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Dale Kolke/Calif. Department of Water Resources
Water rushes into the diversion pool from a damaged Oroville Dam spillway. Repairs of the spillways continue.

State to hold another round of meetings on Oroville project

OROVILLE, Calif. — The state Department of Water Resources is sponsoring another round of community meetings to report on the progress of the Oroville Dam spillway reconstruction.

The meetings will be at the following locations:

- July 17 at the Oroville Municipal Auditorium, 1200 Myers St.

- July 19 in the Sierra Nevada Room at the state Department of Transportation's District 3 office, 703 B St., Marysville.

- July 24 at Boyd Hall, 1895 Lassen Blvd., Yuba City.

Each of the meetings will begin at 6 p.m. and follow a similar format. DWR leaders and experts will give an update on the Lake Oroville spillway repair project and take questions and comments.

The meetings will be similar to those held in April and May. They come as the DWR in April awarded

a \$275.4 million contract to the Omaha, Neb.-based Kiewit Infrastructure Co. for permanent repair work on the spillways, which is expected to continue through the summer.

The state wants to have its system operating by Nov. 1, the start of the winter rainy season.

Lake Oroville is the main reservoir for the State Water Project, which irrigates more than 600,000 acres of Central Valley farmland and serves 20 million urban customers in the San Francisco Bay area and Southern California.

Spillway ruptures in February led to the two-day evacuation of about 188,000 area residents and threatened a large portion of the Eastern Sacramento Valley's \$1.5 billion agriculture industry, including rice and tree crops and several processors along the Highway 99 corridor between Chico and Yuba City.

State collars wolf from new pack

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SUSANVILLE, Calif. — Ranchers and a wolf advocate are praising the state's handling of a newly discovered pack in Lassen County.

Pamela Flick, the California representative for Defenders of Wildlife, says she's glad the state Department of Fish and Wildlife put a radio collar on the alpha female of the Lassen Pack.

The pack's presence was confirmed last week. It is the second wolfpack to settle in California. The Shasta Pack was identified near the Oregon state line in 2015.

"The information gathered by the collar can be shared with ranchers running livestock near the pack to help inform management, including the use of proactive strategies like increasing human presence and other tools to reduce conflicts between wolves and livestock," Flick said in an email.

Such "coexistence strategies" were the focus of a workshop held in Hat Creek, Calif., in mid-June, hosted by Flick and state and federal wildlife officials. At the workshop, top DFW officials were grilled by cattle producers who perceive the agency as slow to notify landowners of nearby wolf sightings.

Several attendees, including rancher and Shasta County Supervisor Mary Rickert, urged the DFW to collar wolves so producers could learn more quickly that the predators are in the area and move their livestock out of



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Pamela Flick, right, of Defenders of Wildlife and Dennis Orthmeyer of USDA Wildlife Services demonstrate how to install a radio collar to deter wolves from attacking grazing cattle. Flick praises state wildlife officials for radio collaring a wolf in the newly discovered Lassen Pack.

danger, if possible.

"As long as the government can be diligent about notifying us, then it will work," Rickert said in an interview.

DFW wildlife manager Karen Kovacs told the ranchers that radio collars are "in our plan."

"One key point of discussion at that event was that many diverse stakeholders ... all agree that it is critical to collar at least one wolf from each known wolf family in order to track pack activities and inform local landowners and ranchers of nearby wolf presence," Flick said.

Several ranchers have reported seeing wolf tracks in Lassen County in recent

weeks. Rancher Joe Egen said in an interview he had considered not turning his cattle out on his summer range but decided to do so with a heavy human presence.

Biologists captured the 75-pound female gray wolf on June 30 after 12 days of trapping attempts, according to a state news release. They examined the wolf and fitted her with a tracking collar.

She had given birth to pups this spring, said Deana Clifford, the DFW's senior wildlife veterinarian.

Trail cameras operated by the U.S. Forest Service captured photos of the mother and three pups. While much of the pack's activity has

been in Lassen County, tracks have also been confirmed in Plumas County, officials said.

The collar will keep track of the mother's activity, survival, reproduction and prey preferences, the release explained. Officials say they hope the collar will help minimize wolf-livestock conflicts by providing information about the pack's location.

State and federal protections make it illegal to kill or hunt gray wolves in California. Wolf advocates and state officials have been promoting nonlethal means of warding off wolves, including using guardian dogs, motion-sensor lights, brightly colored flags or range riders.

New almond plantings boost production as shipments soar

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Expectations for a record almond crop this year continue to rise, and shipments are keeping pace with production.

Growers in California should expect to harvest 2.25 billion meat pounds this year, a more than 5 percent increase from the 2016 production of 2.14 billion meat pounds, according to the National Agri-

cultural Statistics Service.

The harvest will begin as the industry caps off a big shipping year at the end of July. Domestic shipments and exports are up 14 percent and 17 percent, respectively, for the 2016-17 crop year that finishes this month, according to the Almond Board of California. U.S. shipments in June were up 22 percent from last year, the board reported.

"We expect we'll have a record shipment year," board

president and chief executive officer Richard Waycott told the Capital Press. "We'll reach the end of this month with over 2 billion pounds shipped for the first time in history. All regions of the world have increased their consumption."

NASS' latest production estimate is more than 2 percent higher than the agency's subjective forecast in May. The apparent bumper crop is fueled more by new plantings rather than an abundance of

nuts on trees.

The average nut set per tree this year is 5,714, down 7.2 percent from the 2016 crop, reports the NASS.

But bearing acreage is expected to reach the 1 million mark this year, up from 940,000 acres in 2016, according to NASS.

"In general I would say that the crop is pretty good," said Dani Lightle, a University of California Cooperative Extension orchard systems adviser in Orland. "There's certainly some orchards that hit the weather wrong with the bloom so they're a little lighter."

The next task for growers is to prevent damage from heat, as Central Valley temperatures have soared well into the triple digits for a couple of stretches this summer. But so far, "most orchards are doing OK," Lightle said.

Winter storms and cold weather extended the bloom in February and March, as significant rains caused some bee boxes to rest in standing water and made spray applications more difficult.

Nonpareils — one of the



Tim Hearden/Capital Press File

Kevin Davies operates a tractor with a sweeper that picks up almonds as a bankout driver follows during harvest in an orchard in Gerber, Calif. Almond producers are expecting to harvest a record 2.25 billion meat pounds later this summer.

earliest and most popular varieties — recorded all of 29 "bee hours," Lightle said. But that was apparently enough to improve Nonpareils' nut set from last year. This year's average set is 5,717, up 2.4 percent from 2016, according to NASS.

The growth comes as the industry is still recovering from a price slide that began in late 2015, as prices fell

by nearly half from the more than \$4 a pound that was paid for some almonds during the 2014 crop year.

However, almond production has remained profitable despite the slide, UCCE adviser Roger Duncan has said.

Prices have stabilized in recent months as global demand remains healthy, growers say. And the Almond Board wants to keep it that way.

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Chocolate milk off menu at San Francisco schools

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — San Francisco school kids who learned to live without soda and candy will soon have to give up chocolate milk, too.

The city's school district will ban chocolate milk in elementary and middle schools this fall and in high schools in the spring, the San Francisco Chronicle reported Monday.

The school district already bans sodas in schools and doesn't allow cookies or other sweets to be served with lunch.

One carton of chocolate milk includes about 40 percent of the recommended daily allowance of sugar in a child's diet, supporters point out.

Officials in San Francisco tested the ban in five schools over the past school year and found that in two, there was no decrease in the number of milk cartons kids consumed. There was only a slight dip in the other three schools.

"The kids grumbled about it for a couple of days," said Libby Albert, executive director of the district's Student Nutrition Services. But for the most part, they just switched to

white milk, she said.

Most elementary and middle school students attending the summer session at George Washington High School interviewed during a recent school lunch said they didn't care whether chocolate milk was offered.

Sebastian Ong, 8, said chocolate milk is "yummy and delicious," and the absence of it at school would be "a bummer, but whatever."

But banning chocolate milk might not be the best choice for every school, said Marlene Schwartz, director of the University of Connecticut Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity.

There are students who strongly prefer flavored milk and who might have nutritional deficiencies, Schwartz said. It might make more sense to offer chocolate milk to such children ensure they get the calcium, vitamin D and potassium they need, she said.

"You kind of have to know your student body," Schwartz said. "Districts have to make an informed decision."