

Washington

Quagga mussels a threat to irrigators

Ports, shippers oppose tax to fund campaign

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Quagga mussels clog irrigation systems and are approaching the Pacific Northwest, warns a Washington state senator, who has proposed a tax on ships to fund a battle against the invasive species.

Shippers, ports and marine terminal operators oppose the new fee, arguing large vessels are unlikely to introduce invasive species and that another tax will make Washington ports less attractive to companies.

"I know the big boats are unhappy, and I'm willing to work with them on this, but we do need an adequate and reliable source of funds to combat these species," said Republican Sen. Jim Honeyford, who represents the irrigation-dependent Yakima Valley in Central Washington.

The quagga mussel and its relative, the zebra mussel, are natives of Eastern Europe and were introduced into the Great Lakes by ships in the late 1980s.

Along with clogging pipes and screens, the mussels upset the ecosystem.

Zebra mussels have spread more widely in the Midwest, but quagga mussels have appeared more places in the West, including in California.

They were discovered in Montana in November, increasing concerns that quagga mussels will reach Idaho and Washington.

To illustrate the threat, Honeyford has been showing other lawmakers quagga mussel-encrusted pipes from Lake Mead on the Nevada-Arizona border.

"We really need to get a



Washington state Sen. John McCoy, D-Tulalip, examines pipes encrusted with quagga mussels as Sen. Lisa Wellman, D-Mercer Island, looks on during a Jan. 24 meeting of the Senate agriculture committee. Sen. Jim Honeyford, R-Sunnyside, has been passing around the glass case to highlight what the invasive species would do to irrigation pipes if it reached Washington.

Quagga mussel

This non-native freshwater mussel poses a major threat to U.S. waterways as an invasive species. It's similar in appearance to its more infamous cousin, the zebra mussel.



0.8 inches (Actual size)

Binomial name: Dreissena rostriformis

Appearance: Shell is striped, being more pale toward the end of the hinge

Diet: Filter feeder

Life span: 3-5 years

Origin: Dnieper River drainage of Ukraine

First observed: 1989 in Lake Erie near Port Colborne, Ontario

Sources: www.wikipedia.org; USGS

Capital Press graphic

handle on this," he said. "Once they get in, they're very difficult to eradicate unless they're in a small area, and if they're not in a small area, then you can pretty much say goodbye."

Honeyford has introduced Senate Bill 5303 to enlarge the state's program to prevent and respond to aquatic invasive species.

Currently, recreational boaters are practically the program's only support, spending \$2 a year per boat and raising about \$500,000.

Honeyford's bill would charge large vessels calling on Washington ports \$125. Out-of-state recreational boats and seaplanes would have to buy a \$20 permit to use Washington waters. Each tax would raise an estimated \$450,000 a year.

Honeyford's bill also would tap taxes already paid by public utilities. The mussels can interfere with hydroelectric dams. The tax would raise an estimated \$1 million the first two years, increasing to \$2.8 million the following two years.

The bill follows, somewhat, recommendations from an advisory group convened by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. The group included farm groups, tribes, environmentalists, ports and the ship-

ping industry. The group did not come to a consensus on the ship tax.

Ports and shippers opposed the tax at a hearing Thursday in front of the Senate Agriculture Resources and Parks Committee.

The shippers argued international and federal rules already prevent vessels from spreading invasive species.

The ports say they're battling Canadian ports for business.

"Any cost you put on industry just makes it that much more likely you'll lose cargo," said Jordan Roy, vice president of the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, which represents marine terminals.

According to a WDFW report, invasive species could attach themselves to the hulls of vessels. Also, invasive species could be introduced when ships discharge ballast water picked up in the ocean.

Six states, including Oregon and California, collect fees from ships for invasive species programs, according to WDFW. Oregon's fee is \$88, while California charges \$850.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Cattle gather at a feedlot in Franklin County, Wash. Cattle feeders say a change in how the state Department of Ecology enforces dust-control plans motivates their support for a bill to exempt feedlots from the Washington Clean Air Act.

Washington feedlots ask out of state air law

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington beef industry wants lawmakers to exempt cattle feedlots from the state Clean Air Act, complaining the Department of Ecology has adopted a no-tolerance stance on dust rising from thousands of animals in dry conditions.

"They have adopted what I would call a new no-tolerance interpretation as it relates to dust," Agri Beef director of regulatory affairs Jayne Davis told the House Environment Committee on Monday. "We don't think it can be achieved anywhere in the cattle industry."

Dust from agricultural operations is generally not regulated by the Clean Air Act, which carries fines of up to \$10,000 per violation.

The law, however, does apply to cattle feedlots with more than 1,000 head during the dry summer months.

House Bill 1299, introduced by Aberdeen Democrat Brian Blake, chairman of the agriculture committee, would add cattle feedlots to agricultural operations exempted from the act.

Ecology pushed back against the proposal, telling the committee that feedlots emit pollution. "Feedlot dust is not benign," said Stu Clark, Ecology's air quality program manager.

To control dust, feedlots must use "best-management practices," such as sprinklers,

scrapping pens and windbreaks. Ecology and the industry worked out the guidelines in 1995.

Controlling dust is hard, but the guidelines — "based on reasonableness" — worked well, said Ed Field, executive director of the Washington Cattle Feeders Association.

"We determined it was good for our neighbors and good for us and worked very well until the last several years, when there's been a change in personnel and a change in attitude," Field said.

Clark said Ecology is talking with cattlemen to update the 1995 policy. The bill, he said, would "restrict Ecology's ability to address real health and environmental concerns from cattle feeding."

He also warned that the Environmental Protection Agency may not approve, leaving feedlots vulnerable to federal enforcement.

Ranchers said that controlling dust makes neighbors happy and cattle healthy.

"I do my BMPs very religiously," Ephrata rancher Will Derting said. "It's a good-neighbor thing to do."

Ecology sent several warning letters to feedlots for alleged dust-control violations last year, an Ecology spokeswoman said. The most recent fine against a feedlot for wind-blown manure was a \$50,000 penalty issued to Simplot Feeders in Walla Walla County in December 2015.

Washington Ecology plots course to pick farm practices

Farm Bureau 'very, very nervous'

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington producers, environmentalists and others will get together this spring and begin catalog farming methods that prevent water pollution, according to a plan presented this week by the state Department of Ecology.

Ecology says the practices will be voluntary and not new rules. Still, "a lot of folks are very, very nervous," said Evan Sheffels, Washington Farm Bureau associate director of government relations. "Our preference is that this just go away."

Ecology has signaled its intention to move ahead with an exercise ordered by the Environmental Protection Agency during the Obama administration. The EPA told Ecology in 2015 to develop agricultural "best-management practices" to help the state meet water-quality standards. An EPA spokesman said Friday that the agency still expects Ecology to do so.

Ecology has approached the subject cautiously. It hired a consulting firm, Ross Strategic of Seattle, last March to interview producers and environmentalists about their expectations and worries.

"We felt like our stakeholders would feel freer to speak with an outsider rather than ourselves, and we feel it was helpful," Ecology water quality communications manager Sandy Howard said.

Elizabeth McManus, a principal in the firm, reported that farmers are concerned the practices will be onerous, uneconomical and become de facto regulations.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Workers harvest cranberries in a flooded bog in southwestern Washington. The state Department of Ecology will form an advisory group to evaluate farming practices that prevent water pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency instructed the state to identify "best-management practices" for agriculture.

While producers are concerned about where Ecology is heading, environmentalists are impatient with the department's pace, according to McManus. Environmentalists said Ecology was moving too slow, thwarted by politics, she reported.

Northwest Environmental Advocates sued the EPA in U.S. District Court in Seattle in December, claiming the agency should cut off federal funding for clean-water projects until Washington adopts agricultural best-management practices. The suit is pending.

Moving ahead and based on McManus' recommendations, Ecology has proposed forming a 10- to 20-member advisory group by mid-spring to evaluate the effectiveness and cost of practices, such as buffers between fields and waterways.

Ecology says it expects members to also be drawn from tribes, counties, regula-

tory agencies, conservation districts and Washington State University.

Ecology has so far spent \$40,000 on Ross Strategic and has not yet decided whether to retain its services to work with the advisory group, Howard said.

Ecology has shied away from the term "best-management practices," opting for "voluntary clean water guidance for agriculture." The state Clean Water Act already gives Ecology broad authority to mandate pollution-control measures for individual farms and ranches.

Sheffels said farmers could benefit if the advisory group weighs costs and benefits and doesn't depart too far from National Resources Conservation Service standards. "Our concern, as always, is this will turn into something different in the later stages and become a regulatory hammer," he said.

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Valley Agronomics LLC and Ag West Supply Working Together to Support Area Agriculture

By Jason Pollard January 12, 2017

Oregon—After months of meetings and preparation, it has become official that the respective companies of Valley Agronomics and Ag West Supply, based out of Rickreall Oregon, have agreed to work together to support area Agriculture. Valley Agronomics will lease the business from Ag West Supply and hire all of the current employees to be part of the Valley Agronomics operations.

Operating in a competitive marketplace had become a challenge for their ag input supply business. Simplot, CPS, Wilbur Ellis and Wilco all had locations in the area. As a cooperative, their members desired to have a convenient location, but acknowledged without partnering with someone else, it would continue to be a challenge. Wilco and Ag West Supply had been friendly for years and discussions began a few months back considering options. With the recent merger of Wilco-Winfield with Valley Agronomics, this provided an opportunity for Ag West Supply and Valley Agronomics to come together to support the local community.

"We are excited to have the Ag West Supply Agronomy team joining ours, and adding a location strategically located between our Whiteson and Harrisburg Ag Centers," stated Bill Hubbell Vice President over the Willamette Valley for Valley Agronomics, Previously General Manager for Wilco-Winfield Ag. The effective date that the operations will begin conducting business as Valley Agronomics is February 1, 2017. Valley Agronomics will add custom application, fertilizer delivery, and lime to the current offerings out of this facility.

Both organizations are a perfect example of what a cooperative can mean to a community and the patrons of the cooperative system. By coming together to form this alliance and lease out the ag business from Ag West Supply, Valley Agronomics will be able to provide more services, and products to the local area.

Valley Agronomics LLC is a locally owned cooperative proudly serving area agricultural producers, commercial businesses and families in Oregon, Washington, Southern Idaho, and Parts of Nevada and Utah. Following founding traditions of honesty and caring for others, Valley Agronomics is customer focused and driven.

For more information, visit www.valleyagronomics.com



This map shows the locations of both Cooperatives throughout the state of Idaho and surrounding states

