

Study says cougars, wolves save human lives

Rancher, losing calves, can't see the upside

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A new study by university scientists seeks to foster rural acceptance of large carnivores by showing that cougars save lives by reducing the number of deadly collisions between vehicles and deer.

Researchers affiliated with colleges in Washington, Idaho, Alaska and Alberta, Canada, compared data from 19 states in the East, South and Midwest. The scientists concluded that recolonizing cougars in those states would thin deer populations and prevent five traffic fatalities and more than 700 injuries a year.

The paper's lead author, University of Idaho professor Sophie Gilbert, said the



Courtesy of Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife/Brian Kertson
A new study by university researchers found that cougars prevent traffic fatalities by reducing deer populations.

findings would apply to other areas and that she wanted to show there are benefits to reintroducing large carnivores.

"It's not all costs," she said. "I think that hitting a deer is something most people have

either experienced or they know someone who has hit a deer. It can be anywhere from traumatic to deadly.

"This might be something new for people to consider and make them feel better about

living near large carnivores."

The study acknowledges that reintroducing predators, such as cougars and wolves, is a "highly polarizing" issue and that ranchers, hunters and rural residents "bear the brunt of the costs."

Conservation efforts, however, depend on large carnivores thriving outside protected wildernesses, according to the study.

"Societal acceptance of large carnivores living in proximity to humans is therefore a critical yet daunting conservation goal," the study states.

"Public perceptions of carnivores may become more positive knowing that these predators reduce their odds of crashing into an ungulate."

Central Washington rancher Keith Kreps said he hasn't seen benefits from what he says is an increasing number

of cougars around his cattle in Klickitat County.

He said he lost about 18 calves to the big cats last summer and two more were injured. He said he fears a human will be attacked.

"They're trying to convince John Q. Public that the cats are beneficial. I don't feel they're beneficial to our area. They're detrimental," he said.

"Don't get me wrong. I've never wanted to see all the cougars gone, but they're too thick," Kreps said. "The deer are gone, and they've started in on my cattle."

According to the study, efforts to control deer by other means, including hunting, have had limited success. "Recolonization by large carnivores could provide an efficient solution to the problem of deer overabundance," the study states.

Mark Pidgeon, president of

the Hunters Heritage Council in Washington, said hunters could thin deer herds if given a chance.

"The obvious solution here is to have more hunter harvests," he said. "One of the reasons the number of hunters is going down is because people don't feel they have the opportunity."

Pidgeon warned that using a species to suppress another could have unintended environmental consequences.

"An ecosystem needs to be managed as a whole," he said. "The eradication of predators would not be good either."

Another researcher, Laura Prugh of the University of Washington's School of Environmental and Forest Services, told a university publication that the authors hoped to "help people become more accepting of living" with large carnivores.

Rapidly changing industry complicates hazelnut forecast

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

ALBANY, Ore. — Crews hired by USDA are being extra careful this year as they collect data from hazelnut orchards across Oregon for the annual crop forecast.

Last year, the agency's National Agricultural Statistics Service overestimated Oregon's hazelnut production by more than 25 percent, catching farmers and packers off guard when the harvest came up short.

While NASS hasn't pinpointed exactly what went wrong in 2015, the rapidly changing landscape of Oregon's hazelnut industry combined with an early maturing crop likely contributed to the skewed results, said Dave Losh, the agency's state statistician.

"It was an abnormal year for a lot of reasons," Losh said, noting that the early spring caused nuts to develop more quickly last year.

Farmers are planting new acreage of cultivars resistant to eastern filbert blight while older orchards are gradually succumbing to the fungal disease, he said.

The new orchards are being planted in various densities while older trees have been heavily pruned to slow the disease's progression, further complicating the scenario, he said.

Until the mid-2000s, the main change that NASS had to track was the hazelnut industry's declining acreage, said Gene Pierce, an agricultural statistician with the agency.

With new growers and trees now coming online, it's more challenging for NASS to determine the size of the "universe" it uses for statistical analysis, Pierce said.

For now, however, NASS is focused on ensuring its crews are accurately following the

model for collecting data, rather than trying to change the model itself, said Chris Mertz, the agency's regional director for the Northwest.

"Before we make any huge tweaks, we want to make sure we're covering all of our bases," he said.

The annual forecast is conducted by NASS but the Oregon Hazelnut Marketing Board covers the \$93,000 cost.

Although NASS forecast that Oregon would produce 39,000 tons of hazelnuts last year — 8,000 tons more than were actually harvested — many farmers considered the estimate conservative at the time, said Larry George, president of the George Packing Co.

A survey of farmers conducted by George Packing last year pegged their average forecast at 41,000 tons. One estimate of 35,000 tons was considered a far outlier, he said.

"The trees looked loaded last year. It looked like a good crop," George said.

Trees may have appeared to be brimming with hazelnuts, but many had shrunk as eastern filbert blight killed their upper branches, he said.

The impact of blight is difficult to account for, since the roughly hazelnut 700 farmers in Oregon have 700 unique methods of fighting the disease, George said.

"How do you poll something that has no consistency?" he said.

Growers are reluctant to remove blight-infested orchards due to high prices in recent years, but the old orchards are nonetheless quickly losing productivity, said Mike McDaniel, proprietor of Pacific Agricultural Survey, a geographical data firm that's assisting NASS.

"The new wave coming online is not quite compensating for the loss of mature production," McDaniel said.

Oregon State scores USDA grant to expand hazelnut research

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Oregon State University's hazelnut research program was awarded \$3.1 million in a round of USDA grants announced Aug. 2.

The five-year grant will be used to continue hazelnut research at OSU, where breeder Shawn Mehlhacher is credited with saving the industry by developing varieties resistant to eastern filbert blight. Mehlhacher, who submitted the grant application, could not be immediately reached for comment.

OSU's grant proposal indicated the money would be used to expand commercial hazelnut production in the U.S. The work will focus on the Pacific Northwest, where Oregon accounts for nearly all of U.S. production and growers have added 3,000 acres since 2009; the temperate "fruit belt" region of the eastern U.S., where new blight-resistant cultivars are expected to be released in three to four years; and the Midwest and Great Plains, where new hybrids are being identified that have superior nut quality, yield, and adaptation to demanding climates, according to a news release.

OSU's application describes hazelnuts as a "profitable, high-value, low input, sustainable crop for which steadily increasing world demand now exceeds supply."

Producers and consumers are enthusiastic about increased U.S. production, the grant application says, but susceptibility to eastern filbert blight remains a problem. In addition, existing cultivars lack climatic adaptability, which severely limits production in the East and Midwest and threatens the sustainability of production in Oregon, according to the application.



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Hazelnuts raked up during harvest await cleaning in this 2014 photo. Oregon State University has received a \$3.1 million to continue hazelnut research.

OSU's grant application said there is a \$3.26 billion national and international market for hazelnuts and "powerful environmental and economic benefits" would be

generated by large-scale production of hazelnut hybrids.

"Hazelnuts are an ideal choice to integrate into profitable, sustainable agricultural or agro-forestry production systems, and are family-friendly for small producers focused on local food issues," the application states.

Hazelnuts could become a third crop in the Midwest and Great Plains, joining corn and soybeans, and would have considerable value as a specialty crop in the Eastern states, according to the application.

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COMBINES	COMBINES	COMBINES
 <p>JD 5680, 881 hours, small grain, 35% Rahco Leveler, 635F platform and cart.....\$429,900 Four Lakes 755668</p> <p>JD T670, 1127 hours, small grain, MacDon BPU platform, rasp bar cylinder, straw chopper.....\$180,000 Donald OA084501</p>  <p>JD 5670, 1061 hours, small grain, Hilco 28% leveler, Prodrive, 24.5-32 tires.....\$350,000 Moscow C0755391</p> <p>JD 5670, 353 hours, small grain, Rahco 18% 4-way leveler, 615P BPU platform.....\$370,900 Tangent 765553</p>	 <p>JD 9660WTS, 1892 hours, small grain, conventional cylinder, straw walkers, MacDon BPU platform.....\$135,000 Madras OA78924</p> <p>JD 5680, 958 hours, Rahco 35% leveler, 635F flex cutting platform w/cart.....\$506,000 Colfax 755717</p>  <p>JD 9870, 1389 hours, Level Land, small grain, 650/85-38 duals, straw spreader.\$209,000 Four Lakes 80741568</p> <p>JD 9770, 3688 hours, small grain, level land, 635F platform and cart.....\$189,000 Colfax A0736737</p> <p>JD 5690, 350 hours, small grain, 28% Hilco leveler, 24.5-32 duals, 4WD, Countour Master.....\$500,000 Moscow D0765122</p>	 <p>JD 9770 3079 hours, small grain, 35% Rahco leveler, 630R platform & cart.....\$225,000 Colfax OS730470</p>  <p>Case IH 9230, 536 hours, Hilco 27% leveler, small grain, no platform.....\$440,000 Teloa YEG224449</p> <p>JD 9650STS, 3126 hours, sm grain, 18% Hilco leveler, grass seed combine, 914P BPU. \$120,000 Tangent OS700523</p> <p>JD 5680, 1002 hours, small grain, 35% Rahco leveler, 635F platform with Stoess cart\$463,300 Colfax 755718</p> <p>JD T670, 1917 hours, small grain, conventional cylinder, straw walkers, 615P BPU platform.....\$165,000 Tangent OA082615</p>  <p>JD 9760, 2767 hours, Rahco 18% sidehill leveler, duals, 4WD, straw chopper, contour master.....\$167,000 Tekoa OS715882</p>



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