

'We're fortunate to have so much ag representation'

FARMERS from Page 1

Five of the Idaho Senate's 10 committees and five of the House's 14 committees are chaired by legislators involved in agriculture.

"We're fortunate to have so much ag representation in leadership positions," said Brackett, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. "That kind of sets the tone for the Legislature."

When the Legislature is making decisions that could impact agriculture, it helps to have that kind of farming knowledge base in the legislative body, said Sen. Steve Bair, R-Blackfoot, a retired farmer who is still involved in agribusiness.

"It's nice to have a bloc of folks who have an ag background and understanding of agriculture and how those bills will affect agriculture," said Bair, chairman of the Senate Resources and Environment Committee.

Idaho legislators debate hundreds of proposed bills each session and are tasked with setting the state budget, which is \$3.45 billion in fiscal year 2018.

Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs, said it makes sense that agriculture enjoys such good representation in the Legislature since the state's economy and way of life largely revolve around it.

'An ag state'

"Idaho is an ag state. That's what we do," he said. "Everywhere you go in the state there is agriculture, from the north to the south and from the east to the west."

Considering the agrarian nature of Idaho — 38 of the state's 44 counties are classified as rural — "I think we represent our population pretty evenly," Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls, said about the high percentage of ag industry folks in the Legislature. "We have a rural-friendly Legislature."

The large number of Idaho lawmakers with a solid agricultural background makes it easier to help the legislative body understand the unique risks and challenges farmers and ranchers face compared to other businesses, said Russ Hendricks, director of governmental affairs for the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation.

Many other states don't enjoy that benefit, Hendricks said. "We're happy every day that we're not in one of those other states."

According to Oregon Farm Bureau Federation Communications Director Ann Marie Moss, it's safe to say fewer than 10 percent of Oregon's 90 legislators are involved in the farming industry.

She said, "it's challenging for us to make sure agriculture's story is told and heard at our Legislature because there



Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls, stands on the steps of Idaho's Capitol on Dec. 1. Patrick is one of 25 members of Idaho's 105-person legislature who are farmers, ranchers or involved in agribusiness.

Sean Ellis/Capital Press



Idaho's Capitol. Twenty-five members of Idaho's 105-person legislature are farmers, ranchers or involved in agribusiness.

Sean Ellis/Capital Press

are so few lawmakers with direct ties to agriculture."

Based on a quick calculation, about 7.5 percent of Washington's 147-member Legislature is involved in farming, said Tom Davis, director of government relations for the Washington Farm Bureau Federation.

That low percentage, compared to Idaho, "is a great depiction of why (agriculture) is in such trouble within our state Legislature," he said. "Folks (here) do not understand agriculture even though it's the second largest industry in our state."

Eight of California's 120 legislators, or about 6.7 percent, are involved in agriculture, according to Dave Kranz, communications man-

ager for the California Farm Bureau Federation.

American Farm Bureau Federation doesn't track how many people involved with farming are in state Legislatures but "that is a very impressive number for Idaho," said Mace Thornton, executive director of AFBF's communications department.

Willing to learn

Idaho is not only blessed to have so many legislators directly involved in agriculture but "we also have many people who have been involved (in farming) but perhaps are in another career at this time," said Rick Waitley, executive director of Food Producers of Idaho, an industry group.

A good example, he said,

is Rep. Caroline Troy, R-Genesee, who was previously involved in a wheat farm in North Idaho.

Another example, Waitley said, is Sen. Jim Rice, R-Caldwell, an attorney who is chairman of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee.

While not directly tied to agriculture, he grew up around farming and his "involvement in 4-H and love for agriculture has resulted in him being a tremendous advocate for agriculture," Waitley said.

Agriculture is such a key part of Idaho's culture and economy that most non-farm legislators inherently understand its importance or are willing to learn about it, several lawmakers and lobbyists told Capital Press.

"That is where I am sure we would outshine those states to our West," Waitley said. "I hear other lobbyists in other states talk about how difficult it is to get lawmakers to listen. That would not be true of most Idaho lawmakers over the years. They may represent a lot of blacktop in their district ... but they are still open to listening about the issues that make Idaho's agriculture industry a backbone to the economy..."

Rep. Mat Erpelding, D-Boise, represents one of the state's most urban districts, but that doesn't stop him from appreciating how important agriculture is to Idaho.

Erpelding, who has served on the House ag committee for six years, said he's "always had a deep reverence for the farming and ranching community" since his career as an outfitter and guide also revolves around the land.

"I know how important it is to our economy," he said. "If I can help people in my district understand the importance of agriculture, then I think I'm doing the state a service."

Ag backgrounds

The list of 25 Idaho lawmakers involved in farming or ranching would be much higher if it were expanded to include people with some type of involvement or intimate familiarity with agriculture, said Rep. Judy Boyle, a Republican rancher from Midvale.

"A lot of legislators grew up in rural areas and their dad was a farmer or their grandpa was a rancher," said Boyle, chairwoman of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee. "Just because they're not actively involved in agriculture doesn't mean they don't have an ag background."

"A lot of people in the Legislature not involved in agriculture are not that far away from it," Harris said. "Even legislators not involved in agriculture see the importance of it."

Future makeup

While Idaho's Legislature has a high percentage of members with a detailed knowledge of farming, that might not necessarily be the case in the future, several legislators told Capital Press.

Idaho is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation in population and most of the new arrivals are moving to the state's main urban area, around Boise in southwestern Idaho. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Idaho ranked third in percentage population growth from 2015 to 2016, behind Utah and Nevada.

The Legislature lost a few rural seats during the last 10-year redistricting and that looks to continue, said Bair and others.

If someone looked at the makeup of Idaho's Legislature 40 years ago, the percentage of people involved in agriculture then would probably be closer to 40 or 50 percent, Bair said.

"Each time redistricting takes place, we lose a couple more rural seats and we gain a couple more urban seats," he said. "I think that does not bode well for agriculture."

The Legislature's representation moving toward urban and away from rural Idaho "is always a concern," said Rep. Clark Kauffman, a Republican farmer from Filer. "But I think for right now we're in pretty good shape."

Timber sales in expanded area have been canceled

DEADLINE from Page 1

The American Forest Resource Council hopes the president takes executive action scaling back the monument before that date, said Travis Joseph, the group's executive director.

However, AFRC won't be easily satisfied: Unless the monument's boundaries are revised to entirely exclude so-called O&C Lands, which are dedicated to timber production, the group won't drop its lawsuit, he said.

Congress enacted the O&C Act to make those federal lands permanently available to logging, so the president's authority to create national monuments under the Antiquities Act doesn't override that statute, Joseph said.

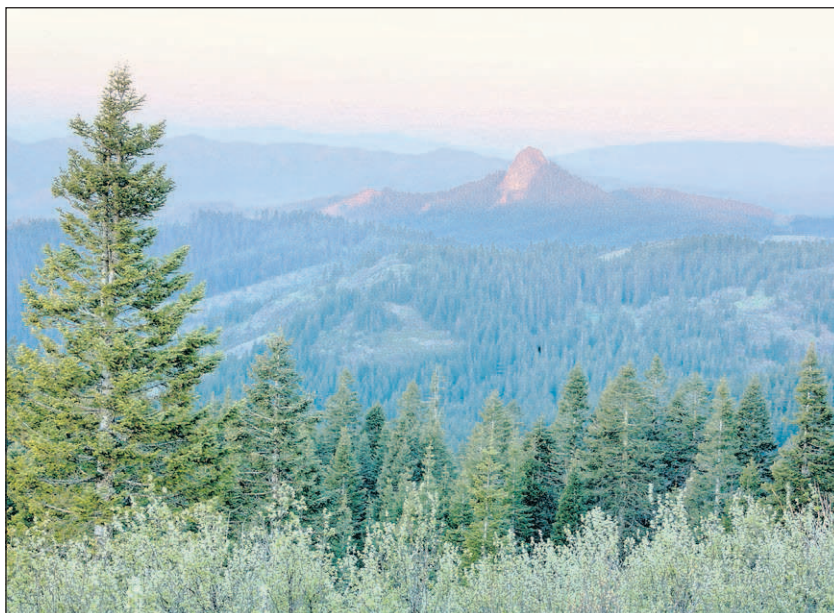
"The O&C Act applies to all of the acres by the plain meaning of the law," he said. "It's not about the specifics of the designation. It's about the law."

If a president were allowed to wipe out such decisions made by Congress, it would have "extraordinary implications for land management in the Western U.S.," Joseph said.

The prolonged interruption of the litigation has been frustrating because the plaintiffs want to delve into the merits of the case as soon as possible, said Rocky McVay, executive director of the Association of O&C Counties.

"Timber sales that were in the works in the expanded area have been canceled," McVay said.

While commercial logging within the national monument is banned, the



A large basaltic spire known as Pilot Rock is seen in the distance in this 2015 file photo taken in Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument near Ashland, Ore. Litigation over President Obama's expansion of the monument is set to resume Jan. 15 unless the Trump administration resolves the dispute.

Courtesy of Bob Wick, BLM

expanded designation is also troublesome for ranchers who fear grazing curtailments within its boundaries.

It's unclear what the Trump administration's drastic reduction of two Utah national monuments — Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante — may foreshadow for the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, McVay said.

Environmental groups are already lining up to file lawsuits against that

action, he said. "There will be a lot of fallout from this decision."

The circumstances surrounding each national monument under review by the Trump administration are unique, said Joseph.

That's particularly true for the Cascade-Siskiyou, which is the only monument containing lands devoted to timber harvest by statute, he said. "That legal conflict doesn't exist anywhere else in the country."

Plan recognizes ranching and farming as 'important components of the Oregon economy'

PLAN from Page 1

108 packs at the end of 2015.

• Oregon's two-zone management protects wolves in Western Oregon, where packs are just getting started, while allowing the flexibility of "lethal control" of wolves in Eastern Oregon, where most of them live and livestock attacks are a major concern.

• "Variation in local conditions will likely cause some areas to be more prone to livestock depredations than others, and chronic conflict may preclude survival of some wolf packs in certain circumstances." This past August, ODFW killed four wolves from the Harl Butte pack for repeated attacks on calves, and authorized a rancher to shoot a Meacham Pack wolf for the same reason.

• The draft document said classifying wolves as "special status game mammals" provides the most options for long-term management. Among other things, the status allows "responsive" hunting and trapping when required. Such action would require a permit, and hunters and trappers would have to be pre-certified by ODFW.

• "Natural dispersal," in which young adult wolves leave their birth packs to find new territory and mates of their own, is providing "continued expansion and ongoing genetic connectivity" to wolves in other states. Continued dispersal from Idaho into Oregon is likely, Idaho had 786 wolves in