

Washington

Farmworker housing schedule slips

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MATTAWA, Wash. — It's behind schedule, but the Washington Growers League still plans to open 144 beds of housing for seasonal farmworkers next year in Mattawa.

Last Dec. 3, the state Department of Commerce awarded the league a \$3 million grant to build the housing. It initially hoped to break ground early in 2016 and possibly be ready for occupancy this fall.

The time table has been pushed back several times and now groundbreaking is pegged for December with occupancy in mid-summer of 2017.

"We had a lot of negotia-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The Washington Growers League's 270-bed seasonal farmworker housing south of Wenatchee opened in 2010 and is full in the summers. The league plans to open more housing in Mattawa next year.

tions with the city of Mattawa and development process that slowed things down. It's a function of the scope of de-

velopment likely to occur in Mattawa," said Mike Gempler, executive director of the league in Yakima.

More than one developer is looking at building general and farmworker housing in the city, and that caused the city to re-examine its infrastructure needs, he said.

The league's project is on 10 acres in the southwest quadrant of the intersection of Highway 243 and Road 24 Southwest. It is Port of Mattawa property within city limits.

"There's water, sewer, electrical and fiber optic so the port is a good place to develop," Gempler said.

The league opened a new \$6 million, 200-bed migrant farmworker housing facility, Brender Creek, in Cashmere in May 2015 with private and state funding.

It also operates the 270-bed Sage Bluff facility near

Malaga, south of Wenatchee, that it built in 2010.

On Sept. 15, the league completed a second step in applying for another \$3 million Department of Commerce grant for a second phase in Mattawa for an additional 168 beds.

Wafra, formerly the Washington Farm Labor Association in Olympia, applied for \$3 million to build 166 beds of seasonal farmworker housing in the city of Okanogan. The Commerce Department announces grant awards in December. There's \$6 million in the fund per biennium so both could be granted.

Wafra has a purchase agreement on 20 acres along the Okanogan River in the north end of town east of

Caso's Country Foods, said Dan Fazio, Wafra director and CEO. The agreement is contingent on the grant and Wafra hopes to complete the project next year, he said. A second phase is possible in the future, he said.

Meanwhile, the league also is still pursuing a privately financed housing model and hopes to present it to growers soon. In the past, Gempler has said the model he had in mind is for growers to invest in construction and own a right to rent a certain number of beds. He's called it "sort of a time-share model."

Grower investments and league bank loans would pay for development and bed rent would pay operational costs, he has said.

WDFW proposes buying more private land

No commercial logging planned

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife plans to buy timberlands totaling more than 1,600 acres in Kittitas and Cowlitz counties.

If the acquisitions are approved by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, WDFW would manage the properties to provide wildlife habitat and public recreation, said Julie Sandberg, WDFW real estate services section manager.

The department may log some trees for forest health and to reduce fire danger, but wouldn't conduct commercial timber harvests, she said.

WDFW staff members were scheduled to recommend the land buys Friday at the commission's meeting in Olympia.



Courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife plans to buy 705 acres of timberland in Kittitas County. WDFW also plans to buy timberland in Cowlitz County, adding to the department's million-acre portfolio.

If the commission agrees, WDFW will buy 705 acres south of Cle Elum in Kittitas County from the Nature Conservancy for \$811,000.

The conservation group bought the land from the Plum Creek Timber Co. in 2014 as

part of a \$49 million, 47,921-acre deal.

Weyerhaeuser Co. bought Plum Creek in 2015.

WDFW's purchase would be part of a larger plan to acquire forest land on the east slopes of the central Cascade

Mountains and the upper Yakima River basin.

The commission also will consider buying 975 acres along the Kalama River in eastern Cowlitz County for \$2.1 million from Merrill Lake Properties LLC, a timber com-

pany. WDFW last year bought property in the area from the company.

WDFW owns or manages approximately 1 million acres.

Both purchases would be funded by the state's capital budget.

WATER

Odessa Subarea seeks more funding

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — Lawmakers and other officials say they'll consider all funding sources to reduce the cost of bringing Columbia River water to Odessa Subarea farms.

The sentiment was expressed several times during the Columbia Basin Development League's annual meeting last week.

Farmers in the Odessa Subarea want to replace shrinking groundwater supplies with surface water from the federal Columbia Basin Project. The project now serves 671,000 acres of the 1,029,000 acres originally authorized by Congress in the 1930s.

The state Department of Ecology, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and East Columbia Basin Irrigation District are working to bring project water to 87,700 more acres. Construction of projects to expand the existing system are in varying stages of development.

The irrigation district capped the estimated annual cost to landowners at \$253 per acre for 30 years. The league hopes to reduce the cost to \$200 per acre.

The share that would be paid by landowners "is still really too high," said Mike Schwisow, league director of governmental relations.

Those seeking the funds have to be "innovative, persistent and turn over every rock that we can find," Schwisow said.

The federal government has contributed \$58 million and the state has contributed \$75 million to the expansion.

The league is seeking \$20 million in federal funding.

Ecology's Office of the Columbia River will request \$15 million in the state's 2017-2019 capital budget, said director Tom Tebb.

"We'll see," said state Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, during her presentation. "I'm hoping we can" provide funding.

But farmers and the league face competition for funding and legislators face budget pressures and debt limits, she warned.

Keynote speaker Gary Chandler, vice president of government affairs for the Association of Washington Business, credited local legislators with trying to find every dollar they can in tough circumstances. He told league members to keep pushing.

"If we lose the momentum for whatever reason ... I'm afraid it won't come back for a while," he said.

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