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Idaho

Forest Service, Idaho work to boost logging on federal land

By KEITH RIDLER
Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — The U.S. Forest Service and Idaho have forged 10 agreements for logging and restoration projects on federal land in what officials say could become a template for other Western states to create jobs and reduce the severity of wildfires.

Under the deals, Idaho foresters will administer timber sales on about 10,000 acres the federal agency has on its to-do list but can't complete because the money for the work is instead going to fight wildfires.

So far this year, the cost of that fight has surpassed \$2 billion — more than half the federal agency's annual budget — during one of the worst fire seasons on record in the West.

The state work involves managing timber sales to a lumber company after determining how much is available and sometimes even marking what can and can't be cut.

Money generated from the sales goes into accounts in the national forest where the timber was harvested, less expenses incurred by the Idaho Department of Lands for ad-

ministering the sales.

The federal money is held in accounts to be used for additional work, which can include thinning projects to reduce wildfire threats and projects to improve habitat for fish and wildlife.

The federal-state partnership is possible under the Good Neighbor Authority passed by Congress more than a decade ago that initially involved Colorado and Utah. The 2014 Farm Bill expanded the measure to include other states.

Michigan, Wyoming, Oregon, Nevada and in particular Wisconsin have moved ahead with the partnership. But officials say Idaho — where 38 percent of the land is managed by the U.S. Forest Service — has made rapid progress.

"Idaho has really stepped up to fully embrace that ability for us to work with our state partners to get more work done," said Intermountain Region Forester Nora Rasure, whose area includes 53,000 square miles of forest lands in Utah, Nevada and portions of Wyoming, Idaho and California.

Government, industry and environmentalists have devel-



Colin Mulvany/The Spokesman-Review, via AP

In this 2016 photo, a plane drops a load of fire retardant near Spokane, Wash. The U.S. Forest Service and the state of Idaho have forged agreements leading to more logging on federal land in what officials say could become a template for other Western states and reduce the severity of wildfires.

oped a collaborative approach in Idaho following years of stalemated litigation over forests that were sometimes consumed by flames as decisions were delayed.

"They're building agreements on being able to manage the forest in such a way that you can get timber off of them but you don't compromise environmental values," said John Freemuth, a Boise State University environmental policy professor and public

lands expert. "It's not a panacea, but it's better than forest wars. That exhausted a lot of people."

Watchdog groups say they're concerned the policy might have more to do with avoiding environmental regulations than enhancing forest health.

But for now, they are cautiously supportive.

The Idaho Department of Lands manages 2.4 million acres of state endowment land

it received at statehood to primarily benefit public schools. About a million of those acres are forested.

Tom Schultz, director of the Idaho Department of Lands, said the work with the Forest Service helps Idaho by reducing the threat of giant wildfires spilling onto state and private forest land, and removing stands weakened by insects or disease to help prevent the spread of those problems to state and private lands.

Another major benefit is jobs. Shultz said an analysis suggests 12 to 15 direct and indirect jobs will be created for every million board feet of lumber harvested.

The watchdog groups wonder how well Idaho can mesh its forestry program, which is geared to maximize revenue over the long term, with the Forest Service's multiple-use mandate that includes timber sales, recreation and wildlife habitat.

"We'd like to see them recognize that you can still have a profitable timber sale while protecting some of those sensitive resources," said Jonathan Oppenheimer of the Idaho

Conservation League.

The Idaho Department of Lands has received a three-year grant for \$900,000 from the Forest Service for the program and Idaho lawmakers have authorized \$250,000 from the state general fund.

State officials say the goal is to have the program paying for itself with profitable timber sales in three to five years.

"We want to significantly increase the number of acres being treated," Idaho State Forester David Groeschl told Gov. Butch Otter and other elected officials during a Tuesday meeting of the Idaho Land Board, which previously approved entering into the agreements with the Forest Service.

The 10 projects in Idaho are in various stages, with two currently being logged and a lot of curiosity about how state-managed timber sales on federal land will turn out.

"There's probably a natural tension between agencies, but I think that we're making real progress in getting beyond some of that," said Jane Darnell, a deputy regional forester with the Forest Service whose area includes northern Idaho. "We'll get there."

UI plans ag technology 'boot camp' in Pocatello

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Nephi Harvey's company has developed technology that enables feedlot operators to diagnose sick cattle about two days before clear symptoms surface by tracking how often they drink from the watering trough.

Harvey, with Fort Supply in Kaysville, Utah, will be among the presenters featuring the latest innovations in crop and livestock production at an Ag Tech Boot Camp, scheduled for 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Jan. 4 at Idaho State University's Roy F. Christensen Building.

University of Idaho Extension officials, private industry representatives and state commodity group leaders have formed an informal committee to plan the inaugural event, which is supported by the USDA Risk Management Agency. Admission will be \$30, and organizers expect a crowd of about 100 people. Jon Hogge, UI's Extension cereals educator for Eastern Idaho who is heading the planning committee, said the event will likely rotate among different regions of the state in the future.

Organizers are also mulling a possible trade show and a second day of activities, focused on technology demonstrations.

"These types of educational conferences are important because a lot of producers don't know what's out there that may help them with just a little bit of change in what they're doing," Harvey said. "We have to be making more money per animal, not just



Courtesy of Nephi Harvey

Electronic cattle tags are read as part of a system developed by Fort Supply Technologies of Kaysville, Utah, to compile data on cattle operations and predict when cattle may become sick based on how often a cow associated with a specific ear tag needs to drink from its trough. The technology will be featured in an ag technology event scheduled for Jan. 4 in Pocatello.

have more animals making less money."

Harvey's animal health-monitoring system uses electronic ear tags that can be read from as far away as 25 feet, reducing labor and animal handling. An antenna by the watering trough records when a given ear tag approaches. The company's algorithm analyzes deviations from normal drinking, factoring in temperature and humidity data from a weather station.

Harvey said he's approached researchers, including from University of Idaho, about conducting third-party studies on his products. His company has found the producers quickly recoup their

investments — \$3,500 per pen, plus a monthly charge of 25 cents per head — by reducing livestock mortality and weight loss, as they can take proactive steps to boost cattle immune systems.

The event's keynote speaker will be Brent Hillman, with Progressive Crop Systems in Shelley. Hogge said Hillman's staff helps producers integrate yield monitoring equipment into their harvests, and to use the data effectively in making decisions.

Hogge said other event topics may include drones, variable-rate fertilizer, irrigation innovations, running pivots using a cell phone and other topics commodity group leaders may suggest. He's

planning a panel discussion featuring farmers who have effectively implemented technology into their businesses.

Les Nunn, an event organizer with Bear Lake County Extension, anticipates ranchers will be especially interested in advancements in genomics and genetic testing of livestock.

Laura Johnson, with the state Department of Agriculture, said last winter, during an annual agricultural outlook seminar, UI Extension hosted a two-hour discussion on agricultural technology. Surveys of attendees showed the session was extremely popular and prompted UI to "look at something bigger," she said.

Idaho bean, seed groups to seek legislation to protect crops from soybean diseases

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Bean Commission and Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association will turn to the legislature to try to ensure soybean seed doesn't bring in diseases that could harm the state's \$70 million dry bean industry.

Idaho is the nation's leader in dry bean seed production because of strict testing guidelines that require bean seed to undergo serology testing and be certified as disease-free.

Idaho dry bean industry representatives say soybeans have the potential to bring in diseases that could significantly harm their industry, a claim supported by a University of Idaho plant pathologist and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

The bean and seed groups earlier this year asked the ISDA to initiate a rule that would prohibit soybeans from being grown in southcentral and southwestern Idaho, where the state's dry bean industry is located.

That idea was nixed by the office of Gov. Butch Otter, whose spokesman, Jon Hanian, told Capital Press the governor needed a lot more information about the rationale for the proposed ban.

During their quarterly meeting in June, IBC members also discussed the idea of taking soybeans under the commission's umbrella to ensure they have to follow the same strict testing rules and regulations that dry beans do.

IBC and IEOSA members discussed those ideas during

an August conference call.

IEOSA Executive Director Roger Batt told Capital Press the groups will pursue legislation to accomplish both of those ideas during the 2018 Idaho Legislature.

"We're pretty hopeful we can get both those things done during the 2018 legislative session," Batt said.

Soybean acres in Idaho have fluctuated between a few dozen and a couple hundred over the last decade, mostly on a trial basis, but some bean industry leaders believe it's only a matter of time before they are grown on a larger scale in Idaho.

"Dry beans are a 100-year-old industry in the state of Idaho; it doesn't make any sense to jeopardize it with a few acres of soybeans," said IBC board member Don Tolmie, an agronomist and production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co.

"On the surface, it sounds like we are trying to restrict an ag business," he said. "That's not it at all. We're trying to protect an ag business that is already established."

If a moratorium is passed, soybeans could still be grown in North and East Idaho.

But the moratorium idea is not supported by some IBC members, including farmers Doug Huettig and Mike Goodson, who both spoke against it during the IBC's June meeting.

Goodson said it makes more sense to pursue other means of protecting the industry, such as placing soybeans under the IBC's authority.

Friends' hobby preserves farm history

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BLACKFOOT, Idaho — Ken Tuck spends his free time much as he did in high school — tinkering in his shop with his best friend, Tony Rushin.

Only back when they were younger, they built hot rods. Nowadays, the friends from Idaho Falls, who are both retired from long careers at the Idaho National Laboratory, restore antique tractors for area farmers.

Their projects were on display in the antique tractor exhibit at the Eastern Idaho State Fair on Sept. 1-9.

"The fair started and operated in the fall as an agricultural event, when the crops are in, but you look at a lot of it over here and it's commercialized," Tuck said. "To see old farm equipment or any kind of farming stuff boosts up the farmers." Tuck said he relishes time

spent in the shop behind his house with Rushin and his Labrador, listening to classical music and giving new life to long-neglected farm relics. Though he admits he'd prefer to work on hot rods, Tuck explained his hobby now serves a higher purpose, as several "farm buddies" have old tractors in line awaiting his and Rushin's attention.

With each machine they restore, Tuck said, they also preserve a piece of family history. Nostalgic family members tell their stories about childhood memories and great-grandfathers — pioneers in East Idaho agriculture — who once used the tractors.

"Farmers have a tie to it because it's part of their heritage," Tuck said.

One of their earliest and favorite tractor projects was restoring a small 1936 John Deere for a group of siblings, who wanted to surprise their fa-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

ther. The old tractor had been in a cellar for years, buried under burlap potato sacks.

Rushin is always struck by the simplicity and longevity of the old farm implements.

"You get a computer (problem) that shuts down a big tractor for weeks," Rushin said. "But the 1936 here, we fixed

it up and put gas in it, and it started right up after sitting that long."

The rarest tractor they've restored is an International Farmall MD, which starts on gasoline and switches over to diesel fuel.

As much as they value family history, they most enjoy the new memories they help shape. In lieu of a limousine, the Farmall tractor they rehabilitated pulled the bride and groom on a wagon when a daughter in the family got married. Though most farmers have modern tractors for working fields, Tuck said some of them still enjoy driving the antiques "like go-carts."

Rushin said their tractors are also routinely entered in local Fourth of July and homecoming parades.

Retired cattle rancher Duane Jensen, of Rockford, restored four of the antique tractors displayed at the fair.




SAGE Fact #145

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