

Washington

County official wants Trump to stop grizzly restoration

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

SEDRO WOOLLEY, Wash. — The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have issued draft plans to restore 200 grizzly bears to the North Cascades, drawing immediate opposition from an Okanogan County commissioner.

The two federal agencies issued draft plans and environmental impact statements on Jan. 12 and invited public comments at meetings in eight communities next month.

Okanogan and Chelan counties have opposed such efforts in the past. Jim DeTro, Okanogan County commissioner, said most people in Eastern Washington are opposed, given how the Endangered Species Act has ruined the timber industry and destroyed custom, culture and economic stability.

He said he hopes the federal effort is stopped by President



Associated Press File

Federal officials have come up with four options for bringing grizzly bears back to the north Cascades of Washington state. An Okanogan County commissioner opposes the plan.

Donald Trump when he takes office Jan. 20.

“I would say we will support reintroduction in Eastern Washington if every tributary that flows into Puget Sound and the Pacific Ocean has two confirmed mating pair of grizzly first,” DeTro said.

That would be like the state

ramming its wolf recovery plan down the throat of Eastern Washington, he said.

The agencies said they are “pleased” to announce the plans.

“Restoring grizzly bears to the North Cascades Ecosystem would enhance the probability of longterm survival and con-

servation of grizzly bears in the contiguous United States thereby contributing to overall grizzly bear recovery and greater biodiversity of the ecosystem,” the agencies said in a newsletter.

Conservation Northwest and the National Parks Conservation Association were

“thrilled” two years ago when the same agencies announced a round of public meetings to help them decide whether to consider restoration.

Okanogan County commissioners have reminded the agencies of a state law passed more than a decade ago preventing state funds from being used for grizzly bear recovery.

The draft alternatives include a no-action plan and three action plans of varying speed but each seeking to restore a reproducing population of approximately 200 grizzlies through capture of bears in British Columbia or Montana and their release in the North Cascades. Plans include habitat and access management and public education and outreach.

The last known sighting of grizzlies in the North Cascades was in 1996 but there are six populations of them in North America, the agencies said.

Grizzlies were listed as a threatened species in the contiguous U.S. in 1975. They

were listed as endangered in Washington in 1980.

The North Cascades Ecosystem encompasses 9,800 square miles in the U.S. and 3,800 in British Columbia. The U.S. portion includes North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area, Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

The public comment meetings are from 6 to 8 p.m.: Feb. 13, Cle Elum, Putnam Centennial Center; Feb. 14, Cashmere Riverside Center; Feb. 15, Winthrop Red Barn; Feb. 16, Omak, Okanogan County Fairgrounds annex; Feb. 21, Bellingham Technical College; Feb. 22, Darrington Community Center; Feb. 23, Sultan High School; Feb. 24, Renton Community Center.

Other means of comment can be given at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/grizzlydeis>. Comments may be submitted through March 14.

Researchers weigh solutions for acidic soil

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Some Eastern Washington farmers are considering which options are most affordable to combat increasingly acidic soils.

Soil pH levels are likely to continue to slowly drop unless something is done to reverse it, said Tim Paulitz, research plant pathologist for the USDA Agricultural Research Service in Pullman, Wash.

Lower pH levels lead to a reduction in yield, particularly in legume crops, because some nutrients become less available.

Acidic soil is particularly a problem in Spokane County near Rockford, Wash., and along the Idaho border. Acidity levels are dropping in other areas as well, although not as steeply, Paulitz said.

Researchers are considering the use of calcium carbonate, or agricultural lime, to reduce the problem, but the economics of the solution aren't yet clear.

“How much lime do you really need to add to push the pH enough, and is that going to be so costly that you're not going to be able to afford it?” Paulitz asked.

Many farmers don't have close, cheap sources of lime, Paulitz said.

Some finely ground sources of lime quickly shift pH levels, but won't be long-lived, while larger-particle sources take longer.

“It's not something that's instantaneous,” Paulitz said. “It takes a while for that reaction to happen.”

In the meantime, some wheat varieties developed in the Midwest and being used in WSU's spring wheat breeding program are tolerant of aluminum, another problem in the soil when pH levels drop. Growing those varieties may be a stop-gap option, Paulitz said.

“The buffering capacity of the soil is being overwhelmed over years of ammonia-based fertilizers,” Paulitz said. “You could be increasing certain diseases. Other diseases, you may decrease. The pH really has an effect on the plant and pathogens, and they all interact.”

Farmers who direct-seed apply ammonia-based fertilizers in a narrow band in the upper soil instead of mixing it in during conventional tillage, which has reduced pH levels in top layers.

Direct-seeding farming systems allow growers to plant seed and fertilize in one or two passes directly into the residue and root structure of the previous year's crop.

Specialized equipment opens a narrow seed row in the soil, and plants grow through that seed row.

Water fight will spawn lawsuits, lawmakers warned

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Senate Agriculture and Water committee was cautioned Thursday that reclaiming control of water policy from the Washington Supreme Court will probably lead to a court fight.

The warning, made by a tribal attorney and a state Department of Ecology official, was rebuffed by Sen. Jim Honeyford, R-Sunnyside.

“If we're afraid of being in lawsuits, then we might as well close our doors, sine die and go home, because we're not going to accomplish anything,” he said.

The committee held the first of what likely will be many hearings this session on how to respond to high court rulings that have blocked Ecology from taking water from rivers



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Washington lawmakers are discussing a controversial state Supreme Court decision on rural water wells.

and streams for new uses, even in cases the department says won't harm fish.

The so-called Hirst decision last year threatens to stop the drilling of new wells for rural homes. The Foster decision in

2015 bars Ecology from offsetting water withdrawals by improving fish habitat.

The rulings leave intact agriculture water rights, but alarm farm groups concerned about the futures of farm families and

rural communities.

Both rulings placed a high priority on minimum stream flows that Ecology has set in 26 of the state's 62 watersheds. The court has held the flows are protected water rights.

If Ecology can't tap rivers to offset new water uses, attention will turn to agriculture, said Bill Clarke, representing a coalition of water users in Pierce County.

“In this state, anytime we have a quote, ‘successful mitigation’ what that means is we're taking irrigated farmland and losing it,” he said.

Tribes and environmental groups support the Supreme Court rulings.

Mukleshoot Indian Tribe attorney Ann Tweedy warned lawmakers not to weaken stream-flow protections.

“It would force tribes and others who are concerned

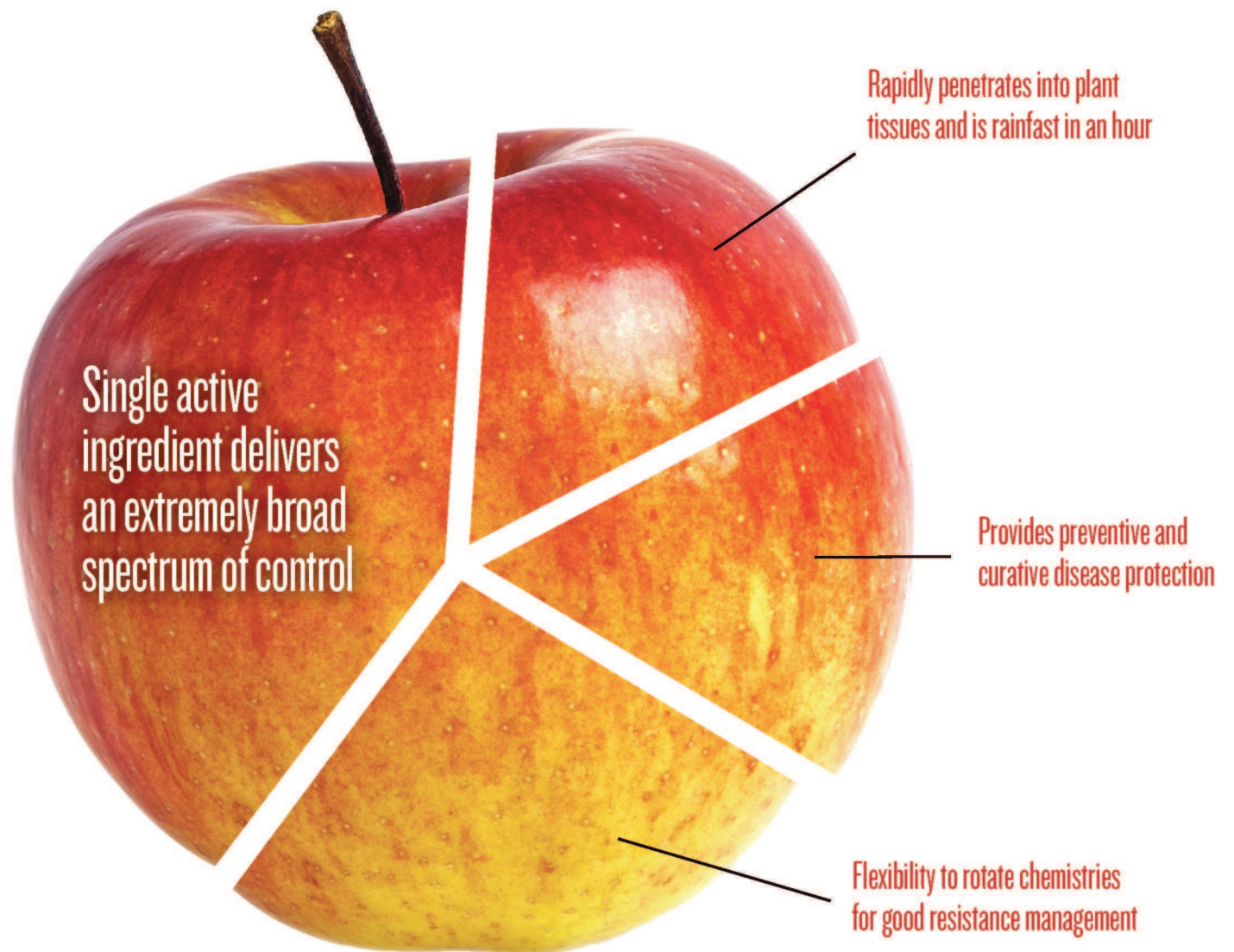
about instream flow resources to utilize federal protections, like the (Endangered Species Act) and potentially adjudication of tribal rights as well,” she said.

One piece of legislation introduced by Honeyford, Senate Bill 5003, would effectively nullify Foster. The bill would allow Ecology to consider the economic benefits of withdrawing from rivers for development. Ecology would be required to have a habitat plan to keep the withdrawals from harming fish.

“This is an attempt to give the Department of Ecology some tools to better manage our water supply,” Honeyford said.

Sen. John McCoy, D-Tulalip, said he was so disturbed after reading the bill the evening before that he had trouble sleeping.

When explaining disease protection for apples, cherries and pears, a pie chart didn't seem right.



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