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Idaho

Field burning bill heads to Senate floor

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A bill that would prevent a major reduction in the number of allowable field burning days for Idaho farmers has been sent to the Senate floor with a “do-pass” recommendation.

Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee voted 6-1 in favor of the bill Jan. 25 following extensive public testimony.

Committee members asked a few dozen questions about the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality proposal, which is opposed by several environmental and public health groups, which claim it would endanger public health.

The bill would amend Idaho’s crop residue burning program.

Tiffany Floyd, who manages DEQ’s air quality division, said the main goals of the program are to protect public health while allowing farmers to continue to use the tool. Field burning rids farmland of pests and weeds without the use of chemicals.

“If we thought (this) was jeopardizing public health in any way, we would not be presenting this proposal to you,” she told committee members.

DEQ can approve a burn



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Idaho farmers and ag industry leaders discuss a bill that would amend Idaho’s field burning program on Jan. 25 at the Idaho Statehouse. A Senate committee approved the bill, which is designed to prevent a major reduction in the number of allowable field burning days.

request only if ozone and small particulate matter (PM 2.5) levels aren’t expected to exceed 75 percent of the national standard for those air pollutants.

But the federal standard for ozone was tightened in October 2015 and that will result in the number of allowable burn days in Idaho declining by half to a third, Floyd said.

To avoid that, DEQ is proposing to loosen Idaho’s ozone standard to 90 percent of the federal standard.

Some environmental groups and public health advocates wanted DEQ to tighten the state’s PM 2.5 level to offset the loosening of the

ozone standard.

“The science just isn’t there to support that position,” Floyd said.

Austin Hopkins, a conservation assistant with the Idaho Conservation League, submitted written comments to the committee on behalf of several groups that oppose DEQ’s proposal, which still must pass the full Senate and House.

In those comments, the groups accuse DEQ of siding with the agricultural industry at the expense of protecting public health.

Their letter states that the proposal “represents a deplorable breach of the agreement

reached by all parties in good faith on a resolution of the field burning issue in 2008.”

“Our major concern is that (it) would weaken protections for public health in Idaho,” Hopkins said.

Several farmers who use field burning as a tool testified in support of DEQ’s proposal.

Farmers who burn their fields following harvest would be greatly impacted by the federal ozone standard change in the absence of DEQ’s proposal, said Justin McCleod, president of the Nezperce Prairie Grass Growers Association.

In response to a question from a committee member, McCleod and other farmers said it would not be economically feasible to grow Kentucky bluegrass without field burning.

Without field burning, “the Kentucky bluegrass industry would not survive in Idaho,” said Nezperce farmer Greg Branson.

Sen. Dan Foreman, R-Moscow, said DEQ’s proposal was a good, safe solution to the tightening of the federal ozone standard.

If the farmers who burn their fields lost that ability, Idaho would be “looking at the demise of a very important industry,” he said.

Water conference set for Feb. 16

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A conference examining water issues in Idaho and across the West is planned for the Superior Conference Center in Burley, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Feb. 16.

The conference is sponsored in part by the Idaho Humanities Council in conjunction with the visiting Smithsonian Institution exhibit Water/Ways, which will be on display at the Burley Public Library through March 12.

Speakers will present a variety of perspectives on the story of irrigation, the future of hydropower, recreation, aquaculture and other topics.

Conference organizer Russell Tremayne, humanities council board member and a College of Southern Idaho history professor, said he’s had a water conference in mind for a couple of years.

There have been big water issues in Idaho for a long time, including the recent landmark agreement between surface and ground water users.

A lot of legal discussion has surrounded Idaho’s various water challenges, and the idea is to bring water experts to the table to explain to average citizens what has taken place, he said.

“We’re all water users. ... Ultimately, we’re always going to be in a pickle with scarcity,” he said.

Conference speakers and their topics will include:

- Jim Jones, former chief justice of the Idaho Supreme Court: “A Little Dam Problem.”

- Barbara Cosens, University of Idaho College of Law professor: “Adapting Water Law to a Changing Climate: Through the Win-

dow of Drought.”

- Kevin Marsh, Idaho State University environmental historian: “Slipping Through the Cracks: The Snake River, Its Aquifer and Idaho’s Water Conflicts.”

In addition, Tremayne will moderate a discussion with local water users about today’s water issues and their concerns.

That panel will include Randy Bingham, former manager of the Burley Irrigation District; Randy Brown, manager of the Southwest Irrigation District; Brian Olmstead, manager of the Twin Falls Canal Co.; Mark Davidson, director of conservation initiatives for the Idaho Nature Conservancy; Barry Pater, chairman of the College of Southern Idaho Aquaculture Department; and a representative of Idaho Power.

The conference will also feature luncheon keynote speaker Cort Conley, an Idaho river guide, historian and writer, and his presentation, “Songs of the Winds: 1,200 Miles Down the Snake River.”

The Smithsonian Water/Ways exhibition examines the environmental, cultural and historic significance of water, including how the availability of water affected settlement and migration patterns across the Western U.S.

It also looks at how human creativity and resourcefulness are providing new ways of protecting water resources and renewing respect for the natural environment.

The conference and lunch are free, but registration is required. For more information about the conference and exhibit and to register, visit: bplibrary.org.

Farmworker goes from illegal immigrant to legal dairy foreman

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

HOMEDALE, Idaho — Immigration reform is expected by many to be a major issue during the term of President Donald Trump.

Whether that translates into some type of amnesty or path to residency for the millions of people estimated to be in this country illegally remains to be seen.

But at least one immigrant who came here illegally in the 1980s and benefited from the amnesty signed into law by President Ronald Reagan isn’t hopeful that today’s illegal immigrants will enjoy that same opportunity.

Rutilio Bautista was pleasantly stunned when Reagan in 1986 signed the Immigration Reform and Control Act that offered amnesty to farmworkers here illegally.

Bautista had crossed the U.S. border illegally four years earlier and was working at a greenhouse in Idaho.

Because he had been working in agriculture, the law allowed him to obtain a green card and remain legally.

“I couldn’t believe it,” Bautista said when he heard what Reagan had done.

Bautista said he’s not hopeful such an opportunity will arise again any time soon.

He said politicians have used the promise of immigration reform “as a card in their pockets” for years to gain



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

From left, Jenny, Luz, Norma and Rutilio are pictured at the Bautista home near Homedale, Idaho, on Dec. 30. Rutilio came to the U.S. illegally in 1982 but gained legal residency following the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and is now foreman of a dairy.

votes but have no intention of actually pushing for it.

Bautista said he realizes Reagan signed the law to help farmers but it did more than that. It offered a way for him and a lot of other people here illegally to forge a new life.

“The reason Reagan did it was for the farmers,” he said. “But President Reagan helped not only the farmers but a lot of illegal immigrants as well.”

Bautista first entered the U.S. in 1982, when he was 17, walking for two straight days.

After working in a series of farm-related jobs, including in a greenhouse, cleaning beans, processing hops and detasseling corn, he went to work at a dairy outside Homedale owned by Bob Sonke.

He has remained there and is now the dairy’s foreman.

“You can’t beat him; he’s good people,” Sonke said. “He’ll do anything for anyone.”

Bautista and his wife, Luz,

who, like her husband, was raised on a farm in Mexico, have raised two daughters,

Jenny and Norma.

Jenny is majoring in food science at the University of Idaho and is the state secretary for Idaho FFA.

She hopes to remain an advocate for agriculture and would like to help lead efforts to convince youngsters who were raised on farms to remain in agriculture.

Norma graduated from Boise State University and although her career plans don’t involve agriculture, she spent a summer detasseling corn so she could gain an appreciation for what her parents did to give her an education.



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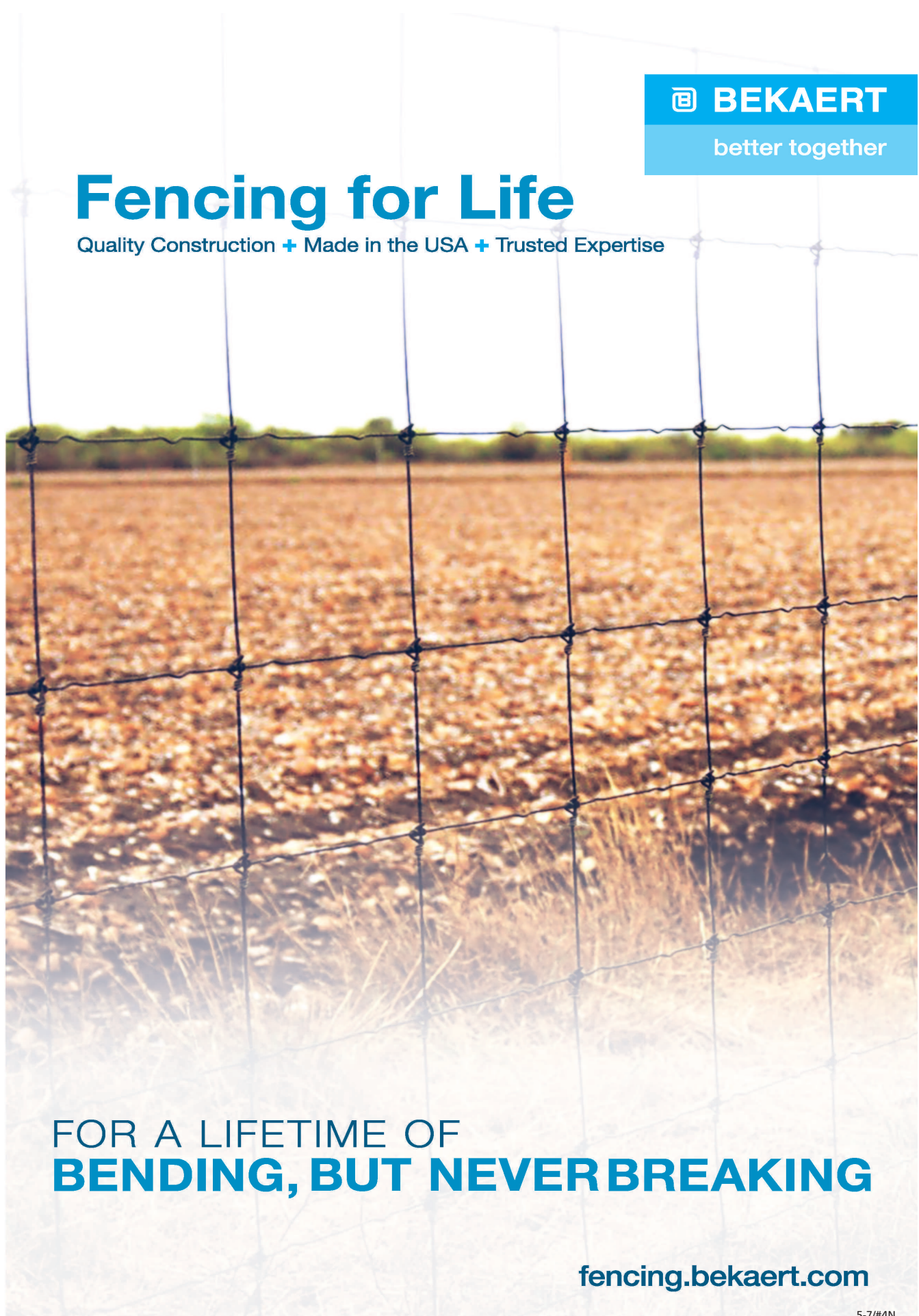
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