

# Labels, restrictions proposed for neonicotinoid pesticides

## Proponents of two bills argue pesticide class harms pollinators

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

SALEM — Neonicotinoid pesticides, which critics blame for death and illness among pollinators, would be subject to new restrictions and labeling rules under two bills before the Oregon Legislature.

Labels would be required for pesticides containing neonicotinoids, as well as seeds and raw crops treated with the chemicals, under Senate Bill 928.

The entire class of neonic-

otinoid insecticides would be restricted under Senate Bill 929 to be available only to licensed pesticide applicators, farmers and veterinarians.

The measures are necessary because neonicotinoids have been implicated in large-scale die-offs of pollinators, as well as long-term health problems for the species, according to proponents.

A March 27 hearing on the two bills before the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee attracted an overflow audience, including some supporters adorned with insect antenna headbands, wings and striped black-and-yellow outfits.

Proponents of the bill argued that studies have linked neonicotinoid pesticides to the decline of honey bees and other pollinators, adversely



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

A honeybee pollinates blueberry flowers. The entire class of neonicotinoid insecticides would be restricted under Senate Bill 929 in Oregon to be available only to licensed pesticide applicators, farmers and veterinarians. Supporters say the chemicals can hurt bees.

affecting their biological processes even when the exposure isn't lethal.

"When exposed, an entire plant becomes toxic, including the pollen and nectar," said Rep. Pam Marsh, D-Ashland, a sponsor of the bills.

It makes sense to limit neonicotinoid availability to farmers and others who are trained to use them judiciously, since many retail buyers don't carefully read pesticide instructions and often assume more is better, she said.

"We have to take action and we have to do it now," Marsh said.

Opponents of the bill argue the threat of neonicotinoids to pollinators is overstated, since they're unlikely to come across the chemicals in the field at the same high concentrations they would in laboratory experiments.

Raw agricultural and horticultural commodities would be labeled under SB 928 as being treated with neonicotinoids even if they contain no residue of the chemicals, said Scott Dahlman, policy director of the Oregonians for Food and Shelter agribusiness group.

"They do break down over time," he said.

An exemption in SB 929 allows farmers to use the insecticides but doesn't explain

who meets that description, Dahlman said. "There's no such thing as a farmer card to prove you're a farmer."

Neonicotinoids do pose a risk to pollinators, but restricting their usage would likely have unintended effects, said Paul Jepson, director of Oregon State University's Integrated Plant Protection Center.

Jepson said he's neutral on the bill but asked lawmakers to consider the trade-offs of the legislation. Without access to neonicotinoids, many backyard gardeners would probably substitute organophosphate and pyrethroid insecticides that also kill insects but are more toxic to humans, he said.

"I urge you to consider the consequences of using a blanket approach," Jepson said.

# Floodwaters overwhelm N. Idaho drainage districts

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**  
Capital Press

BONNERS FERRY, Idaho — Pumping snowmelt into the Kootenai River is an annual spring chore for Tim Dillin and the others who farm in his area of Northern Idaho.

Dillin explained that growers who work the roughly 45,000 acres of rain-fed agricultural land in the Kootenai Valley face a unique infrastructural challenge. Earthen dikes block most of the mountain streams — which are routed into drainage ditches across their farms — from the river. When river flows are high, the farmers must close the gravity-fed drains on their ditches and turn on pumps to evacuate the water.

This spring, however, the pumps haven't kept pace with the runoff, which has inundated vast expanses of farm ground. Dillin expects planting will be delayed by at least two to three weeks.

"Our best spring wheat we get in by April 20-25," Dillin said. "This year, I think a lot of fields people won't get planted until the end of May."



Courtesy of Tim Dillin

Water is evacuated by pumps and a gravity drain from drainage ditches in Northern Idaho's Kootenai Valley. Farmers in the valley say they have to pump water every spring, as mountain streams are blocked from flowing directly in the river by dikes, but flooding has been extensive this spring.

He's also concerned his late-planted canola may flower in July, when hot weather could reduce yields.

Snowpack in the region was about 115 percent of normal, but low-elevation snow melted rapidly and was followed by heavy March rains.

"The last time we've had this much water was the winter of 1996 to 1997," Dillin said.

In Southern Idaho, grow-

ments toward pumping costs under a treaty with operators of Kootenai Lake, located downstream in Canada. Lake operations often back up water into the Kootenai flats, raising river levels above the ditch drains. The situation is complicated when Libby Dam, located upstream from the valley's growers, makes flood-control releases.

"Most seasons we have to pump, but not like this year," Olson said. "It's going to delay us."

Wes Hubbard, an Idaho barley commissioner who farms at the opposite end of the valley from Olson and Dillin, said his son flew him over the area when he was home on spring break. He described what he saw as a "disaster."

"From the air, it looks to me as much as 50 percent is under water right now," Hubbard said. "We're always pumping, especially this time of year with spring runoff, but we're usually preventative, keeping ditches down to keep things flowing."

"There's nothing preventative about this."

# Washington member of Congress opposes grizzly bear restoration

By **DAN WHEAT**  
Capital Press

The National Park Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are moving forward with a plan to restore and reintroduce grizzly bears in the North Cascades without supporting sound science or adequate public meetings, says U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

Newhouse, whose 4th congressional district encompasses part of the North Cascades ecosystem, sent a letter to Karen Taylor-Goodrich, superintendent of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, on March 27 expressing his "firm opposition" to the plan.

"I believe such decisions should be made with substantial local input and support from the local communities that will be most impacted," Newhouse wrote.

The general consensus of people attending a March 2015 forum in Okanogan on the issue was "that their



Dan Wheat/Capital Press  
Dan Newhouse

concerns were not being taken seriously by federal officials," Newhouse wrote.

As a result, Newhouse brought the issue to the attention of NPS Director Jonathan Jarvis and USFWS Director Dan Ashe during House Natural Resource Committee hearings in March 2015.

While the directors assured him that public meetings would be conducted



Courtesy of Chris Morgan, Grizzly Bear Outreach Project

There are believed to be about 20 grizzly bears in the North Cascades of Washington with no reported interaction with ranchers or livestock.

appropriately, it subsequently came to his attention that recent public meetings in Okanogan were held in the same manner as those in 2015 "where many residents were not allowed to express their concerns and were treated in an unacceptable manner by the NPS and

USFWS employees conducting the session," Newhouse wrote.

He noted that the last confirmed sighting of a grizzly in the North Cascades was in 1996 and that the agencies' draft environmental impact statement found it "highly unlikely that the area contains a viable grizzly bear population."

Proposed restoration also may violate a 1995 state law banning transplanting or introduction of the bears, he said.

"I believe the federal government should defer to the will of state and local communities on species re-introduction issues. ... There are issues of higher priority that NPS should address... such as the roughly \$12 billion maintenance backlog on NPS lands," he wrote.

Many ranchers in Okanogan County, which includes part of the North Cascades Ecosystem, oppose grizzly bear reintroduction.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Senate Agriculture Chairwoman Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake, listens to a staff report before testifying in front of a House committee March 28 in Olympia on a bill to reopen rural Washington to new household wells. The bill, introduced by Warnick and backed by the Washington Farm Bureau, passed the Senate but has an uncertain future in the House.

## Alternatives to Senate's Hirst bill receive airing

### Plans depend on new government committees

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Two state agencies indicated support Tuesday for setting up dozens of "mitigation committees" to make sure new domestic wells don't draw water from fish, a proposal that a Washington Farm Bureau lobbyist called too complicated and too costly.

The watershed-level committees — made up of tribal, county and state officials — would approve projects to offset new well withdrawals.

The projects, funded by drillers of new wells, would respond to the state Supreme Court's Hirst decision. The court ruled in October that each landowner must prove and each county must verify that a new well won't take water from other uses, particularly stream flows for fish.

Counties, builders, bankers, real estate agents and anguished would-be rural homeowners say the court set an impractical standard. Environmentalists and tribes defend the decision as necessary to keep new wells from cumulatively harming fish.

The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday held a hearing on a bill passed by the Republican-led Senate that would roll back the Hirst decision.

The committee, however, also has before it two separate but similar proposals from majority House Democrats. Each proposal calls for the Department of Ecology to create mitigation plans and committees for watersheds, supported by fees of up to \$7,500 to drill a well.

"Both of those (bills) don't fix Hirst at all," Farm Bureau associate director of governmental relations Even Sheffels said. "So we're very nervous about what the committee will do."

The court's 6-3 ruling up-

to an Ecology study.

Ecology has shown no support for returning to the pre-Hirst policy.

Ecology water resources manager Dave Christensen said that a proposal by Rep. Larry Springer, D-Kirkland, balances development and fish protection. "We believe that, however small, cumulative impacts matter," he said.

Springer introduced a Hirst bill that resembled the Senate-passed bill. But it has been reworked and now more closely resembles a proposal by Rep. Derek Stanford, D-Bothell.

"We think (the proposals) are too complicated, too costly, too dependent on these watershed groups," Sheffels said.

Department of Fish and Wildlife water policy leader Michael Garrity said the Springer and Stanford plans "seem to be on the right track."

"They offer assurances that mitigation will be accomplished in a scientifically sound and protective manner," he said.

Senate Bill 5239 would be a simple solution, said the bill's prime sponsor, Sen. Judy Warnick, R-Moses Lake. Warnick said her bill would not infringe on Ecology's authority to protect stream flows and fish.

"It just gives a green light to a homeowner who has a few acres who would like to build a home there, a few acres to raise their family," she said.

The Hirst decision halted building plans for landowners throughout that state. Some of them urged lawmakers Tuesday to act swiftly to reopen rural Washington to new wells.

No bill, however, is likely to emerge soon.

Environmental groups argue the Hirst decision protects agricultural water rights, as well as fish.

Growers are unconcerned, said Jim Halstrom, lobbyist for the Washington Tree Fruit Association and Washington State Horticultural Association.

"We believe the potential for this is vastly overstated, and it's not a concern for any of us," he said.

## Some say Idaho could lead immigration reform discussion

By **SEAN ELLIS**  
Capital Press

BOISE — During a March 22 press conference, national leaders involved in immigration reform efforts said Idaho is in a unique position to lead the nation in that discussion.

Idaho is one of the most conservative states in the nation and its vibrant rural economy, which is driven by agriculture, stands on the shoulders of foreign-born labor, said Ali Noorani, executive director of the National Immigration Forum, which is based in Washington, D.C.

His point, made during a press conference sponsored by the Idaho Dairy Farmers' Association, is that Idaho is in a position to understand many people's desire for stronger border security but also the reality of how important foreign-born labor

is to the economy.

"So as one of the most conservative states in the country whose economy is so closely linked to the immigrant workforce, I think that (the Idaho) delegation can really change the debate," Noorani said. "I think that the Idaho delegation has an incredible opportunity to lead the nation forward in fixing our immigration system."

Noorani's stance was supported by Charlie Garrison, founder of the Garrison Group, a Washington, D.C.-based firm that deals with federal policy issues and represents the IDA on immigration.

Two of Idaho's four-member Republican congressional delegation, Sen. Mike Crapo and Rep. Raul Labrador, sit on their chambers' judiciary committees, which have jurisdiction over immigration issues, Garrison said.

Rep. Mike Simpson has a lot of seniority in the House and is chairman of the subcommittee on appropriations and Sen. Jim Risch "knows agriculture as well as anybody in the state knows agriculture," he said. "So the Idaho delegation is uniquely positioned to understand and ... be helpful on the issue because of their roles in the House and the Senate."

IDA officials recently traveled to D.C. to deliver the results of an Idaho petition, signed by 3,100 people, that calls for comprehensive immigration reform to members of the state's congressional delegation.

The petition and press conference are part of the dairy association's ongoing efforts to elevate the issue of immigration reform and pressure congress to act, said IDA Executive Director Bob Naer-