

Washington

Grain Commission leader adds U.S. Wheat chairman to resume

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Mike Miller is balancing several jobs these days.

The Ritzville, Wash., farmer took over as chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates July 11 during the organization's annual meeting in Annapolis, Md.

Miller is also chairman of the Washington Grain Commission, a title he'll hold until the end of the year. He credits fellow commissioners Brit Ausman and Gary Bailey with taking on many of the duties for that board.

"We're a pretty good team," he said.

And he just started harvesting this year's crop this week.

"The moisture looks great,



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Mike Miller is a Ritzville, Wash., farmer, chairman of the Washington Grain Commission and the new chairman of U.S. Wheat Associates.

the quality looks good, the straw is quite tough," he said.

Miller will serve a one-year term at U.S. Wheat just as

longtime president Alan Tracy retired July 1 and former vice president of overseas operation Vince Peterson took over

the top job. Tracy will continue on as a senior adviser, according to U.S. Wheat.

Miller says it's been business as usual at the organization.

"My role right now is to bring the board along to any subtle changes Vince has," he said. "But Vince and Alan have been working together for decades. The preparation has been in place."

Pacific Northwest farmers will see a continued emphasis on South America and Asia as customers.

Miller expects more focus on trade policy as farm bill discussions get underway. The industry is watching for the possible renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

"We obviously have a very keen interest, because Mexico and Canada are our partners," he said.

Miller said the industry needs to convince decision makers in charge of the budget that the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service's Market Access Program and Foreign Market Development program are critical to developing international markets.

"They came back with a zero from the president's budget, but that's a beginning step," he said.

Miller said he is excited by U.S. Wheat's existing overseas team and the standards they hold themselves to while representing wheat farmers.

"The rest of the world is trying to mimic our marketing

policy," he said. "That's the ultimate compliment."

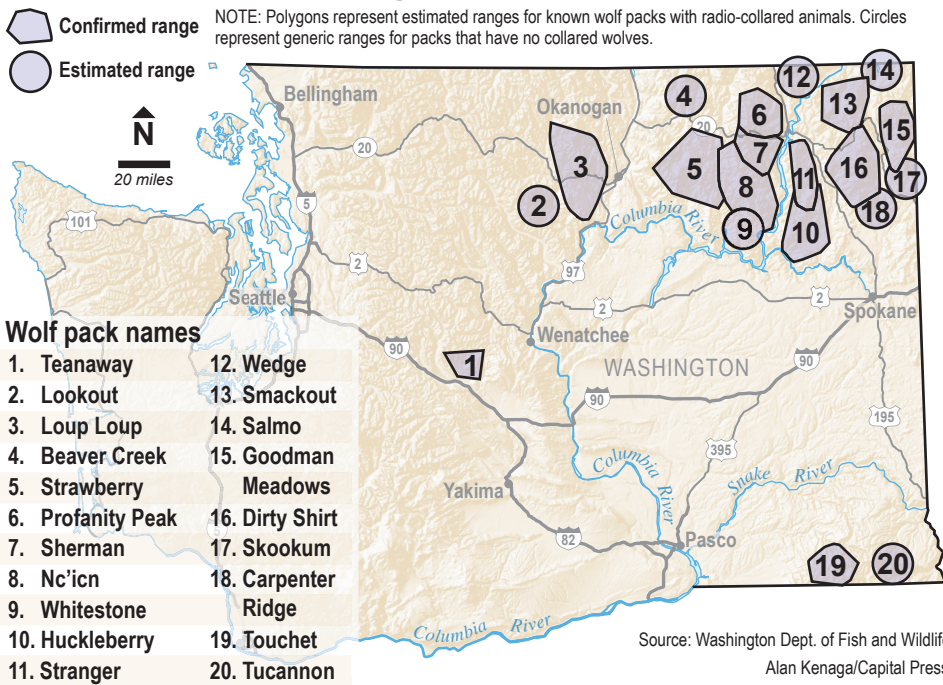
Fellow Washington commission board member Dana Herron said Miller is effective as a leader. He credits Miller with guiding an increased focus on the importance of wheat quality and end-use functionality.

"We will prioritize market development like it's never been prioritized before," Herron said.

When his term is over next year, Miller most hopes to maintain the momentum built by previous leaders and pass it on to the next chairman.

"This is a really humbling experience for me," he said. "I look forward to the challenges that are ahead, within reason."

Known Washington wolf packs (As of Dec. 2016)



NE Washington wolfpack kills second calf

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington wildlife managers have confirmed a second calf has been killed this grazing season by a wolfpack in Ferry County in north-east Washington.

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife reported Friday that a range rider found the carcass two days earlier on a Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment.

WDFW had earlier confirmed the Sherman pack killed a calf June 12 in the same area. The department said it was unable to determine whether another calf found dead at approximately the same time and place was killed by wolves because only bones remained.

According to WDFW policy, the department will consider shooting a wolf or two if a pack attacks livestock three times within 30 days

or four times within one year and non-lethal deterrence has been ineffective.

The ranch whose calf was found dead July 12 has five contract range riders checking on herds, according to WDFW.

Evidence such as radio-collar data, signs of a struggle and injuries suffered by the calf pointed to an attack by one or more members of the Sherman pack, according to WDFW.

Newhouse amendment would expand farmworker housing use

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

USDA-funded farmworker housing could be reopened to H-2A visa foreign guestworkers under an amendment to the 2018 House Agricultural Appropriations bill from Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

The House Appropriations Committee passed the bill July 12.

If passed by the full House and Senate, the provision will benefit a 70-bed Yakima Housing Authority facility in Granger, Wash., next year and similar farmworker housing in Oroville, Wash., said Dan Fazio, director of the farm labor association WAFLA in Olympia.

USDA-funded farmworker housing was closed to H-2A workers by the Obama administration under the premise they could displace domestic workers, Fazio said.

"The irony is many domestic workers lack work authorization so those here legally (H-2A) didn't have precedence over others," Fazio said. "Our position is it should be open to all."

The problem was brought to light by Bob Boehm, Michigan Farm Bureau commodity and marketing manager, when the organization was being assisted by WAFLA in setting up an H-2A program, Fazio said.

Fazio learned it was a problem in Granger and Oroville and brought it to the attention of Newhouse, whose Sunnyside farm is near Granger.

The amendment should benefit hundreds of other farmworker housing facilities in Washington, Michigan, North Carolina and California, Fazio said.



Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash.

USDA loans should be open to H-2A workers, Newhouse said in a news release.

"As we have witnessed a decrease in domestic workers seeking jobs in agriculture, we have seen an increase in H-2A workers and some USDA-funded farmworker housing is under utilized," Newhouse said.

His amendment also provides \$1 million in hops research, directs the Food and Drug Administration to review regulations on wine grape growers and continues the foreign Market Access Program at levels higher than President Trump proposed.

H-2A employment has doubled in the past four years and likely will continue to grow, so farmworker housing built with

Judge: Firebreak did not violate environmental law

Lawsuit challenged 20-mile firebreak in Washington national forest

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

The U.S. Forest Service did not violate federal environmental law by creating a 20-mile-long firebreak to stop a Washington state wildfire, a judge has ruled.

In 2015, a lightning strike in Washington's Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest ignited the Wolverine Fire, which eventually grew to nearly 100 square miles.

Due to a lack of natural barriers, the Forest Service decided to remove vegetation along a 300-foot-wide "community protection line" to stop the fire's spread.

Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics, an environmental group, filed a lawsuit arguing the agency "logged" the firebreak without "environmental analysis or public participation" required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

According to the complaint, the Forest Service logged more than 100 acres of critical habitat for the northern spotted owl while creating the firebreak.

Removing trees and vegetation also "increased current and future fire risks" by disturbing soils, rendering them vulnerable to flammable invasive weeds, the plaintiff argued.

The environmental group claimed the Forest Service relied on an invalid regulation that exempts fire-fighting and other emergency actions from NEPA review.

The lawsuit asked a federal judge to enjoin the For-



Courtesy of U.S. Forest Service

The Wolverine Fire in 2015 burned some 65,000 acres near Lake Chelan in Central Washington. An environmental group's lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service for building a fire line to protect rural hamlets has been thrown out.

est Service from relying on that regulation in the future and to order the agency to "mitigate fully the environmental damage" from the firebreak.

Chief U.S. District Judge Thomas Rice has rejected the plaintiff's arguments, ruling that the regulation allowing the Forest Service to react to emergencies without NEPA review is justifiable.

Rice also found that the Forest Service complied with the emergency regulation in creating the firebreak since the national forest's supervisor determined that urgent action was necessary.

The judge disagreed with the plaintiff's argument that

forest fires are a predictable occurrence that shouldn't qualify as emergencies, saying the claim is "contrary to common sense."

"Just because wildfires are common and their general existence is foreseeable, the danger created by any specific wildfire is not so foreseeable and can create an emergency situation with little or no forewarning," Rice said. "For example, in this case, the Wolverine Fire was started by lightning and spread quickly. The fire moved as fast as three miles per day, was threatening several communities, and had breached two containment lines. This clearly constitutes an emergency."

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