

Oregon

Flurry of water complaints under investigation

Farmer files 26 allegations of rule violations in Polk County

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Farm regulators are investigating a flurry of complaints about water quality problems from agricultural activities in Oregon's Polk County.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture received 26 complaints about alleged violations of water regulations in the county over the winter, which is a high volume over a relatively short time period in one area, said John Byers, manager of the agency's agricultural water quality program.

"That's certainly not the norm," he said.

The situation is also unusual because all of the complaints were filed by a farmer who serves as a director of the Polk Soil & Water Conservation District, which aims to mitigate water quality problems, Byers said during a recent meeting of the Oregon Board of Agriculture.

"As a private citizen, he has the ability to do that," Byers said.

However, the concern is that Polk County residents may think the complaints were brought on behalf of the district, which could dissuade them from inquiring about water quality questions due to a fear of enforcement, he said.

Creating that perception wasn't the intent of the farmer, who was concerned about prospective violations in his area, Byers said.

"I don't think it was malicious," he said.

The goal of ODA's agricul-

tural water quality program is to ensure compliance with the rules, rather than take enforcement actions such as issuing penalties, Byers said.

Landowners who have water quality violations are assisted by the local soil and water conservation district, so the recent complaints in Polk County raised questions about straining that district's capacity, he said.

"It becomes a bigger burden on them," Byers said.

Even so, the complaints have invigorated discussions about water quality in the region, which may ultimately help further the program's goals, he said.

Investigations of the complaints are ongoing, though some have been closed without finding any violations, he said.

The vast majority of the complaints pertain to erosion from a lack of vegetation or crops being planted up and down a slope, though several relate to livestock and manure piles.

Kelly Gordon, a farmer from Monmouth and director of the Polk S&WCD, said he was prompted to file the complaints due to worries about the effect of heavy rains, which likely caught farmers off guard.

Gordon said he did not file the complaints as a representative of the district and doesn't believe water quality problems have gotten worse in the county.

The district's manager and another director suggested that Gordon first approach the Polk S&WCD before filing a complaint with ODA, which he plans to do in the future, he said.

"I don't think it's a pervasive thing. It just pops up now and again," Gordon said.

Senators to subpoena EPA chief in Colorado mine spill

By MATTHEW DALY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republicans vowed April 13 to issue a subpoena to force the head of the Environmental Protection Agency to appear at a field hearing in Phoenix next week on a toxic mine spill that fouled rivers in three Western states and on lands belonging to two Native American tribes.

Wyoming Sen. John Barrasso said the Senate Indian Affairs Committee would vote on a plan to subpoena EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy.

Barrasso chairs the Indian Affairs panel, which is conducting an April 22 hearing on the 3 million-gallon spill at Colorado's abandoned Gold King Mine.

The Aug. 5 spill contaminated rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah, as well as in the Navajo Nation and Southern Ute Reservation.

If approved, the subpoena would be the first issued by the Indian Affairs panel since 2004, during the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal. Abramoff was a prominent Republican lobbyist who pleaded guilty to charges including conspiracy, fraud and tax evasion in the purchase of gambling cruise boats. He spent 3 1/2 years in prison.

A federal investigation blamed the EPA for the Colorado spill, saying an agency cleanup crew rushed its work, failed to consider the complex engineering involved and ended up triggering the very blowout it hoped to avoid.

Oregon research projects awarded grants

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon research projects were awarded nine of 37 grants announced April 7 by the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program.

Nearly \$2.9 million in grants were awarded for projects in 11 Western states and territories, with Oregon pro-

posals awarded \$754,721.

The Oregon projects include:

- Extending the winter squash season, Oregon State University, \$49,958.
- Evaluating hazelnut orchard cover crops, OSU, \$49,997.
- Restoring rangeland soil health, Crooked River Weed Management, \$44,450.
- The impact of wheat

chaff collection on weed control, OSU, \$250,000.

• Soil solarization for weed control, OSU, \$247,329.

• Building Integrated Pest Management networks, OSU, \$67,802.

• Sustainable grazing in wetland pastures, Coos County Soil and Water Conservation District, \$15,237.

• On-farm production costs, farmer Sarah Brown, \$9,400.

• Improving water-saving techniques in vineyards and orchards, A to Z Wine Works, \$20,548.

Western SARE is funded by USDA and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, and is hosted by Utah State University.

Online <http://www.westernsare.org/Projects/Funded-Projects-by-Year/2016-Projects>

Researchers develop an app to protect bees

By DIANE DIETZ
Eugene Register-Guard

Researchers want to help farmers "bee responsible" by providing a smartphone app with everything farmers need to know about protecting bees while in the field.

The app provides toxicity ratings for 150 farm chemicals from Abamectin to Ziram, how-tos on avoiding poisoning and symptoms of bee poisoning.

"We looked at the crops grown in the Northwest," said Oregon State University toxicologist Louisa Hooven, "and then at all the products that are likely to be used when the crop is flowering — which is when the bees will be foraging. Those were the pesticides we included."

It's critical information because Oregon beekeepers manage about 70,000 commercial honeybee hives, entomologist Ramesh Sagili said in a prepared statement.

The bees pollinate about 50 Oregon crops, including blueberries, cherries, pears,



Associated Press file

In this Jan. 28, 2014, file photo, a hive of honeybees is on display. Researchers have developed a smart phone app to help farmers when honeybees are foraging.

apples, clover, meadowfoam and vegetable seed worth a half billion dollars annually, he said.

The app warns farmers about the circumstances when most bee poisonings happen, including:

- Insecticides are applied when bees are foraging.
- Insecticides are applied to bee-pollinated crops during

bloom.

• Insecticides are applied to blooming weeds in orchards or field margins.

• Insecticides drift onto blooming plants adjacent to the target crop.

• Bees collect insecticide-contaminated pollen (such as corn), nectar (such as cotton or mint), or other materials from treated crops that

do not require bee pollination.

• Bees collect insecticide-contaminated nectar from plants treated with systemic pesticides.

• Bees collect insecticide-contaminated nesting materials, such as leaf pieces collected by alfalfa leafcutting bees.

• Bees collect insecticide-contaminated water (from drip tape or chemigation, for example).

• Beekeepers and growers do not adequately communicate.

The app is meant to help farmers protect honeybees, but also native ground-dwelling species such as squash bees, long-horned bees, sweat bees, mining bees andbumblebees.

"How to Reduce Bee Poisoning" was produced jointly by OSU, the University of Idaho and Washington State University. Its cost was underwritten by beekeeper associations in Oregon, Idaho, Washington and California, and by the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

Oregon standoff defendant Jake Ryan detained until trial

By STEVEN DUBOIS
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — Refuge occupier Jake Ryan will remain in a Portland jail pending trial despite assurances from a Montana sheriff that he would keep an eye on him if returned to that state.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Paul Papak said April 7 he might have granted pre-trial release had Ryan surrendered last month after learning that a grand jury had returned an indictment against him. Instead, Ryan became a fugitive until his arrest April 5 in Clark County, Washington.

"The fact that you went into hiding — into hiding armed — causes me great concern," Papak said.

Ryan, 27, of Plains, Montana, was one of more than two dozen people charged because of their involvement in the 41-day takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. The men and women were protesting U.S. land restrictions and the imprisonment of two ranchers who started fires.

Ryan traveled to Oregon in January with four firearms and served as a guard.

His attorney, Jesse Mer-

rithew, asked the judge to let Ryan return to Montana pending trial. He stressed that Ryan has no criminal record, and Sheriff Tom Rummel of Sanders County fully supported having Ryan return to Plains, something he wouldn't want if Ryan were a problem.

Merrithew said the sheriff told him that if Ryan ran, "he would track him down himself."

Assistant U.S. Attorney Craig Gabriel countered that Rummel is a friend of Ryan's family, failed to find him during the month he went into hiding and is not entirely cooperative

with federal law enforcement. "If he's released, law enforcement is unlikely to find him again," Gabriel said.

Ryan was arrested after a landowner called to report a trespasser in rural Clark County, Wash. An officer found the young man sleeping in a shed, a loaded gun nearby.

Merrithew said Ryan ran because of fear, because others were giving him bad advice and because he wasn't getting clear information about what he was facing. "He is motivated to fight this case and does not want to run," Merrithew said.

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