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Wolf group charts a quicker path to lethal control

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington's Wolf Advisory Group settled on a lethal-control policy March 30 that if in place last year would have allowed wildlife managers to shoot wolves in the Profanity Peak pack nearly three weeks earlier to stop attacks on cattle in the Colville National Forest.



Donny Martorello

The new policy lowers the threshold for lethal removal and gives the Department of Fish and Wildlife more leeway to act as a pack shows signs of habitually targeting livestock.

WDFW hopes earlier intervention will mean shooting fewer wolves to change the pack's behavior, the department's wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said. "This could save the lives of livestock and wolves," he said.

The group represents producers, environmentalists, hunters and animal-rights advocates. Members accepted the lethal-removal protocol to end a two-day meeting to review last year's policy and to revise it for the upcoming grazing season. WDFW will issue a written protocol in the coming weeks.

Martorello said he called WDFW Director Jim Unsworth during a break and got the director's support. Ultimately, the decision rests with Unsworth whether to shoot wolves to stop depredations.

Following a policy approved by the advisory group a year ago, Unsworth ordered wolves in the Profanity Peak to be culled after the fourth confirmed attack on livestock. The fourth depredation was confirmed 26 days after the first. WDFW eventually shot seven wolves, leaving four survivors in the pack.

Under the new policy, WDFW will consider lethal removal after three depredations within 30 days. Significantly, one depredation could be classified as "probable." Previously, only confirmed depredations counted toward triggering lethal removal. To confirm a wolf attack, WDFW investigators look for wounds to the flesh, but in some suspected cases only bones remain.

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Success in growing a co-op



Medical Lake, Wash., farmer Dan Sproule and LINC Foods co-founder Beth Robinette look over pea shoots that Sproule brought to the co-op warehouse for delivery to customers March 14 in Spokane.



Carrots sit in the back of Latah, Wash., farmer Bruce Hogan's car as he delivers them to LINC Foods March 14 in Spokane.

LINC Foods connects farmers with new markets around region

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Spokane — The atmosphere is busy but light on a recent March morning at the new LINC Foods warehouse in north Spokane.

Delivery truck driver Kyle Merritt gathers produce for an order inside the walk-in cooler.

Founder Beth Robinette puts beef cuts from her family ranch in gift boxes for customers.



Medical Lake, Wash., farmer Dan Sproule chats with Robinette and Merritt as he drops off beets and pea shoots, among other items.

Latah, Wash., farmer Bruce Hogan has bags of oversize carrots in the back of his car when he pulls up to the entrance. The carrots will be cut into bite-size coins for public school children's lunches.

They are members of a cooperative of 49 farmer-owners, LINC Foods — the acronym stands for Local Inland Northwest Cooperative — that connects them with new markets around the region.

The co-op now handles several thousand pounds of produce each week, Robinette said.

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Photos by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Delivery truck driver and malting assistant Kyle Merritt gathers up produce to deliver orders March 14 in the LINC Foods walk-in cooler in Spokane.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

John Purcell, Monsanto's research and development and Hawaii business lead, stands in one of the greenhouses at the company's vegetable seed R&D facility in Woodland, Calif., on March 28. He says the company is placing a greater emphasis on outreach.

Outreach key to improving Monsanto's image, official says

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

WOODLAND, Calif. — Better outreach to consumers and efforts to educate the public are keys to improving Monsanto's image amid controversies over genetically-modified crops and an impending acquisition by fellow giant Bayer, a top company official said.

In the last few years, Monsanto has stepped up public and media tours of its facilities and made greater use of social media to explain its work, said John Purcell, who runs the company's vegetable seed research and development lab in Woodland.

"It leads to some interesting conversations," Purcell said of the company's "Big Ag" image. "I think for certain folks within the organization, it is a challenge. For those of us who've been in it awhile, there's a lot of pride in what we do."

"Spending the time I have working with people who feed the world ... has been an amazing experience," he said.

Purcell's remarks during a question-and-answer session came as company officials gave reporters a tour of the Woodland facility, which develops seeds for tomatoes, onions and other vegetables, and put on presentations on agricultural technology advances. The lab accelerates the natural plant breeding process but does not use GMO technology.

The tour was similar to one held last summer for journalists at Monsanto's Chesterfield Village Research Facility outside St. Louis, where company leaders acknowledged that they have been slow to engage GMO critics and were surprised by the vitriolic reaction to Monsanto's work.

In the last few years, the company has been "intentional" about becoming more transparent and explaining its role in agriculture, Purcell said. As part of that, the Woodland lab holds an open house each summer.

"It's the model we have to embrace in agriculture," Purcell said. "We have to pay attention to the 98 percent (of Americans who don't farm). Not just with GMOs, but everything."

The push proceeds as regulators in the U.S. and Europe are reviewing the \$57 billion acquisition of Monsanto by Bayer, the German pharmaceutical and chemical company. Purcell said company leaders expect the deal to close by the end of this year.

"The one thing that gets people excited is that the two companies are definitely committed to innovation," he said.

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