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Opinion

Editorial Board

Publisher
John Perry

Editor
Joe Beach

Managing Editor
Carl Sampson

opinions@capitalpress.com

Online: www.capitalpress.com/opinion

OUR VIEW



Associated Press File
President Donald Trump has proposed a reduction in the USDA budget for next year, but it's Congress that ultimately writes the federal spending plan.

Trump ag budget cuts just beginning of process

The Trump administration has proposed a 21 percent cut in discretionary spending for the Department of Agriculture, and ag interests are grumbling.

We understand the concerns, but it's too soon in the process to get too excited.

Here are the facts.

The president's plan cuts \$4.7 billion from the current budget for non-entitlement programs that are implemented by appropriation bills rather than enshrined in permanent law. Trump's plan still allocates \$17.9 billion for these types of programs. (Our colleagues at Politico framed that figure as "just" \$17.9 billion, suggesting that it's not a significant amount of money.)

The Trump budget cuts money for rural water and wastewater infrastructure loans, would reduce county ag service offices, eliminate spending on ag statistics, and end the

International Food for Education program.

None of the proposed cuts would impact spending on the so-called "mandatory" programs — the crop programs and welfare expenditures that make up \$130 billion of the USDA's current budget of \$155 billion.

We would not suggest that some of these proposed cuts could cause problems for farmers and ranchers. In many cases the statistics produced by the USDA are the only independent market information available to producers and the public at large. Their loss would be a tragedy. Similarly, not having a local Farm Service office would be a hassle.

We emphasize the tenuous nature of the administration document because the Trump plan lacks much detail. The traditional, full-budget document is said to be coming in May.

But more importantly, the Constitution gives the president absolutely no authority over producing the budget.

While the president can offer to Congress his suggestions for the next spending plan, and we appreciate any president's considerable weight in influencing policy, it is the Congress that actually enacts the budget.

Presidents of all stripes have proposed cuts in USDA's budget, eliminating one program or another to help pay for their own spending priorities. Then the Senate and House ag committees step in, and individual members use their influence to sway their colleagues to save or expand favored programs.

While the president's budget proposals have to be given due weight, we've seen too many of these plans wither on the vine to get too excited now over Trump's allocations.

Readers' views

Another side to the wolf death story

OR48, a recently collared male Canadian Grey wolf of the Shamrock Pack here in Wallowa County died as a result of biting into a cyanide powder trap set for coyotes. This coyote trap was set by a USDA Wildlife Service trapper. It was set on private property.

Of course there has been a chorus of outraged howling put up by those who have no working knowledge or personal investment in the management or removal of predators.

Even Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife expressed their shock and dismay that the un-intended, or "incidental taking" of a Canadian Grey wolf has occurred.

This shock and dismay is odd given the history of ODFW's behavior regarding their management of the predatory wolves.

A quick examination of ODFW's management of the Shamrock pack reveals numerous wolf/livestock depredation investigations being performed. The majority of these "investigations" resulted in livestock killings being categorized anything but a confirmed wolf-caused killing. Coyotes or "other" predators were suggested as being the culprits responsible for the loss of livestock.

If it is deemed by ODFW that most all livestock killing problems can be laid at the feet of coyote or "oth-

er" reasons who may argue with them? From personal experience challenging ODFW thought process can be a mostly futile effort.

There has been a near-refusal by ODFW to share collar GPS location data with area livestock owners. One can assume U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees are also kept in the same degree of "black-out" information silence.

A requested lethal removal of livestock killing/harassing Shamrock Canadian Grey wolves was refused outright by ODFW decision-makers, even though all Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan requirements had been met and even exceeded by the Shamrock pack for such a take. This ODFW refusal gave the impression the Shamrock pack was not and should not be of concern to private property owners.

There is also the fact private property owners are in no way obligated to provide habitat or safety zones for Oregon's latest predator newcomer. This is stated in the Oregon Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, page 10, Chapter One.

It is actually an Oregon Statute; ORS 496.192(1). "Nothing in the Oregon ESA is intended, by itself, to require an owner of any private land to take action to protect a threatened species or an endangered species, or to impose additional requirements or restrictions on the use of private land."

So, the coyote trap was set on private property, and

lo and behold ... a Shamrock pack Canadian Grey wolf was caught in the very trap set for coyotes. Maybe the same coyotes who were getting blamed for livestock killings?

Given these facts, it looks like this Incidental Take can ultimately be laid at the feet of ODFW.

Justice sometimes prevails.

*Kerry Tienhaara
Oregon Wolf Education
Joseph, Ore.*

There are other ways to fight Japanese beetles

In the February issue of the Capital Press, I was horrified to see that the Oregon Department of Agriculture is proposing to treat 1,000 acres in Bethany and the Cedar Mills areas of Washington County with acelepryn to battle the Japanese beetle. They propose spreading granules of acelepryn over the lawns of 2,500 private residences, parks and golf courses, each being treated yearly for 5 years.

Has the Oregon Department of Agriculture still not learned that pesticide use does not control pests? In the long term pests become resistant to pesticides which leads to heavier applications of the pesticides or the search for new poisons. Pesticides may kill the insect targeted but the constant low level of pesticide exposure to other species (including humans) can be devastating.

Pesticide granules in

lawns would expose birds, children, pets and other beneficial insects to its toxic effects. After a rain these pesticides enter the water system polluting streams and rivers. On the packaging for acelepryn it states drift and runoff may be hazardous to aquatic organisms. Then also being hazardous to the animals, birds and humans who might consume the fish of these streams.

It is well known that pesticide exposure can affect reproductive rates of birds and cause birth defects. I often wonder why 1 in 66 children being born are affected with a form of autism. Could it be due to the decades of low lever pesticide exposure?

There are safer alternatives to battle the Japanese beetle. The bacterial disease known as Milky disease was successfully used to control the beetle in 14 eastern states back in the 1940s. A parasitic wasp (*Tiphia Verulis*) has also been beneficial in controlling the Japanese beetle. These methods may take longer to gain control, but will not be polluting the environment while they are working.

Humans need to work with nature, not against her. If we don't, humans will be the ultimate losers. I would encourage the citizens of Washington County to refuse the treatments of your yards, parks and schools. I would also recommend the Department of Agriculture read Rachel Carson's "Silent Spring."

*Kim Tinker
Family Nurse Practitioner
Sandy, Ore.*

Washington's Voluntary Stewardship Program begins to take shape

By JAMES GOCHE'
For the Capital Press

**Guest
comment**
James Goché



Washington state's Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP) passed a milestone on March 8 when Thurston County became the first VSP pilot project to submit a final draft work plan for review and approval by the Washington State Conservation Commission.

Close behind is Chelan County, the second of two pilot projects commissioned by the Legislature, which is scheduled to submit its work plan later this month.

After this, the majority of Washington's counties will be following suit over the next several years and VSP will take root across the state.

VSP is a ground-breaking program enacted by the Washington State Legislature in 2011 that requires the 27 counties that "opted in" to develop a voluntary process for meeting the State's Growth Management Act's goals of supporting and enhancing agriculture and protecting critical areas in watersheds designated by the county commission.

The program is an alternative to GMA regulations and enforcement actions, and the litigation that it has encouraged in recent years.

VSP requires that agriculture and environmental protection be treated with equal importance and that local communities work together cooperatively to develop metrics and benchmarks that can be used to determine if the program's goals are being met.

In 2014, the two pilot project counties reached out to members of agricultural organizations, environmental groups, Native American Tribes and others to ask for representatives to serve on local VSP Watershed Groups. These Watershed Groups were then given the daunting responsibility of developing a draft Work Plan that turns an idea (voluntary stewardship) into a working program.

Data collection was one of the first priorities for Work Plan development and the Thurston County Watershed Group (TCWG) quickly discovered that while there was a great deal of information available about critical areas and related environmental issues, local agricultural data was spotty, incomplete and often out of date.

TCWG's solution was to create two subcommittees — a Technical Team comprised of environmental interests and government agency staffers to compile critical area data, and an Agricultural Viability Subcommittee comprised of local farmers, economists and educators to define "local agriculture" and figure out what it needs to be viable.

Over the next two years, the subcommittee conducted a national literature search with the help of county staff, consulted a variety of experts and conducted several work sessions with local agricultural producers and businesses. As a result, it came to several conclusions that have now been incorporated into

the Thurston VSP Work Plan draft.

The first was that farming and ranching rely on a healthy and growing "agricultural economy" to sustain their operations. Agricultural producers need a reasonable return on their investment of time and money in order to stay in business and keep "working lands" working.

Secondly, the subcommittee identified five critical elements that are necessary for "agricultural viability." The categories that these elements fall into are 1) Land, 2) Water, 3) Infrastructure, 4) Regulatory Reform, and 5) Access to Markets, Finance and Information.

Finally, the subcommittee created a two-track approach for assessing the "value" of local agriculture. The first track involves a "market analysis" of agricultural economic activity to determine the contributions that it makes to the local economy.

The second track assesses the "social or community values" that local agriculture, especially food production, represents in order to capture its non-monetary worth. The latter was deemed important because it accounts for why people are willing to "buy local," sometimes at higher prices, and helps capture all of the many benefits that local agriculture brings to the communities that it supports.

One other important feature of the Thurston plan is the notion of "adaptive management." VSP is a new and innovative approach for supporting agriculture and protecting the environment and so its implementation will have to be dynamic, starting with the best information available and then filling in the gaps through lessons learned. During an informal review of the Thurston plan in January, one member of the state review panel wryly noted that creating a VSP program is much like "passengers flying in an airplane while they are still in the process of constructing it."

The Thurston VSP Work Plan draft received good marks and positive feedback during its preliminary review and is now before the State Conservation Commission for final action. The Commission has 45 days to act and if both the Thurston and Chelan plans are approved and receive Legislative funding for implementation, Washington State should have active VSP programs underway on both sides of the Cascades by this summer with more to follow in the coming years.

The author is a volunteer member of the Thurston Watershed Group and has been serving as the chair of the Agricultural Viability Subcommittee. He is the managing partner of Friendly Grove Farm in Olympia, Wash., and is a former member of the Thurston Conservation District Board of Supervisors. In a former life, he helped one of Washington's larger counties enforce environmental regulations as a deputy prosecutor.

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