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EPA regional head didn't see What's Upstream as 'legal issue'

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Environmental Protection Agency's top Northwest official asked What's Upstream last year to not single out farmers as responsible for Puget Sound pollution, but he also reassured the group's leader that spending EPA funds on the advocacy campaign wasn't a "legal issue," according to newly available EPA records.

The records, released in response to a Freedom of Information Act request by the Capital Press, shed new light on the depth of concern some EPA staff members had about the legality of What's Upstream, led by Swinomish Indian tribe environmental policy director Larry Wasserman.

The campaign sought increased regulation of agriculture to improve Puget Sound water quality.

The campaign collapsed in April as some federal lawmakers charged the EPA with funding malicious and illegal lobbying activities. The EPA's inspector general is auditing the spending, and the Washington Public Disclosure Commission is investigating whether What's Upstream broke state law by failing to report lobbying activities.

According to the just-released records, What's Upstream had the attention of wary EPA staff members for several years, particularly after Wasserman proposed in 2013 using EPA funds to push a ballot initiative to restrict farming near waterways.

The tribe dropped the proposal, but continued to pursue a lobbying campaign with the help of Seattle firm Strategies 360.

As lower-level EPA officials were exploring in 2015 whether Wasserman's single-minded focus on regulating agriculture was grounds for cutting-off funding, Wasserman requested a meeting with Region 10 Administrator Dennis McLerran.

According to EPA notes of the July 16, 2015, conference call, Wasserman, joined by tribe attorney Nate Cushman, told McLerran that he didn't think the EPA could legally withdraw a grant already awarded to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission to fund "public outreach."

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New life for old WOOD

Reclaimed lumber from barns, outbuildings popular among renovators and woodworkers

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SUVER, Ore. — Staring up into the innards of a partially dismantled grain elevator, deconstruction expert Steve Marlega could barely contain his enthusiasm.

Though much of the wood in the roughly 70-year-old structure was too insect-damaged to be reclaimed, the massive old-growth timber beams supporting its frame were in superb condition.

"I'll tear this whole thing down just for those," said Marlega, project manager for Northwest Reclaimed Wood, a deconstruction firm.

While the old Pacific Seed grain elevator in Suver, Ore., was no longer useful to its current owner, the Wilbur-Ellis farm supply company, lumber from the structure will live on in various forms.

Like the wood from ancient barns and other outdated and dilapidated agricultural buildings around the region, it will be turned into furniture and used in home renovations by people who value its unique heritage.

"History is huge. You don't want it to just die," said Danuta Burris, co-owner of Salem Salvage, a reclaimed wood company that buys material from Marlega.

'A big thing'

People often prefer to use lumber that was milled at about the same time as their older homes were built because it fits better aesthetically and dimensionally, she said.

Such lumber is also used as a decorative element in newer homes, Burris said. "Barn wood is a big thing right now. Everybody wants that barn wood look."

Dismantling an old barn or grain elevator is much more time-consuming and complicated than simply bulldozing it or setting fire to it. The added care is necessary to extract the valuable lumber intact, said Marlega. "You can't get it by knocking it over."

In some cases, quickly demolishing or burning down a structure simply isn't safe or practical. The Pacific Seed grain elevator, for example, was too close to other buildings and a railroad track.

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Danuta Burris of Salem Salvage puts the finishing touches on a table made from reclaimed wood at the company's yard in Salem, Ore. Old wood from barns and other farm buildings is popular among woodworkers and home renovators.

Darell Braman of Northwest Reclaimed Wood, a deconstruction company, dismantles a grain elevator in Suver, Ore. Old wood from barns and other farm buildings is popular among woodworkers and home renovators.

Photos by Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Big wheat crop fails to yield big payday

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Good growing weather bolstered wheat yields this year compared to 2015, but growers aren't seeing the growth in their wallets.

Washington's winter wheat production this year topped 130

million bushels, up 46 percent from 89 million bushels harvested in 2015, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Spring wheat production was 27 million bushels, up 18 percent over last year.

"It was a perfect year for growing wheat, with the excep-

tion of falling numbers," said Mary Palmer Sullivan, vice president of the Washington Grain Commission.

Many farmers are seeing lower prices due to low falling number, a test run by grain elevators for starch damage.

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Capital Press File

Though the amount of wheat harvested is up across most of the Pacific Northwest compared to last year, low prices are cutting into this year's farm income.

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