



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Wolves and other predators are the subject of environmental lawsuits around the West.

A new challenge to USDA predator control

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

Environmentalists have filed a lawsuit challenging the legality of USDA's predator control efforts in Idaho, arguing the environmental effects were inadequately studied.

The complaint, filed by Western Watersheds Project, Wildearth Guardians, Center for Biological Diversity and Predator Defense, seeks to stop "killing projects" by USDA's Wildlife Services division until a new analysis is complete.

An environmental assessment by USDA authorizing predator control by Wildlife Services in Idaho violated the National Environmental Policy Act by failing to disclose the full "direct, indirect and cumulative effects" of these activities, the complaint said.

Wildlife Services should have conducted a more comprehensive "environmental impact statement," or EIS, that took into account the total effects of killing black bears, coyotes, cougars and wolves in addition to poisoning ravens and starlings, the plaintiffs claim.

"It does not disclose how the areas in which it conducts these activities may overlap with one another or how they may act in concert to increase or change impacts on the environment," according to the complaint.

A spokesman for USDA

said the agency does not comment on pending litigation.

A more extensive analysis is necessary because Wildlife Services has committed to killing ravens at the direction of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game to protect the greater sage grouse, the complaint said.

Similar lawsuits against Wildlife Services have recently yielded mixed results for environmental groups.

A complaint filed by Wildearth Guardians challenging environmental studies that underpinned USDA's predator control programs in Nevada and elsewhere was initially dismissed by a federal judge in 2013.

However, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the case in 2015 and USDA settled it last year, agreeing to update the environmental studies and avoid killing predators in Nevada's wilderness areas and wilderness study areas until then.

Several of the same plaintiffs in the recent Idaho case also filed a complaint in 2016 against Wildlife Service's agreement to kill wolves at the behest of Oregon wildlife regulators.

A federal judge dismissed that lawsuit last month, finding that USDA wasn't required to perform an environmental review of the program because Oregon officials could kill wolves regardless of the federal agency's participation.

Record crop possible for Pacific Northwest cherries

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — The 2017 Pacific Northwest sweet cherry crop is forecast at 22.7 million, 20-pound boxes, but it could easily exceed the 23.2 million-box record set in 2014, several growers said May 17 at the Five State Cherry Commission meeting.

But they also foresee a good spread of 90 to 100 days to harvest the crop, which they hope makes for orderly supply and sales and good prices.

"This crop is bigger but will have more shipping days. Last year we had 20 days to move the bulk of the crop. This year it should be 40 so it will sell like a smaller crop," said West Mathison, president of Stemilt Growers, Wenatchee.

The 2016 crop was 20.97 million boxes, the third-largest in history. Many growers said this year's crop could well be 15 to 25 percent larger. That would put it in the 24 million- to 26 million-box range.

"We will have lots of cherries," said B.J. Thurlby, president of the industry promotional arm Northwest Cherry Growers and the Washington State Fruit Commission in Yakima.

In 2009 and 2012, weather-caused harvest compression — when the whole crop matured at about the same time — caused a glut in the supply chain and depressed prices. Growers are crossing their fingers that doesn't happen this year.

After two years of record-early harvest starts driven by warm springs, this year's cooler spring is bringing the start back to normal, or slightly later than normal.

First cherries

For years, the first cherries picked in the state have been the Chelan variety at the orchard of John and Debra Doebler at Sentinel Gap north of Mattawa. Heat reflected into their orchard from high basalt cliffs brings early maturity.

Their normal start is June 1. Last year was their earliest ever, on May 18, and the year before it was May 23, giving Stemilt Growers the first cherries to pack.

At the meeting, Mathison



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Ryan and Travis Doebler show green Bing cherries in their Mattawa, Wash., orchard on May 17 that they say will be ready to pick June 15. Their Chelan variety will be ready around June 5 or 7 and are always the first picked in the state.

said the first cherries will probably be picked June 12 this year. But later that day in their orchard, the Doebler sons, Ryan, 30, and Travis, 26, estimated a start of June 5 or 6. Their father, John, said June 7 or 8 is more likely.

"Usually, the warehouse comes out and says, 'Let's start tomorrow and then they do and whoops, it's too green.' Then it's 'Let's wait a day,'" Debra Doebler said.

"There's always an eagerness but there's no real reason to be early because California has plenty of fruit," John Doebler said. "It's better to be patient and have better quality."

The Pacific Northwest harvests about 80 percent of the national sweet cherry crop, and California harvests 15 percent, followed by Michigan and New York. Washington grows roughly 85 percent of the PNW crop.

2016 prices have not yet been released by USDA, but Washington's 2015 crop garnered \$436.9 million and averaged \$19.70 per box. Those were low due to harvest compression from hot weather. The national value of sweet cherry sales that year was \$758.9 million.

California harvests cherries before the PNW and for several years has been hindered by bad weather.

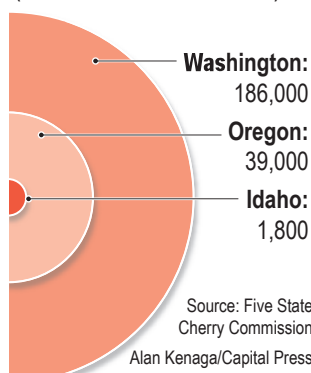
This year, it has its largest crop in years, estimated at 7 million to 8.5 million, 15-pound boxes.

The bulk of the California crop will be harvested the weeks of May 21 and 28 and should be

Pacific Northwest cherry production forecast for 2017

Washington state is forecast to produce 186,000 tons of sweet cherries in 2017, up more than 24 percent from 2016. The PNW harvests about 80 percent of the national crop annually.

(Harvest forecast in tons)



wrapping up as Washington's harvest ramps up.

"I worry about California having some carry-over. There's always some shippers down there who sit on some fruit and then put it out after we start. I hope that doesn't happen this year. Those little nuances can really affect us," Thurlby said.

He said Washington's late start makes him nervous about having enough volume for Fourth of July sales. He anticipated roughly 5 million boxes in June, 14 million in July and 4 million in August.

"I pray we hit the Fourth with some volume and if every retailer is at \$5.99 per pound,

we are dead. We need to get ads (with prices of \$3.99 and \$2.99 per pound) going for momentum," Thurlby said.

Export outlook

The crop in Turkey is early this year and should be finished by mid-July, opening a window for Northwest sales into Europe, he said.

South Korea, China, Southeast Asia and Mexico are priority foreign markets with Myanmar and Cambodia showing promise for the future, said Keith Hu, international program director of Northwest Cherry Growers.

A big help to exports is a new Western Distribution Services' cold storage facility next to Sea-Tac Airport, Thurlby said.

"Last year, we put more fruit through Sea-Tac than ever before, but we've always needed more cold storage there so this has the potential to really help us," he said.

The Washington breakdown is: Wenatchee district 100,000 tons, up from 86,368 in 2016 and 87,248 in 2015; Yakima district 85,000 up from 62,850 in 2016 and 78,019 in 2015.

The Oregon breakdown: Hood River, 7,000, down from 7,055 in 2016 and up from 4,860 in 2015; The Dalles, 30,000, down from 33,330 in 2016 but up from 16,766 in 2015; Milton-Freewater, 2,000, up from 771 in 2016 and 158 in 2015.

The Five State Cherry Commission adopted an \$18 per ton grower assessment for promotions.

WSDA to certify organic pot

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington tops the country in many organic crops such as apples and pears, and may soon lead the nation in government-sanctioned organic marijuana, too.

Gov. Jay Inslee signed legislation last week to make the Evergreen state the first to recognize organic pot.

The bill directs the state Department of Agriculture to write rules for certifying organic marijuana and to fine growers and retailers who make false claims.

"It's another way to normalize the industry. To have some oversight for claims being made," said Lara Kaminisky, executive director of The Cannabis Alliance, which backed the bill.

Marijuana has grown into a \$1 billion industry since Washington voters in 2012 legalized recreational marijuana. Colorado voters legalized pot the same day, but lawmakers in that state rejected a bill last year to certify organic marijuana. Opponents said the organic label would imply marijuana has no health effects.

Washington lawmakers approved organic marijuana last month in a wide-ranging cannabis bill. Other provisions received more attention.

WSDA Organic Program Manager Brenda Book said the department probably won't have a certification program fully operating until the 2019 growing season. Although standard organic farming practices apply to marijuana, WSDA must write

a separate state rule because marijuana is illegal under federal law.

"The only reason to develop a state program for marijuana is because of the lack of recognition on the federal side," she said.

WSDA's organic-certification program does not receive federal funds, but it does operate under USDA rules. As a result, WSDA won't be able to label organic marijuana "organic."

"That would be a problem because that's a federally regulated term," Book said.

The department has not suggested an alternative word or phrase.

"If it's going to work for the industry, they have to get behind it and market it," Book said.

Kaminisky said coming up with a name and then telling consumers what it means will be a challenge.

"Of course, it would be nice to call it 'organic,'" she said. "To say 'organic' would immediately resonate with people."

Washington ranks behind only California in the farm-gate value of organically grown crops, according to a report by the Washington State University Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources.

Besides apples and pears, Washington leads the country in organically grown sweet cherries, pears, juice grapes, sweet corn, onions, snap beans, potatoes, green peas and eggs, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

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