

La Nina peaks; NW snowpack on the line

Next few weeks key for snowpacks

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A weak to moderate La Nina in the tropical Pacific Ocean has probably peaked, though it may have enough punch left to swell Northwest snowpacks, climatologists report.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said that the cooler-than-normal ocean likely will begin warming, but won't reach average temperatures until the spring. Climatologists estimated the chances of La Nina sticking through the winter at 90 percent.

La Nina stacks the deck in favor of cool and wet weather in the Northwest for

the next few weeks, Washington State Climatologist Nick Bond said.

"It's not going to go away right away," he said. "There's no reason to think we won't have a typical response to La Nina."

Temperatures along the equator between South America and the international dateline were 0.8 degrees Celsius below normal, the same as in December, NOAA said in a monthly report. Temperatures more than 0.5 degrees below normal qualify as La Nina conditions.

La Nina conditions generally mean below-average temperatures and above-average precipitation in the northern tier of the U.S. La Nina has the opposite effect on the southern tier.

La Nina has yet to de-



EO Media Group File

Snow accumulates in the hills near Pendleton, Ore. Though the La Nina in the Pacific Ocean may have peaked, weather forecasters say there's still plenty of time for the snowpack across the West to continue to build.

liver huge amounts of snow for summer irrigation in the Northwest. Snowpacks in 11 basins in Washington on Thursday ranged from a high

of 109 percent of normal in northeast Washington to a low of 70 percent in the south Cascades, according to the Natural Resources Conserva-

tion Service.

"Our snowpack is OK, but it's not above normal in most spots," Bond said. "The next week or two should be on the wet side. I think it's going to turn around."

Precipitation will be above normal for the Northwest and Northern California for the next two weeks, according to a forecast issued Wednesday by the Climate Prediction Center. The odds are particularly high for wet weather in Oregon and Northern California. Also, temperatures are expected to be below average.

"We got off to a pretty good start" on snowpacks, Bond said. "While there was a hiatus in December, it looks like it's going to resume, at least for a while."

Federal climatologists

planned to issue a new seasonal outlook Jan. 18.

Oregon snowpacks in 12 basins are below normal for this time of year, according to NRCS.

The snowpacks ranged from a high of 54 percent of normal in northeast Oregon to a low of 29 percent in the Klamath Basin in Southern Oregon on Jan. 11.

NRCS charts snowpacks in 21 basins in Idaho. Panhandle snowpacks are around 100 percent of normal. Snowpacks in the southern half of the state are generally smaller.

The Owyhee Basin in the southwest corner of the state was 43 percent of normal on Thursday.

In California, snowpacks in six basins ranged from 86 to 68 percent of normal on Jan. 11, according to NRCS.

There's still room for more cherries, promoter says

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Last year's huge Pacific Northwest cherry crop made money for retailers and some growers but the leader of the industry's promotional arm says even larger crops can be successful.

"We can grow the cherry deal. The U.S. market still has great potential for growth. We just didn't have the movement we needed (in 2017) but we can grow that," B.J. Thurlby, president of Northwest Cherry Growers, told several hundred growers at the Northcentral Washington Stone Fruit Day at the Wenatchee Convention Center on Jan. 16.

The 2017 PNW sweet cherry crop totaled a record 26.4 million, 20-pound boxes, besting the record 23.2 million boxes in 2014. It came in June, July and August on the heels of a record April, May and June California crop. Total West Coast production was 35.1 million, 20-pound boxes.

Thurlby said some growers are asking if it's time



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Maria Adame picks Rainier cherries at Drescher Orchard, Orondo, Wash., last July. Too many cherries caused prices to tumble this year, but an industry leader says there's still room for more larger cherries in the market.

to start yanking cherry orchards but that apple growers thought the same thing when apples reached 50 million, 40-pound boxes, then 100 million and now 140 million. PNW cherry acreage, at 62,000, has grown 46 percent since 2000 and volume has grown 336 percent, he said.

June prices and returns were good but in July wholesale prices tumbled below

\$16 a box, unprofitable for all involved. Some picked fruit was dumped.

"Retailers told me of normal repeat customers who only bought twice this year. What they bought wasn't very good so they switched to blueberries and grapes," Thurlby said.

Twenty-two percent of the crop was 11-row (the number of cherries per row

in a box) in size and smaller and doesn't sell as well as 10-row and larger, he said.

The average wholesale on 10-row red cherries to Asia was \$46 per box. More than 6 million boxes were exported to Asia, he said.

In any given year, crop size, quality, the amount of competition from other fruit and other variables affect supply and demand, he said.

Group files lawsuit against Forest Service

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

Conservationists in northeast Oregon are suing the U.S. Forest Service for reauthorizing livestock grazing on 44,000 acres of grasslands within the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area.

The lawsuit, filed Jan. 10 by the Greater Hells Canyon Council in La Grande, Ore., seeks to protect a rare and endemic species of plant known as Spalding's catchfly — a summer-blooming member of the carnation family.

Spalding's catchfly is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. It is found today only in eastern Washington, northeast Oregon, west-central Idaho, western Montana and a small

sliver of British Columbia, Canada.

Veronica Warnock, conservation director for the Greater Hells Canyon Council, said livestock grazing further jeopardizes the viability of Spalding's catchfly in the area, as cattle displace soil, trample habitat and spread invasive weeds.

Fewer than 1,000 catchfly plants are known to exist in the grazing area along the lower Imnaha River. However, the Forest Service renewed permits in 2015 on four winter allotments, including Cow Creek, Toomey, Rhodes Creek and Lone Pine.

All permits are held by McClaran Ranch, based in Joseph, Ore. Scott McClaran, ranch manager, could not immediately be

reached for comment.

The Forest Service is obligated to protect Spalding's catchfly under the Hells Canyon National Recreation Area Comprehensive Management Plan, Warnock said. The lawsuit also lists Kris Stein, Hells Canyon National Recreation Area district ranger, as a defendant.

Grazing is currently underway on the allotments, though Warnock said the group is not asking for an injunction.

"This isn't about a rancher doing something wrong," Warnock said. "This is about the Forest Service ignoring management recommendations on how to protect and recover a threatened species, something it is required to do in Hells Canyon."

A spokesman for the Forest

Service said the agency cannot comment on pending litigation.

The Hells Canyon National Recreation Area is part of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, though they are technically managed under different forest plans. In 2015, Stein, the forest district ranger, signed off on the Lower Imnaha Rangeland Analysis, which authorized commercial grazing on the four allotments.

The Greater Hells Canyon Council argues that decision violates the agency's obligation to protect threatened Spalding's catchfly under the National Forest Management Act. The species was listed as threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2001 due to agricultural and urban development.



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife photographed this wolf shot by a ranch employee in northeast Washington. WDFW determined the shooting was lawful because the wolf was one of two wolves chasing cattle.

Washington ranch hand says hazing led to shooting wolf

WDFW releases investigative report

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A ranch employee told a Washington wildlife officer that she was just trying to haze two wolves chasing cattle when she shot one last year in the state's first official case of a wolf killed in the act of attacking livestock, according to a report released by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The ranch hand said she didn't think she had hit either wolf, but found the carcass the next day and sent a text message to a department employee.

The investigator concluded the shooting was lawful after interviewing the employee, who was paraphrased in the report as saying, "There was nothing else I could do."

The report, obtained through a public records request, describes the department's probe into the June 30 shooting of an adult female from the Smackout pack in Stevens County.

WDFW investigated a second case of a wolf shot while attacking cattle in Oct. 27 in Ferry County. The department concluded that killing was lawful, too. The department is still reviewing a request for records related to that incident.

Washington's caught-in-the-act law applies only to the eastern one-third of the state. In the other two-thirds of the state, wolves are federally protected. If WDFW concludes shooting a wolf isn't justified, the shooter can be charged with a gross misdemeanor and face up to a year in jail and a \$5,000 fine.

WDFW blacked out the name of the ranch employee as well as her employer. State lawmakers last year passed a law instructing WDFW to withhold the names of ranchers and their employees who

report that wolves are attacking livestock.

According to the report, the ranch tried to haze wolves to keep them away from cattle grazing on Forest Service land. No dead cows or calves had been found, but cattle were bunching together and had broken through a wire fence, signs they were being threatened, according to the WDFW investigator.

The ranch employee said that the day before she shot the wolf, she shined a spotlight on a wolf and fired four or five times to scare it away from cattle.

"This particular producer has tried nearly every tool imaginable to prevent wolf-livestock conflict," WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said Monday. "You can't lose sight of all that effort and time and energy to address the conflict non-lethally."

On the morning of the shooting, the ranch employee said she saw two wolves chasing cattle, which were running toward her camping trailer. She fired and the wolves ran away.

"(The employee) explained she was just trying to haze the wolves from the field, adding she didn't think she hit either of them," according to the report.

The next day, the ranch employee found the female wolf, which had been shot through the stomach. The wolf had previously been trapped by WDFW and was wearing a radio-transmitting collar, according to the report.

The Smackout pack continued to be a problem for ranchers. WDFW trapped and euthanized two wolves in the pack in July to stop chronic depredations.

The pack has attacked livestock belonging to at least three producers in the past four years, according to WDFW. The most recent confirmed depredation by the pack was in October.

Lawmakers will deal with wolves, wine, soybeans and ag credits

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

BOISE — During Idaho's 2018 legislative session, there will be an effort to create a moratorium on soybean production in parts of the state where dry beans are grown.

A bill that would extend the life of the state's wolf depredation control board will also be proposed, as will legislation that seeks to require all high school students in the state to complete at least two agricultural education classes to graduate.

Unlike last year, it appears unlikely there will be revived efforts to change the state's law on the use of dyed fuel, which is heavily used in the agricultural industry.

The Idaho Bean Commission and Idaho-Eastern Oregon Seed Association will introduce legislation that would ban soybeans from being grown in south-central and southwestern Idaho, where

the state's dry bean industry is centered.

Those groups worry soybean seed could bring in diseases that could harm Idaho's \$70 million dry bean industry. They will conduct a presentation on the issue before the House and Senate ag committees later this month before introducing legislation, said IEOSA Executive Director Roger Batt.

A proposal to continue the wolf depredation control board indefinitely has already been introduced; the board's statutory authority to exist would end after this year otherwise.

The proposal would trim the amount the state provides to the board from \$400,000 to \$200,000 annually. The state's cattle and sheep producers provide \$110,000 per year to the board, as do Idaho sportsmen groups.

The money is used by the board to fund efforts to control problem wolves.

"We need that wolf control board," said Idaho Cattle Association Executive Vice President Cameron Mulroney. "The

impact that wolves are having is growing and we need that ability to control wolves when it's necessary."

Rep. Judy Boyle, a Republican rancher from Midvale and chairwoman of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee, has supported efforts to raise money to control problem wolves.

But she told Food Producers of Idaho members Jan. 17 that she doesn't like the idea of cutting the amount of money the state provides in half.

"That's going to be a controversial (proposal)," she said.

Two bills dealing with dyed diesel, which is tinted red so it can easily be identified and is exempt from state and federal fuel taxes because it is only for off-road use, were defeated last year.

One would have created a dyed diesel enforcement program and the other would have done away with dyed fuel altogether in Idaho and required people eligible to use it to apply for a tax refund.