



SURVIVAL MODE

Dan Wheat/Capital Press

An aspen grove is seen in a draw of Pine Creek, northwest of Riverside, Wash. It was burned by back-burning during last August's wildfire.

Okanogan, Wash., ranchers hang on after massive fires

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

RIVERSIDE, Wash. — Fourth-generation Pine Creek rancher Gerald Scholz figured he was out of business.

Firefighters last August set back-burns to stop wildfires that burned about 600,000 acres of Okanogan County, a sprawling part of North-Central Washington that borders Canada.

But wind blew the backburns out of control. One destroyed most of Scholz's grazing ground for his cattle, 95 percent of his timber, 39 cows, 1,425 tons of hay, two hay sheds, a swather and other equipment.

"I'm burned out," Scholz, 52, said last August. He had no place for his cows to graze, and he was forced to buy hay or find other grazing land for the cattle that remained.

State Department of Natural Resources officials have said they saved many ranches, but Scholz says he begged them not to backburn the Pine Creek area.



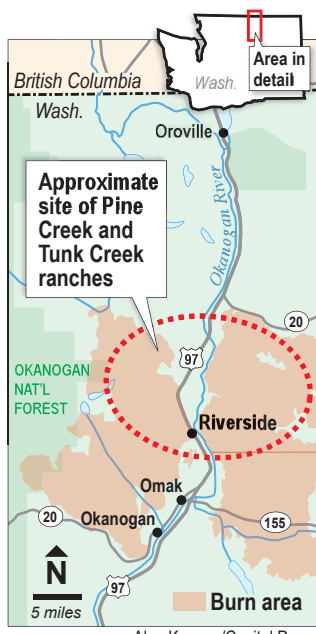
Scholz



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Jim Utt cuts a bale of straw to supplement alfalfa for his cattle on his ranch north of Riverside, Wash. His 92-year-old father, Melvin, watches and usually handles these chores alone. Like many ranchers in Okanogan County, they will feed hay two months longer this spring and maybe through the summer because of pastures burned in 2015 wildfires.

Turn to SURVIVAL, Page 12



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

EPA funds campaign discrediting Wash. farmers

Seattle PR firm hired to promote stronger regulations

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A federally funded website that urges Washington state lawmakers to adopt new regulations on agriculture has drawn the ire of farm groups and the attention of two congressmen.

The website, whatsupstream.com, was set up with a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, which relayed the money to the Swinomish Indian Tribe in northwest Washington.

EPA officials have been regular-

ly updated over the past four years as a Seattle public relations firm hired by the tribe has orchestrated a media campaign to link farmers with water pollution and "build public support for a regulatory

Turn to EPA, Page 12



An advertising sign on a Whatcom County bus promotes a federal website that takes farmers to task for allegedly polluting water.

Courtesy of Save Family Farming

Environmentalists oppose official spotted frog ruling

Written opinion could later serve as legal precedent

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — Environmentalists don't want a federal judge to issue an official written ruling denying their motion to radically change water management in several Central Oregon reservoirs.

During a recent court hearing, U.S. District Judge Ann Aiken told environmental groups they failed to convince

her that a preliminary injunction was necessary to protect the threatened Oregon spotted frog.

The plaintiffs — WaterWatch of Oregon and the Center for Biological Diversity — claimed that water flows from the Wickiup, Crane Prairie and Crescent Lake dams must be significantly modified to avoid harming the protected species.

However, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and irrigation districts argued the operational changes sought by environmentalists would be disruptive to the frogs, which have adapted to stream flows since the structures were built 70 years ago.

The federal agency and three irrigation districts — Central Oregon, North Unit and Tumalo — are named as defendants in litigation that alleges the reservoirs are managed in violation of the Endangered Species Act.

Rather than appeal the denial of their injunction request, the environmentalists have requested that Aiken postpone filing an official written version of the ruling.

The plaintiffs say that an "appealable final, formal opinion is not required to move the matter forward," claiming it would instead be "more productive and efficient" to send the case into mediation.

Turn to FROG, Page 12

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