

## Washington

## Conservation commission floats clean-water policy

## Environmental groups attack plan

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

The Washington State Conservation Commission is floating a plan to revise the state's primary clean-water policy by assigning conservation districts an official role in working with farmers to keep water clean.

Environmental groups are attacking the idea, accusing the commission of trying to undercut the Department of Ecology. Conservation commission policy director Ron Shultz said the goal would be to help farmers, not dilute Ecology's authority.

"Over the years, we've felt as though incentives need to be considered on the same plain as regulatory tools," Shultz said. "The proposal would in no way undermine or reduce the focus on regu-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

The Washington State Conservation Commission tours farmland Jan. 18 in Snohomish County. The commission is floating a plan to give conservation districts a more prominent and official role in carrying out the state's primary clean-water law.

latory efforts."

The commission has directed its staff members to talk to interest groups, tribes and lawmakers about amending the Washington Water Pollution Control Act to stress "incentive programs." The conservation commission would be

the lead agency in overseeing those programs, which would encourage commission-crafted farming practices.

Ecology, at the direction of the Environmental Protection Agency, already is working on compiling voluntary guidelines for farmers and ranchers

to follow. The conservation commission says the two sets of practices would be complementary.

Ecology's representative on the conservation commission, Kelly Susewind, opposed pursuing the policy and said Thursday that he thought the commission's proposal was too vague and that he couldn't support anything that might lead to a weaker state law.

Ecology already offers technical assistance to farmers before issuing fines as a last resort, and two sets of government water-protection practices might confuse landowners, said Susewind, Ecology's point man on water quality.

"It would be totally unfair to producers," he said. "I wanted some assurances on how we avoid that."

The Washington Farm Bureau has not taken a position on the conservation commission proposal. The bureau's

associate director for government relations, Evan Sheffels, said the organization, however, supports incentives for farmers.

"That, on its face, sounds like a good idea," Sheffels said. "We value our conservation district folks. They have the expertise and a level of trust with producers from decades of working together."

Nine environmental groups signed a letter urging the commission to drop the idea of developing its own set of best-management practices.

The groups predicted the conservation commission's guidelines "would ignore the best available science in order to accommodate agricultural interests and therefore would be insufficient to protect Washington's streams and rivers."

Puget Soundkeeper Alliance Executive Director Chris Wilke sent a separate letter airing many of the same complaints.

Shultz said the conser-

vation commission has the expertise to develop incentive-based practices for farmers, avoiding, for example, mandatory and uniform-sized buffers. "We think we have a good mix of people at the table," he said.

In a separate but intertwined proposal, the conservation commission will pitch the idea of taxing every parcel in the state \$20, raising up to \$60 million a year for conservation and other unspecified land projects.

"Farmers could engage with conservation districts to address their concerns and conservation districts would have the resources to help them," Shultz said.

A proposal in 2015 to enact a new parcel fee for water projects received a rocky reception in the Legislature and sank.

The conservation commission argues its budget has been flat, while the need for conservation has been rising.

## Drones, robots highlight WSU tech day

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

PROSSER, Wash. — Drones increasingly collect more data and can do more things in vineyards, orchards and other agricultural settings, says Lav Khot, research professor at the Washington State University Center for Precision and Automated Agriculture Systems in Prosser.

Drones can carry more sensors that can collect more data that can be more easily analyzed by advancements in cloud-based analytics, Khot said hours before the center's technology day, July 31.

More than 150 growers, crop service providers and consultants were scheduled to attend the event to learn the latest about center research and provide their feedback.



Courtesy Washington State University

Lav Khot, Washington State University research professor, operates a drone over a vineyard.

Drones have more abilities in crop water stress detection for irrigation management, chemical applications and disease detection, Khot said. Bird hazing is another use and they are being used in tree fruit, vineyards, mint and potatoes, he said.

"Previously, no one was

talking about who would handle the data. There was not much clarity. Not many options. Now there's several options on that," he said.

While drone usage has been commercialized in the last couple of years, robotics remains in the research and development stage, Khot said.

## WSU scoops up top award with Huckleberry Ripple ice cream

## Big Scoop trophy highlights dairy, food science students

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Washington State University's Huckleberry Ripple flavor has won a national ice cream contest for the third year in a row.

The ice cream flavor, created by students, won the Big Scoop award at the American Society of Animal Sciences Ice Cream Competition July 9 in Baltimore, Md.

"We see people enjoy our ice cream on a daily basis, but it's good to send it out in the world and see it compete with other universities," said Dave Soler, assistant creamery manager at WSU. "Coming out on top is always a good feeling."

WSU competed against North Carolina State University and the University of Connecticut. The animal sciences department received \$1,000 in prize money, to be

spent on student activities, and will host the traveling trophy through 2018.

It's the second time Huckleberry Ripple won, Soler said. Last year, WSU's Apple Cup Crisp flavor took home the big prize.

According to WSU, the creamery uses 1,700 gallons of milk per day from Knott Dairy Farm, a 150-cow farm near Pullman, Wash., which includes a small herd owned and managed by the Cooperative University Dairy Students, or CUDS.

A student production crew maintains quality standards at the creamery.

Kris Johnson, interim chairwoman of WSU's Department of Animal Sciences, said the award highlights the students at the dairy and the food science department who make the ice cream and created the winning flavor.

"It's a really nice illustration of how two really great undergraduate programs can result in something we're all really proud of," she said.

A commercial supplier provides the huckleberries for Huckleberry Ripple.

Soler credits the relation-

ship with the dairy, CUDS and the student production crew at the creamery with the victory.

"We make cheese and ice cream, but our goal is also to produce high-quality, exceptional students who are going to enter the industry and make big impacts," he said.

Several CUDS members also work in the creamery.

"They're on the dairy getting the cow side of things and then they're in the creamery getting the production and processing side of things, too," Soler said. "They're leaving here with just a fantastic education. Our goal is to produce outstanding students who are going to go out, be successful and impact agriculture in a positive way."

Johnson plans to compete for the trophy again next year. The next meeting will be in Canada, she said, so "I've got to figure out how to get Huckleberry Ripple across the border."

Undergraduate students create a summer flavor every year. This year's is lemon chiffon with raspberry ripple, Johnson said.

## Lack of state capital budget delays water projects

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — The absence of a state capital budget will delay millions of dollars worth of water projects throughout Central Washington, including the Odessa Subarea, the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan and irrigation canal maintenance, state and irrigation district officials say.

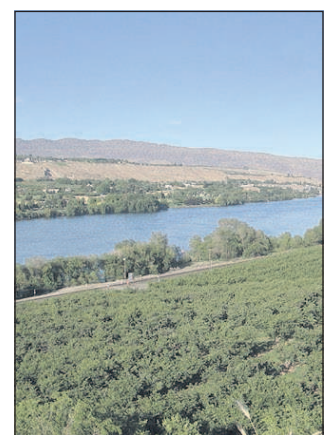
More than \$640 million was requested in the capital budget for state Department of Ecology projects planned for the 2017-2019 biennium. The projects that will not proceed ranged from grants to local solid waste and landfill programs to major construction projects, said Joye Redfield-Wilder, DOE spokeswoman in Yakima.

Department Director Maia Bellon "worked tirelessly at the direction of the governor" to help the Legislature resolve issues surrounding the Supreme Court's Hirst decision on rural water wells in an effort to get a capital budget passed, but it didn't happen, Redfield-Wilder said.

DOE requested \$15.5 million for canal widening and siphons to provide Columbia River water through the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation's Columbia Basin Project to farmers, who now must continue to rely on the declining Odessa Subarea aquifer.

"Irrigation districts have done their own contracting to save money. It's been a great project for collaboration. It will be a setback," Redfield-Wilder said of the Odessa work.

"Groups have been partnering for 12 to 13 years to get



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

The Columbia River flows past a cherry orchard south of Wenatchee, Wash. The river is the lifeblood of irrigated farming in Central Washington.

these projects underway. The aquifer is declining rapidly and having irrigators pump off of it potentially impacts small towns," she said.

The Yakima Basin Integrated Plan projects that will be impacted include:

- \$5.4 million requested to complete a second environmental impact statement to consider a temporary floating drought relief pumping plant on Kachess Lake and exploration of new Wymer area and Bumping Lake water storage.

- \$3 million for shoreline stabilization and permitting related to raising Cle Elum Lake three feet for more storage and a potential pipeline between Kecheelus and Kachees lakes.

- \$10.5 million for continued fish passage construction at Cle Elum Dam and exploration of fish passage at Clear Lake Dam.

- \$5.4 million for habitat restoration projects.

- \$5.1 million for Yakima Basin water conservation projects.

The Legislature could convene a special session to pass a capital budget if Hirst issues are resolved but that appears unlikely. Under the Hirst decision, anyone in a rural area who wanted to build a house would have to prove the new residential water well would not impact stream volumes or senior water right holders. Senate Republicans withheld support for the capital construction budget until the issue is resolved.

If no capital budget is passed until next April a whole construction season will be lost along with windows to use matching funds, Redfield-Wilder said.

Drought years may be increasing, snowpack reliability maybe decreasing and momentum for creative solutions for fish passage and irrigation is threatened, she said.

Scott Revell, manager of the Roza Irrigation District in Sunnyside, said the district is concerned about delays and hopes the Legislature still approves a capital budget this year.

The \$5.1 million in water conservation includes sealing cracks in irrigation canals across the basin, Revell said.

"We have a canal sealing we'd like to do this fall of about 1.5 miles and the cost is about \$300,000 per mile. Portions of concrete canals are in worse shape than others," he said.

Cle Elum Lake gates have already been raised three feet and the shoreline stabilization work is needed so the pool raise can help with migrating sockeye salmon smolt and irrigation, he said.

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