

Lawsuit opposes wild horse birth control

Animal rights group cites negative side effects

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

An animal rights group has filed a lawsuit seeking to stop the federal government from administering birth control to wild horses in the West.

Friends of Animals, a non-profit, claims the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency approved the birth control agent — porcine zona pellucida or PZP — without properly researching its impact on wild horses.

In its complaint, the group has asked a federal judge to order EPA to suspend registration of PZP until it conducts a special review of the substance, which would effectively halt birth control treatments for wild horses.

Western rangelands are inhabited by roughly 60,000 wild horses, which are protected by federal law and managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in cases of overpopulation.

The BLM occasionally rounds up wild horses, removing some from the rangeland while treating mares with PZP.

According to Friends of Animals, the EPA waived requirements that PZP be analyzed for toxicity, ecological effects and environmental im-



Larisa Bogardus/BLM

A gather of wild horses from the Beaty Butte Management Area, adjacent to the Hart Mountain National Wildlife Refuge in Southern Oregon, in this November 2015 photo. An animal rights organization has filed a lawsuit seeking to stop birth control treatments of wild horses on public land. Wild horses compete with cattle for grazing resources on rangeland.

pact when the substance was registered in 2012.

Since then, new information has come to light showing that treating mares repeatedly with PZP can impair their ovarian function and potentially cause infertility, the plaintiff claims.

Even after its effects have worn off, PZP disrupts a mare's reproductive cycle, making it more likely she will give birth during a seasonally inopportune time, the lawsuit said.

Foals born in wintertime are more likely to die from low temperatures and lack of food than those born during the spring and summer.

Friends of Animals petitioned the EPA to consider these and other impacts as part of a special review of

PZP, but the agency decided it wasn't warranted and referred the matter to BLM.

The plaintiff argues this decision was made "arbitrarily and capriciously" in violation of federal pesticide law.

Any action that would boost wild horse populations in the West — such as a suspension of birth control — is of concern to ranchers whose cattle compete for grazing resources.

"The problem with feral horses out on the range is they double in population every four years if left unchecked," said Tom Sharp, a rancher near Burns, Ore., and chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association's endangered species committee.

Treating the horses with birth control is more humane

than allowing their populations to become excessive, he said.

"We know the feral horses are suffering on the range," Sharp said. "They don't have enough food or water and a lot of them just die."

When horses consume too much grass, it leads the BLM to reduce the number of cattle in the area, he said.

"As you have less food and forage available, something has to give," Sharp said.

Horses are also more adept than livestock at jumping over fences that are intended to protect riparian areas from trampling, which can harm sensitive fish species, he said.

"The government is in desperate need to have some tool to manage the wild horse and burro program," Sharp said.

Stormy blossom leads to smaller navel orange crop

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Stormy weather during the bloom last spring will lead to a smaller overall navel orange crop but with larger fruit in 2017-18, government and industry insiders predict.

Growers are expected to harvest 70 million cartons this season, down from the 75 million produced in 2016-17, according to a National Agricultural Statistics Service objective measurement survey.

The survey found a fruit set per tree of 273, below the five-year average of 348. But the average Sept. 1 diameter of 2.34 inches was above the five-year average of 2.24 inches, according to NASS.

"We're pretty much in agreement with" the estimate, said Bob Blakely, vice president of California Citrus Mutual. "There's really a lot of variability as you drive through the Central Valley. ... The crop seems to be the same or a little better in the south but much lighter in the north. The other thing is there's a lot of variability from tree to tree and grove to grove."

Storms that capped off one of the wettest winters in history complicated the navel orange bloom in late March and April, affecting some orchards more than others depending on how far along the trees were in the bloom, Blakely said.

"It's making it a hard crop to estimate," he said. "In general, everyone thinks that it's down and that number (from NASS) is probably a good place to start."

Last season's crop fell short of the 81 million cartons projected by NASS and was down considerably from the 91.4 million utilized cartons recorded in 2015-16. A smaller crop in 2016-17 was expected considering the previous season's big crop and drought-related water shortages during last year's bloom.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Navel oranges grown in the San Joaquin Valley. Stormy weather during the blossom last spring is expected to lead to a smaller navel orange crop this season, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Another small crop with larger fruit sizes could put positive pressure on prices, which are already some of the best that growers have seen in recent years. Prices for mid-size navels, which make up the bulk of the crop, rose to between \$15 and \$17 per 40-pound carton by the end of last season, up from \$10 to \$11 in December, Blakely said.

Growers are getting between \$18 and \$21 per carton for peak sizes of Valencias as they're wrapping up their harvest of a projected 15.6-million-carton crop.

"Those are probably the best prices we've seen in the last 10 years," Blakely said.

The price rally is fueled by a continued healthy demand for oranges, and it's needed by growers whose labor and other input costs keep rising, he said.

"Even though the prices growers are receiving are up, I'm not sure they're keeping pace with costs," Blakely said. "Their margins are not increasing as prices go up."

The navel orange harvest typically starts in mid-autumn and continues until the following summer. This year's harvest is expected to start in mid-October, Blakely said.

Oregon wildfire fighting costs hit \$340 million

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Fighting Oregon wildfires this year so far has cost state, federal, local, tribal and private entities more than \$340 million and consumed 678,000 acres, state authorities said Monday.

All of that activity was manifested in smoke-filled air and limited visibility for many Oregonians.

The "sheer volume of fires all at the same time and continuous days of growth up through Washington and Idaho" created the oppressive conditions, said Doug Grafe, fire protection division chief at the Oregon Department of Forestry.

More than 8,000 personnel from different agencies have been deployed to fight 1,903 separate wildland fires across the state. That's more than one-third of the personnel deployed to combat wildfires nationwide, Grafe said.

The most dangerous fires started in late July and early August. The region has been dry since mid-June, with no significant rainfall until Sunday. Tens of thousands of lightning strikes contributed to the severity of the fire season.

Smoke had already captured the attention of most



Oregon Dept. of Forestry

A firefighter works on wildfires in Southern Oregon. Fighting wildfires in Oregon this season has already cost \$340 million, state officials said on Monday.

of the state, when the human-caused Eagle Creek fire sparked in the state's scenic gem, the Columbia Gorge, Sept. 15, trapped 150 hikers and threatened the City of Portland's water supply, the Bull Run Watershed.

Fire crews kept the fire from that crucial water supply and from the Multnomah Falls Lodge, where flames came within 40 feet of the historic structure.

"A lot of what this fire was doing was spotting out ahead of itself within communities, and they were just having to go

after it, and catch it," said Oregon Fire Marshal Jim Walker. "They did that hand-in-hand with all of the resources, partnering together."

Rain on Sunday evoked widespread excitement in the Gorge, where firefighters continued to battle flames visible from Interstate 84.

"I think we are in a good place with the rain and the conditions," Grafe said.

Gov. Kate Brown deployed the Oregon National Guard Aug. 2 to respond to several severe fires. National Guard helicopters assisted with the rescue of trapped hikers and poured 1.3 million gallons of water on burning land and structures. ODF has released the helicopters after 45 days of duty.

The conditions on air personnel are as bad, if not worse, than combat, said Dave Stuckey, deputy director of the Oregon Military Department.

The state placed 950 National Guardsmen on state active duty, a high for any year since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, when 1,979 Oregon National Guard personnel were deployed, Stuckey said.

Fire crews have suffered no fatalities, but there have been about 34 injuries among National Guard personnel and 23 among ODF personnel.

More water bonds may be put before California voters in 2018

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — Voters in California may see two more water-related bond measures on their ballots next year as proponents try to build on the success of Proposition 1.

Gerald Meral, a former deputy secretary of the state Natural Resources Agency, is about to begin gathering signatures for an \$8.9 billion measure for such water-related projects as repairs to the sinking Friant-Kern Canal in Tulare and Kern counties.

Meral told the Capital Press his initiative is "a follow-up" to Proposition 1, the \$7.5 billion water bond voters overwhelmingly passed in 2014.

"Those of us who've been working on this felt that four years would be a reasonable time to think about another water bond," Meral said.

By 2018, except for the storage component, all the money will be spent from Prop. 1, he said.

"We pretty much modeled



Gerald Meral

this on Prop. 1," he said. "It's very heavy on groundwater (restoration), waste water recycling and water for fish and wildlife."

Meral's initiative would appear on the November 2018 ballot.

Meanwhile, the Legislature approved a bill by state Senate Leader Kevin de Leon, D-Los Angeles, to place a \$3.5 billion bond measure for flood protection, water supply reliability and new parks and open space before voters in June.

"California's aging infrastructure is in dire need of new investment, from our parks to our dams and reservoirs," de Leon said in a statement.

If passed by voters, de Leon's measure would provide \$750 million for flood protection and prevention and \$500 million for such projects as safe drinking water and groundwater sustainability efforts.

In all, the measure — Senate Bill 5 — would include 22 percent of the projects addressed in Meral's initiative, according to an analysis by California Citrus Mutual. The bill does not include funding for the Friant-Kern Canal, and its safe drinking water funding would be less than half as much as in Meral's proposal, CCM asserts.

Citrus Mutual has not taken a formal position on either initiative, the organization said.

The proposal comes as the California Water Commission is considering 12 applications for portions of \$2.5 billion in Proposition 1 funding for storage projects. The commission expects to decide by next June.

The Legislature initially approved a bill in 2009 to put an \$11.1 billion water bond before voters, but that measure was delayed twice and then downsized as leaders feared its defeat amid a sluggish economy. Brown and lawmakers agreed to set it at \$7.5 billion in 2014.



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