

Idaho Water Resource Board funds aquifer model

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Water Resource Board has budgeted \$500,000 toward the first year of a five-year effort to study Treasure Valley aquifers and develop an improved model to predict their function.

The project was included in \$14.4 million the board allocated May 20 for its Secondary Aquifer Fund.

The Idaho Legislature significantly increased its contribution to the fund for Fiscal Year 2017, which begins July 1, from \$5.5 million during the current fiscal year to \$12.5 million.

The remainder of the funding will come from carryover dollars and revenue generated by board assets, including Dworshak Dam and Pristine Springs Fish Hatchery.

Al Barker, a Water Re-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Crops are irrigated in Idaho's Treasure Valley. The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved \$500,000 to begin to model Treasure Valley aquifers to better understand the interaction between groundwater and surface water.

source Board member who serves as the attorney for the Boise Project Board of Control, explained there are several layers of aquifers

within Treasure Valley, some of which are interconnected while others are isolated. While some have an adequate supply, others are in decline.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

A greater sage grouse is shown in this file photo. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals has said sponsors of an Oregon wind energy project must study how the bird will be affected in the winter.

Ruling hinders Oregon wind energy project

Ranchers in Harney County hoped for economic boost

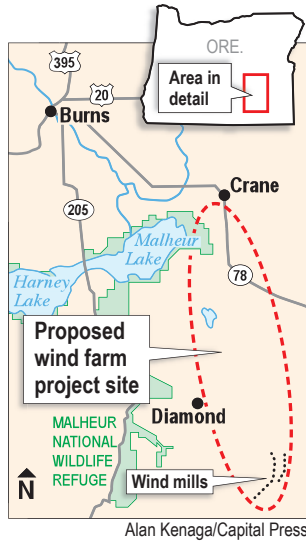
By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A federal appeals court has dealt a serious blow to an already-struggling wind energy project in Oregon's Harney County that would give local ranchers an economic boost.

Though the 100-megawatt wind energy project would have been built on private ranchland, the 12-mile transmission line necessary to connect turbines with the power grid would have to cross public property.

That triggered an environmental analysis that has now been deemed unlawful by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, largely due to a winter-time sighting of sage grouse in the area.

Approval for the project was originally granted by U.S. Bureau of Land Management in 2011, but the litigation by environmental groups and the dropping price of renewable energy have delayed installation of the wind



Alan Kenagal/Capital Press

turbines indefinitely.

Due to the uncertainty caused by the lawsuit, filed by the Oregon Natural Desert Association and the Audubon Society of Portland, a power-buying agreement secured by project developer Columbia Energy Partners was canceled.

The proposal now has another impediment to overcome due to the 9th Circuit ruling, which found that BLM failed to properly examine the impact on sage grouse, a former candidate for Endangered Species Act protection.

Proponents of the wind

project initially prevailed in court when U.S. District Judge Michael Mosman ruled in 2013 that BLM had complied with the National Environmental Policy Act in assessing its environmental effects.

The 9th Circuit has reversed that decision, holding that BLM wrongly concluded the wind turbine site wouldn't be occupied by the sage grouse over winter.

Contrary to BLM's extrapolation, the "wind-swept character" of the site that "makes it ideal for wind-energy generation" also indicated it can be used by the bird because "snow there may be blown off sagebrush and exposed for grouse to eat," the ruling said.

A sighting of sage grouse near the site in February undermines the agency's assumption that the area was too snowy to provide habitat for the bird, the appellate court found.

"And with the impacts on sage grouse not properly established, the BLM did not know what impacts to mitigate, or whether the mitigation proposed would be adequate to offset damage to wintering sage grouse," the opinion said.

"I've always been an advocate for looking beyond the Eastern Snake Plain," Barker said. "There are many aquifers in the state that are in need of study."

Sean Vincent, hydrology section manager at the Idaho Department of Water Resources, plans to team with the U.S. Geological Survey and University of Idaho experts in developing the model. Vincent said the USGS was instrumental in helping to develop previous models, including one for the Spokane Valley-Rathdrum Prairie Aquifer. Vincent said the board will also create a technical advisory team to provide user input on the project.

Though groundwater models have provided the science to base water calls on the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer, Vincent doesn't anticipate

the a Treasure Valley model would be used for conjunctive management in the future.

Rather, he explained it should aid in efforts to bolster groundwater levels through recharge, and in making better management decisions for users throughout the system.

Vincent said a Senate concurrent resolution directed the board to address statewide aquifer and sustainability studies and develop a Treasure Valley groundwater model with "all necessary measurement networks."

As a starting point, Vincent explained the model will use the existing Treasure Valley Hydrologic Project Model, which is static based on an average year. The Bureau of Reclamation "tweaked" the model in 2013 to consider economic data and monthly variability, Vincent said. He

said the new model will be transient — factoring seasonal and yearly changes — highly calibrated, and will use satellite data to calculate water losses through evapotranspiration.

In the first year of the project, Vincent said the team will focus on filling in data gaps, such as installing at least a dozen gages to measure water leaving a shallow aquifer from drains that pour into the Snake River and Boise River.

Wesley Hipke, IDWR recharge coordinator, said the board approved an additional \$200,000 to study Treasure Valley recharge opportunities and \$200,000 to improve modeling in the Wood River Valley, among other line items. He said the majority of the funding — about \$10.4 million — was earmarked for the ESPA.

Idaho dry bean industry debating field standard for nightshade

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

WILDER, Idaho — Idaho's dry bean industry appears split on whether to adopt a maximum field standard for hairy nightshade, a troublesome weed that costs the state's industry about \$8 million a year.

Idaho dry bean seed tested in the laboratory for certification can have no trace of the weed. But some people believe a field standard for nightshade limiting the number of plants in a given area is necessary to ensure the state's bean seed industry remains competitive.

Wyoming's bean industry recently adopted a field standard for nightshade and California and Washington are following suit, said Idaho Bean Commission board member Don Tolmie, production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co.

About 70 percent of the dry beans grown in Idaho are seed beans, and the state is the national leader in that category. Other states that are adopting nightshade field standards will use them to claim their seed certification process is better, Tolmie said.

"These other states around us are ... looking at our blue tag (certification) system and looking to replicate it or improve it," he said. "Idaho needs to adopt a nightshade field standard ... because other states that are after our business are (doing that)."

The nightshade field standard debate is still in the talking stages and the state's bean advisory committee would have to recommend



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Dry beans are sorted at the Treasure Valley Seed Co. facility in Homedale, Idaho, last September. Idaho's dry bean industry is mulling whether to adopt a field standard for the troublesome nightshade weed. Supporters of the idea say it's necessary to ensure the state's dry bean seed certification process remains competitive.

that rule change during its fall meeting, said Doug Boze, executive vice president of Idaho Crop Improvement Association, which supervises Idaho's crop certification program.

Any proposed change would then have to be approved by the Idaho Legislature.

Parma grower Mike Goodson, an IBC board member, said it's likely the state will need to move toward a nightshade field standard to keep pace with other states that are doing that.

"To what extreme, I don't know right now," he said. "But I think we have to start progressing toward something if we're going to (remain) competitive."

Twin Falls grower Bill Bitzenburg, also a member of the IBC board, said the idea is good in theory but he worries about the extra costs it could add to dry bean production since nightshade pressure is so severe in some places that many farmers would struggle

to meet any field standard. "I know I couldn't meet (any standard)," he said. "It's a great idea in theory. It's just the practical applications, the consequences of doing it that I'm concerned about."

There's already zero tolerance for nightshade in laboratory tests, "so what are we gaining other than being able to advertise that we've raised our standards?" Bitzenburg added. "I think we need more input from growers because it will affect them the most."

IBC board member Gina Lohnes, who works for Trinidad Benham Corp., said the state's entire dry bean industry is already working hard to try to eliminate the weed in fields.

"I'm not sure if naming a certain maximum tolerance level would be any better than what we're doing right now," she said. "I think finding ways to help growers control it is a better place for us to put our time and effort."

Apple commission sets its annual budget

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — The Washington Apple Commission adopted a \$10.4 million budget for the fiscal year beginning July 1 at its May 19 meeting.

The budget is up \$270,000 from the estimated final spending for 2015-2016. Reserves are still at \$3 million.

The new spending plan includes \$5.6 million in federal and state grants with \$5.1 million of that being federal Market Access Program money — known by the acronym MAP — for export promotions.

The other major portion of revenue is \$4.7 million in anticipated grower assessments of 3.5 cents per box of fresh packed apples based on an estimated 135-million-box crop this fall.

At the commission's Foreign Trade Committee meeting in Ellensburg on April 21, estimates of the 2016 crop size ranged from 116 million to 153 million 40-pound boxes, with most at 132 million to 135 million, said Cass Gebbers, committee chairman and

president of Gebbers Farms in Brewster, Wash.

A year ago the commission estimated the 2015 crop at 125 million boxes. It's now estimated at 115.8 million boxes and will change more depending on packouts before the season closes.

The new budget allocates \$5.1 million in MAP money and \$2.6 million of grower assessment funds for a total of \$7.7 million for export promotions.

Of that, Mexico heads the list at \$1.2 million, India is at \$1.1 million, China and Hong Kong are at \$858,000, Vietnam is at \$580,000, Indonesia is at \$550,000 and Central America is at \$540,000.

Others in descending order are: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, Middle East, Colombia, Peru, Western Europe, the United Kingdom, Canada and Russia.

At the Foreign Trade Committee meeting, Gebbers raised the possibility of companies opening a World Trade Organization case over anti-dumping tariffs placed on some Washington apple companies by Mexico.

Apple commission leader promotes use of logo

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Washington Apple Commission President Todd Fryhover is urging tree fruit marketers to make greater use of the generic Washington apple logo to increase exports.

He touted co-branding and selective branding of the logo at a May 19 commission meeting in Wenatchee, noting that per capita consumption of Washington apples has been increasing.

Co-branding is use of the generic Washington apple logo — an apple with the name "Washington" over it — along with an individual fruit company logo on the same PLU — the acronym for price look-up — sticker on an individual piece of fruit.

Selective branding is use of the generic Washington logo instead of company logos on fruit for specific markets.

The commission has invested \$650 million over the past 75 years in promotional activities supporting the logo, including domestic promotions before 2003.

The commission has con-



Courtesy of Northern Fruit Co.

Northern Fruit Co., East Wenatchee, Wash., will be using new co-branded stickers on apples this season that show the company's Nordic bear and the Washington apple logo. Previously, Northern just used the Washington logo.

ducted only export promotions since losing its legal status for domestic promotions in 2003. The generic logo is highly regarded in foreign markets.

"It's the not the importer and wholesaler we are concerned about recognizing our fruit. They see it on the boxes. It's not as obvious at the consumer level because fruit is sold mixed in bins and signage is difficult," Fryhover said. "The generic Washington sticker helps identity and builds consumer continuity."

Exports need to increase, he said, because world apple production is rising while trade barriers and other issues are slowing world fresh apple exports.

Markets will become saturated and Washington apple companies, a small part of the international market, are stronger together under a single brand than separately, Fryhover said.

World production is projected to increase from the current 80 million to 100 million metric tons by 2025, he said.

Meanwhile, world fresh apple exports have been about 8.5 million metric tons since 2010 because of economic slowdowns in many markets.

Protectionism in China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and the European Union and a ban on Western produce by Russia have slowed exports, he said.

Russia was the world's largest importer of fresh apples but its ban, imposed Aug. 7, 2014, in retaliation for its aggression in Ukraine, has left European suppliers scrambling for other markets while their production in-

creases, Fryhover said.

Russia receives some gray-market apples but overall its ban has caused a global market disappearance for about 30 million apples, he said.

Washington apple exports to India have fallen a dramatic 62 percent because of a strong dollar, Indian port closures now resolved and a 50 percent tariff, Fryhover said.

"I wouldn't be surprised if our 2014 volume into India (5.6 million boxes) may be our all-time high," he said.

Washington has exported 1.9 million boxes of apples to India this season as of May 15, he said, noting that to finish at 2.5 million boxes would be good.

"India is important because it's a Red Delicious-only market and we will need to export Reds and Gala in greater numbers in the future," he said.

The commission will continue to fund export promotions in India at \$1.1 million. It takes a lot because it's a large country geographically.

Washington's apple exports will finish this season at about 26 to 28 percent of the crop, down from a norm of 30 percent mainly because of a strong dollar, he said.