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Idaho

Governor seeks to intervene in federal logging lawsuit

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

BOISE — Idaho Gov. Butch Otter has asked to intervene in a lawsuit involving an environmental group and the U.S. Forest Service over a proposed logging project.

Otter filed the paperwork Thursday in U.S. District Court to assist the Forest Service.

Friends of the Clearwater filed a lawsuit in November challenging the Forest Service's analysis that found logging and other work in an undeveloped part of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest won't degrade the area or threaten its roadless status and its future as a potential wilderness designation.

The lawsuit involves the Idaho Roadless Rule, which allows road building and logging that is associated with reducing fire risk near communities. The proposed logging is near the tiny community of Orogrande.

Otter said that he's seeking to make sure the state's interest receive adequate representation.

"This is a prime example of the type of project contemplated and authorized by the Idaho Roadless Rule," said Jim Caswell, chairman of the Idaho Roadless Commission. "The Orogrande Project will not only have several important short-term benefits, it will also improve the overall roadless characteristics of the area over the long term."

Orogrande is a tiny, unin-

corporated, historic mining community about 40 miles southwest of Elk City.

It includes about 20 cabins and homes, most of which are occupied seasonally.

Fire has threatened the community a number of times in recent years and the logging project is designed to reduce that threat.

Cheryl Probert, supervisor of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest, has said the Orogrande Community Protection Project will reduce fire risk and promote a healthy, fire-resistant forest. She also said the area has heavy fuel loads and frequent lightning.

But about 280 acres of the project is in the West Fork Crooked River Inventoried Roadless Area and would in-

clude construction of about 6 miles of road. Once logging is complete, the road would be obliterated.

Friends of the Clearwater in the 26-page complaint filed Nov. 3 contend the Forest Service violated environmental laws by concluding that the project would have no significant impact.

The group in its lawsuit said the finding by the Forest Service violates the National Environmental Policy Act because roadbuilding and timber harvest in an Idaho Roadless Area will eliminate the characteristics such areas are supposed to possess.

The governor's office didn't respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press on Friday.



Courtesy of Ryan Cranney

An excavator seeks to protect homes from flooding within the Goose Creek Flood Control District in Southern Idaho.

Irrigation managers rush to save property from flooding

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

RUPERT, Idaho — Southern Idaho irrigation officials and emergency managers have opened floodgates and brought in fleets of excavators to clear overflowing streams and canals of ice, seeking to protect adjacent property from extreme flooding caused by rapid snowmelt.

Low-elevation snow accumulated throughout a cold and stormy winter, until it quickly melted with the recent arrival of an unseasonably warm spell. But the runoff couldn't seep into the frozen ground — and has forced road closures, formed standing ponds in farm fields and damaged property.

Flood damage had prompted 18 Idaho counties to issue disaster declarations by Feb. 20. Six of those counties had also applied for state disaster declarations, and may become eligible to pursue assistance through federal declarations if damage reaches a certain financial threshold, explained Kim Vega, Minidoka County emergency manager.

"We now have to start tracking our costs," Vega said.

Vega said disaster declarations give counties flexibility to shuffle funds and purchase emergency supplies and services without going through the usual bidding process. Minidoka County's state declaration has also provided the county with state help and financial assistance in obtaining supplies, including tens of thousands of sandbags.

"We couldn't keep up we had so many people in need of sandbags and pumps, and we were advised to do a state declaration," Vega said.

Gov. Butch Otter toured some of the hardest hit sites in Minidoka and Cassia counties on Feb. 17.

Minidoka Irrigation District Manager Dan Davidson recruited local contractors, municipalities, highway districts and others in the community with heavy equipment to help him clear ice from the canal. Amalgamated Sugar Co. contributed several pumps to divert water and

protect homes and its factory in Paul.

Lyle Swank, watermaster for the Upper Snake water district, said Ririe Reservoir in Eastern Idaho has released water, and water was released from the Willow Creek floodway channel from Feb. 7 to Feb. 16. Furthermore, the National Weather Service issued flood warnings for Eastern Idaho from Feb. 17 through Feb. 20, due to a rainstorm in the forecast.

Ryan Cranney, a farmer who serves as a board member with the Oakley Canal Co. and director of the Goose Creek Flood Control District, said inflows into Oakley Reservoir reached record highs of 4,200 cubic feet per second at the peak of the flooding, compared with normal levels of 50 to 100 cubic feet per second.

Managers opened their floodgates for six days, beginning on Feb. 11. He said ranchers along Goose Creek — the major tributary feeding the reservoir — lost bridges and fences and had cows separated from feed by gushing water. Based on the recent flooding, he said the Army Corps of Engineers has been reviewing plans to enlarge the reservoir's flood channel.

Cranney said his flood district is supported by a tax it stopped collecting four years ago, once the account reached \$500,000. He said the tax will have to be reinstated, as the account has been depleted to fund recent efforts to clear canals and streams.

"We had track hoes in the middle of new subdivisions clearing out natural channels back to the river to give water a place to go to protect the homes," Cranney said. "I'm hoping the worst is behind us. We're cautiously optimistic, but we're going to be watching things really close."

Twin Falls Canal Company General Manager Brian Olmstead said he and others with storage in Milner Dam have scheduled meetings to review procedures for opening the reservoir's emergency spillway, which hasn't been used in 20 years.

"We'll be ready if something unprecedented happens," Olmstead said.

Idaho potato breeders fry hundreds of experimental lines during trial

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

ABERDEEN, Idaho — For a couple of weeks each winter, University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research and Extension Center smells like a fast-food restaurant as crop scientists make hundreds of batches of french fries.

All of the potato breeding clones developed in Aberdeen from the second field generation on are cut and fried during the annual test for cold-induced sweetening resistance.

Samples are displayed on a table for comparison with a fry-color chart. Processors demand light-colored fries and chips, but after prolonged storage at low temperatures, enzymes can break down starch in spuds, forming sugars that cause dark fries.

The industry's staple, Russet Burbank, can't be stored long-term below 48 degrees without darkening beyond processing standards. Northwest potato breeding programs, however, have been selecting for lines that fry light, even after months of storage at lower temperatures. A colder cellar cuts producers' losses to shrinkage and storage diseases while prolonging tuber dormancy.

"I think we're making good



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Brian Schneider, a technician at the University of Idaho Aberdeen Research and Extension Center, records his observations after making fries from an experimental potato line to test for cold-induced sweetening resistance.

gains on this front," said Rich Novy, a USDA potato breeder who collaborates with the UI program in Aberdeen.

The spuds in Novy's trials are stored for more than four months at 45 degrees and 40 degrees to "push the envelope."

Of the roughly 100,000 first-year clones produced in Aberdeen each year, one to three may ultimately emerge as varieties after more than a decade of trials. As lines draw nearer to release, they're also intensively evaluated elsewhere.

Washington State University potato physiologist Rick Knowles evaluates advanced lines from Aberdeen, Washington and Oregon. He explained cold-induced sweetening resistance is often lost when varieties are exposed to heat stress during the growing season.

Knowles simulates heat stress to evaluate responses of advanced lines, exposing them to 21 days of storage at 90 degrees immediately after harvest and before placing them in cold storage.

Knowles also compares how consistently advanced lines fry when raised in three growing environments — Southern Idaho, the Central Columbia Basin and Hermiston, Ore. He explained different growing and handling conditions can lead to variability.

Yi Wang, a UI post-harvest physiologist based in Kimberly, Idaho, further evaluates advanced Tri-State lines at UI's Food Technology Center in Caldwell — a pilot-scale potato processing plant.

Flooding raises Idaho crop disease concerns

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

SHELLEY, Idaho — David Mundt expects recent flooding caused by rapid snowmelt will claim at least a third of the 700 acres of fall wheat he planted.

"My dad has always told me the rule of thumb is if water stays on fall wheat for at least a week without sinking, it's probably dead," the Shelley farmer said. "It's been on for several weeks now."

But Mundt worries the cool, wet winter and prolonged valley snow cover has also created ideal conditions for diseases to move into his surviving wheat.

Based on boggy field conditions, crop experts predict Idaho grain farmers could be in for a tough season with diseases including pythium, rhizoctonia and snow mold. Complicating matters, a University of Idaho crop pathologist recently confirmed pythium from a southeast Idaho field with resistance to the most commonly used treatments to control it — metalaxyl and mefenoxam.

"The wheat that's still technically viable at this point, because it's been under the snow and ice for so long, it's a great host for multiple diseases," Mundt said. "I'll get together with my field man and try to make strategic decisions. If it's bad enough, we'll come in with glyphosate (herbicide) and start over."

Idaho Wheat Commission officials say flooding has hit the



Courtesy of David Mundt

Shelley, Idaho, farmer David Mundt diverts flood water from an inundated potato cellar, which was storing heavy equipment, into a nearby grain field. Mundt expects to lose about a third of his winter wheat crop to flooding — and potentially more of it to diseases.

western region of the state hardest. But in southeastern Idaho, February has also brought the worst flooding in many growers' memories.

For example, Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co. General Manager Steve Howser had to cut into the bank of his canal Feb. 10 to divert water and save a grower's home. He'll wait to repair the canal, anticipating another mid-February warm spell will bring renewed flooding.

"We've never had to do that before," Howser said. "We still haven't seen the really big runoff come yet."

University of Idaho Extension cereals pathologist Juliet Marshall agrees waterlogged, weakened plants may be more susceptible to diseases. Last summer, it was Marshall who sent in a Pingree-area grower's sickly grain for testing, where

the lab confirmed the presence of pythium that wasn't controlled by methoxym and metalaxyl.

"That probably means (resistance) is widespread at this point, or there's some substantial acreage that has it," Marshall said.

She's submitted a proposal to the Idaho Wheat Commission to study the regional incidence of pythium — and the onset of resistance, which is an established challenge in Washington and Oregon.

Fortunately, a new product with efficacy against pythium, called Intego, will be available this spring, said Mike Erickson, a seed treatment specialist with

McGregor Co. Erickson advises growers to spray and till any diseased grain, waiting two to three weeks before replanting and using a seed treatment. Erickson also notes the ample soil moisture should promote extra tiller growth and make healthy plants even more vigorous.

Marshall cautioned the extra soil moisture could also complicate fertilizer management, pushing nitrogen deeper into the soil profile, resulting in nutrient-deprived stands early in the season and causing overly high protein levels in the late season, once plant roots reach the nitrogen. She suggests applying fertilizer through irrigation as crops need it.

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