable to predation, the plaintiffs argue.

"If they continue dropping to these low water flows, these frogs are going to keep dying," said Lauren Rule, attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity.

Under the preliminary injunction proposed by plaintiffs, the Bureau of Reclamation and irrigation districts would operate the reservoirs under a "regulated option" — with higher winter flows and lower summer flows set a fixed levels — or a "run-of-the-river option," under which dam controls would be left open to mimic natural fluctuations.

The Bureau of Reclamation asked the judge to reject the preliminary injunction request because there's no evidence the frog's population will suddenly deteriorate without these measures.

"It's not going to have the ef-

fect the plaintiffs think it's going to have," said Eitel. "You could have very drastic consequences for this frog population."

Such "aggressive and immediate" actions aren't justified by science and wouldn't work in the best interest of the species, which is more likely to respond positively to gradual changes, the federal agency said.

The "regulated option" and the "run-of-the-river" option are inconsistent with each other, since unmanaged flows of the river could result in lower water levels than environmentalists claim are necessary under the "regulated option," according to the Bureau of Reclamation.

Reducing flows in summer would eliminate some frog habitat while greater winter volumes could overwhelm the species with cold water to which it's now unaccustomed, the agency said.

The plaintiffs have also failed to give the irrigation dis-

tricts credit for conservation measures aimed at improving the frog's chances of survival, the Bureau of Reclamation said.

These steps are being implemented while federal agencies consult on the impact of dam operations on Oregon spotted frogs and develop a broader "habitat conservation plan" that preserves several protected species in the region, as required by the ESA, the agency said.

Rule, the environmentalists' attorney, said the habitat conservation plan has already taken eight years so far and frogs cannot wait "eons" for it to be completed.

Ginsberg, attorney for the irrigation districts, said the habitat conservation plan will be based on the best science and input from multiple groups and agencies, including Waterwatch of Oregon.

"They've become impatient with it, but the solution is not to throw the baby out with the bath water," she said.