

WDFW looks ahead to post-recovery wolf management

Too many to count in northeast corner

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington wildlife officials are beginning to talk about how to manage wolves once the species recolonizes the state.

It may take five more years, but wolves will reproduce in sufficient numbers throughout Washington to meet the state's goals, Department of Fish and Wildlife wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said in an interview.

"The writing is on the wall. This species will reach its recovery objectives," he said. "We need to have a dialogue about what happens when we reach that point, and we need to start having that dialogue now."

Wolves are a state-protected species, a designation that has less weight than federal protection, but nevertheless puts WDFW's focus on recovery.

Taking wolves off the state list could emphasize other issues, such as limiting the population of predators.

The state's action would be separate and subordinate to federal rules. Wolves are federally protected in the western two-thirds of the state, where they are rare.

Wolves are numerous enough in northeast Washington that wildlife managers can no longer count with confidence how many roam in a four-county region.

Martorello said WDFW is focused now on documenting packs and breeding pairs to the west and south, a prerequisite to moving to post-recovery management. State



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

A remote camera installed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife in August photographs wolves in northeast Washington, possibly from the Beaver Creek pack. WDFW is beginning to talk about how to manage wolves after the species has re-established itself throughout the state.

and federal biologists recently captured and fitted with a radio collar Western Washington's first known wolf in decades.

"We are seeing wolves continue to expand geographically, as well as numerically," Martorello said. "It's a

sign to us to start planning. I can't forecast if it will be a two-year process or a five-year process or more, but I do know it will take time."

WDFW counted 115 wolves in Washington at the end of 2016. If projections hold true, the population will

increase by about 30 percent annually, even though the department resorts to lethal control to stop chronic attacks on livestock. WDFW killed three wolves this summer and seven in 2016.

Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen said that he was encouraged that WDFW will start talking about taking wolves off the state-protected list.

Nielsen said northeast Washington has become saturated with wolves. Besides attacking livestock, wolves are reducing the population of deer and elk, and threatening public safety, he said.

"It got so much worse this year than last year," Nielsen said. "It is important to get de-listing, so they (wildlife managers) can be a lot more reasonable about what's really happening out there."

Center for Biological Di-

versity wolf advocate Amaroq Weiss said it was premature to talk about limiting the wolf population.

WDFW should reopen its wolf plan, adopted in 2011, and consider whether the state's goals will ensure the species' survival, she said.

"It's not just a recovery plan, it's a conservation and management plan," she said. "They need to look at all the current science."

Washington's wolf plan divides the state into three regions. The state needs at least 15 breeding pairs, with each region having at least four, according to the plan.

Eastern Washington has eight documented breeding pairs, while the North Cascades has two. The South Cascades has zero. Nevertheless, WDFW projects the goals will be met statewide by 2021 or 2022.

Onion growers benefit from research related to produce rule

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — Research by Oregon State University scientists relating to the Food and Drug Administration's new produce safety rule is benefiting onion growers.

And onion growers have themselves to thank for that, industry leaders say, because they're the ones who funded a good portion of the research through their checkoff dollars.

"That has been money well spent, no doubt about it, and I think everybody agrees with that," said Kay Riley, marketing order chairman for the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee. "It wasn't a hard sell to the (IEOOC) research committee to fund those studies."

Researchers at OSU's Malheur County experiment station conducted several trials over the past four years that collectively showed onions are not at risk of being contaminated by irrigation water containing large amounts of bacteria.

Those studies helped FDA



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

An onion field trial at Oregon State University's agricultural research station near Ontario.

change its mind on some of the agricultural water standards originally included in the produce rule in a way that benefits bulb onion growers.

Beyond that, the research could also help growers who face industry-required Good Agricultural Practices audits, said OSU Extension cropping systems agent Stuart Reitz.

Many of the 300 onion growers in the Idaho-Oregon onion growing region face GAP audits, and some of them face several other types of audits as well, he said. Those audits require them to show they are growing onions in a safe and sanitary manner.

OSU researchers are start-

ing to get the produce rule-related studies published in peer-reviewed scientific journals — one has already been published and another has been submitted for review. That will allow onion growers to incorporate the findings of that research into their GAP audits, Reitz said.

"We're trying to finish getting some of the studies we've done published so we have scientifically valid studies that growers can incorporate into the farm safety plans that GAP audits require," he said.

Clint Shock, director of the OSU experiment station in Malheur County, said the stud-

ies included loading irrigation water with large amounts of bacteria and then tracking E. coli contamination in the field and on onions.

Despite loading the water with bacteria, no traces of E. coli were ever found in an onion, Shock said.

Another study showed that using plastic bins instead of the wooden ones used for decades resulted in no difference in detectable levels of E. coli.

"There is no difference between plastic and wooden bins in terms of food safety," Reitz said.

That research helped convince FDA to drop a produce rule provision that could have required growers to switch to plastic bins.

There are about 1 million wooden onion bins in the region, and replacing them with plastic bins would have been expensive, said Riley, who is also manager of Snake River Produce.

Plastic bins cost three times as much as wooden bins and hold two-thirds as much onions, he said.

California imposes pesticide restrictions near schools

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — The state will proceed with stricter controls on the use of pesticides near schools and child-care centers despite push-back from growers' advocates.

Beginning Jan. 1, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation's new rule will prohibit many applications within a quarter-mile of public schools and licensed day care facilities from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, the state announced on Nov. 7.

This includes all applications by aircraft, sprinklers and air-blast sprayers and all fumigant applications as well as most dust and powder applications such as sulfur, according to a state news release.

The rule will also require nearby growers to provide annual notifications to area schools and county agricultural commissioners of the pesticides they expect to use in the upcoming year.

"As farmers protect their crop with pesticides, we have to make sure those children are safe and we have assurances that they're safe," DPR director Brian Leahy said in prepared remarks streamed online. He said the rule adds "an additional layer" to existing restrictions on pesticides near schools.

The rule comes after two rounds of public comments and complaints from farm groups such as California Citrus Mutual, which has asserted the requirements are unnecessary. CCM was still reviewing the final regulation on Nov. 7, spokeswoman Alyssa Houtby said. The state had originally proposed a mandate that growers notify nearby schools and their county agricultural commissioner at least 48 hours before they spray. But the mandate was removed after Citrus Mutual and other groups



California DPR

Jing Tao, a scientist for the California Department of Pesticide Regulation, checks pesticide residue levels at an air monitoring station in Salinas, Calif. The agency has imposed a regulation restricting pesticide use near schools and child care centers on weekdays.

complained last fall. The state also clarified that "school site" doesn't include school buses and other vehicles.

Laura Brown, CCM's director of government affairs, said earlier this year the group still believes the rule isn't based on sound science and that it places an undue burden on schools to notify parents when there's even a potential that pesticides could be used in the area.

The rule will impact about 4,100 public elementary and high schools and licensed day care facilities and involve about 2,500 growers in California, state officials said.

State officials argue the rule will set a consistent, statewide standard to augment local rules adopted by many counties related to pesticide applications near schools and day care centers. In addition to tightening restrictions, the regulation is designed to encourage greater communication between growers and schools or early-childhood facilities, Leahy said. The communication could help schools better respond to potential drift incidents and inquiries from parents, officials said.



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