

# Washington

## State legislature seeks to shield wolf-plagued ranchers from threats

Bill to prevent WDFW from disclosing records

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Washington Senate and House have approved legislation to withhold records that name ranchers who report that wolves are attacking livestock or sign agreements to prevent depredations.

House Bill 1465 stems from threats ranchers and public employees received last summer as the Department of Fish and Wildlife shot wolves preying on cattle in the Colville National Forest in northeast Washington.

The region's senator, Shelly Short, R-Addy, said she hoped holding back the identity of ranchers would encourage producers to work with WDFW.

"I don't take lightly that this bill allows this information to be exempt from the Public Records Act," she said. "What this bill doesn't do is (prevent) folks from having access to department decisions."

The Senate passed the bill 40-7 on Friday after making



Courtesy of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

A wolf walks in the snow. State lawmakers are moving a bill to withhold records that identify ranchers who help state wildlife managers investigate and prevent attacks by wolves on livestock. The bill stems from threats against ranchers from people angry with state's use of lethal control to stop depredations.

minor changes to a version the House passed last month.

Ranchers along with state and local officials reported being harassed and receiving death threats from people angry with the shooting of seven wolves in the Profanity Peak pack. No suspects were identified or arrested.

The bill originally proposed withholding records that would identify state wildlife managers or contractors connected with responding to depredations.

The original bill also would have allowed WDFW to withhold where wolves were attacking livestock, beyond citing the pack's territory. Washington wolfpacks range over territories as large as 635 square miles, according to WDFW. The department now reports the township where attacks occur. Townships are normally 36 square miles.

The bill was narrowed to focus on withholding WDFW records that identify ranchers who report depredations or

have signed agreements specifying how they will prevent conflicts between livestock and wolves. The agreements make ranchers eligible for state funding.

WDFW reported entering into 54 agreements with livestock producers in 2016 and spending \$410,000 to help them guard their animals.

Some ranchers who work informally with WDFW to prevent depredations say they're concerned that signing an agreement implies they're satisfied with the state's policy of encouraging wolves to recolonize the state.

WDFW estimates the state has at least 115 wolves and anticipates the population will grow by about one-third a year. Most wolves are in Ferry, Okanogan, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties.

Short said lawmakers whose constituents support having a stable and widespread wolf population should back the bill.

"I believe this bill becomes an important tool to increase the willingness of folks who are dealing with recovering populations," Short said. "It will encourage them to work more directly with the department."



Courtesy of Tim Murray/Washington State University

Snow mold on a wheat field. Some farmers in southeastern Washington say they are seeing pink snow mold, an unusual occurrence in that region.

## SE Washington wheat farmers face pink snow mold

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Wheat farmers in southeastern Washington state are dealing with pink snow mold following the unusually hard winter.

Snow mold is most common in wheat crops on the northern tier of the state, said Tim Murray, Washington State University Extension plant pathologist.

The disease isn't typical for the southeastern corner of the state, which tends to be a little warmer, he said, adding that pink snow mold is a first for the farmers in the area.

"It's certainly uncommon to have two solid months of snow cover with no let up," Murray said. Prolonged snow cover promotes snow mold.

Wheat varieties tended to vary in their response to the disease, Murray said. Most tended to be more susceptible.

"Up (north), the growers know this is a chronic problem and so would typically have planted a variety that's resistant," he said. "Whereas down in the Prescott-Waitsburg-Walla Walla area, this is not a problem that growers are thinking about. Their variety selection is based on other problems."

Prescott has a lot of rolling hills. The fields showing the most damage were north-facing slopes, Murray said.

"In some fields there were a lot of smallish areas with damage, but collectively they add up," he said.

Brad Tompkins, who farms in northern Walla Walla County, estimates the disease has impacted 20 percent of his fields.

"It's the first time we've ever seen it," he said. "Our family's farmed in this area over 100 years, so it's unusual."

It wasn't clear how much the fields would recover, Murray said. He typically advises growers to wait three to four weeks to see what regrows.

"When the snow comes off, everything looks bad," he said.

Tompkins said his fields were not recovering.

"We're a 70-bushel ranch, and in those places I'd be lucky to get 10 bushels," he said. "It's pretty devastating."

One farmer told Murray the spots in his field were 10 percent regrown, but he was electing not to re-seed.

"With the (price) of wheat at \$4, he figured it wasn't really worth it to try to till in these little spots," Murray said. "It's a lot easier to get in and reseed a large area than it is a small area."

A farmer with 90 acres did plan to reseed.

Tompkins doesn't plan to reseed, due to spring weather delaying planting. He doesn't expect many neighbors to opt to reseed either, he said.

Crop insurance will help if Tompkins has a yield loss.

Snow is still coming off fields in some of the more usual snow mold areas farther north.

"This was a very unusual winter," Murray said. "If we get back to a normal weather pattern, I would not expect it to be a problem again right away."

Tompkins plans to keep in contact with Murray throughout the rest of the crop year.

"It's hopefully a once in a lifetime thing," he said. "From a farmer standpoint, you just add it to another bunch of problems that could potentially happen, I guess. It wasn't on the shelf, but it is now."

## Washington hemp rules near finish line

Licenses may be available by mid-May

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington's rules for hemp were criticized Friday as too restrictive and expensive, but also praised for keeping the state and prospective growers on the right side of federal authorities.

If state Agriculture Director Derek Sandison signs the rules April 13 as scheduled, the state could issue licenses to grow or process hemp as soon as May 15.

"It's hard to say with any certainty who will pull the trigger and plant. I know there's a lot of interest," WSDA hemp coordinator Emily Febles said.

The rules, which went through a final public hearing Friday, hew to the leeway the 2014 Farm Bill gave states to test hemp as a commercial crop, even though it remains a federally controlled substance.

As a result, Washington rules for buying and planting seeds, and selling, transporting and processing plants likely will be more restrictive than in some states.

WSDA inspectors will have access to hemp farms and processing plants, and their records. The state will test hemp fields to make sure the plants aren't too high in the chemical compound that makes marijuana popular.

WSDA and some hemp ad-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Hemp consultant Joy Beckerman, left, and farmer Ellen Russo of Centralia talk after a Washington Department of Agriculture hearing on rules for growing and processing hemp April 7 in Olympia. WSDA could start issuing licenses as soon as May 15.

vocates say the industry will profit in the long run by staying within federal law.

The advantages include being eligible for USDA research grants and organic certification, federal water and financial services, hemp consultant Joy Beckerman said.

"This is the beginning. To expect to go from prohibition to utopia right away is unrealistic," she said.

Fees and location restrictions are two possible obstacles for hemp farms.

The Legislature instructed WSDA to make the regulatory program self-supporting. WSDA can only make a rough estimate for how high the fees need to be. To start, prospective hemp pioneers must pay a nonrefundable \$450 application fee and then \$300 for a license good for one year.

Farmers and processors also must pay for field inspec-

tions, and seed and plant tests, likely costing hundreds of dollars, according to a WSDA analysis.

Centralia vegetable farmer Ellen Russo said she's interested in planting hemp, but won't be able to afford the fees.

"No way," she said. "I think it's pushing small farmers away. The fees are so high."

Also, Washington already has a thriving, tax-generating marijuana industry. Hemp farms must be at least 4 miles from the nearest marijuana grow to guard against cross-pollination. Febles said the department would be interested in research to determine whether a 4-mile buffer is too much or too little.

"We don't want to create in-fighting between our industries," she said. "If we can play nice with everybody, it would be best both for industrial hemp and marijuana."

Other rules include:

- No one with a felony drug conviction in the past 10 years will be issued a hemp license.
- Processing hemp won't be allowed in homes. Some people said Friday this will prevent hemp from developing as a cottage industry. Febles said the department was concerned about requiring unrestricted access to private homes.
- Growers must immediately plant hemp seeds delivered to their farm.
- The federal Drug Enforcement Administration recently gave the state permission to import hemp seeds. Growers can order seeds now and have them delivered to WSDA's storage locker in Spokane in anticipation of planting in May. "You will be taking a risk," Febles said. "If you're not licensed, you would never be able to access your seeds."

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