



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Cattle Producers of Washington president Scott Nielsen believes his organization's rejected grant application represents a "missed opportunity."

Washington cattlemen's group howls over missing wolf grant

State to send money to ranches, nonprofit group

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Four ranches and a new nonprofit have been awarded a total of \$276,000 in state funds to protect cattle in Washington's wolf country with range riders and fences.

Meanwhile, a proposal by the Cattle Producers of Washington, whose members include ranchers most affected by wolves, has been denied funding.

The cattlemen proposed collaborating with state and local officials to collar more wolves, more closely monitor packs and more efficiently haze predators. Two sheriffs and county commissioners in all four northeast Washington counties endorsed the plan.

The application, however, was opposed by the Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"I think we put together a real good (proposal)," Cattle Producers President Scott Nielsen said. "Ours had the support of the local community. I think it was a real missed opportunity."

The state Department of Agriculture will distribute the grants based on the recommendations of a four-member panel representing conservation districts in Ferry, Okanogan, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties.

Fish and Wildlife already spends about \$400,000 year to help ranchers pay for non-lethal measures to guard livestock from wolves. The Legislature last year created a separate program under the agriculture department for a "community-based approach" to protecting livestock. Lawmakers appropriated \$300,000. The agriculture department will keep \$24,000 to administer the grants.

The largest grant, \$185,493, was awarded to the new Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative. The nonprofit plans to employ four or five range riders to help ranchers head off depredations. "We're taking no pay whatsoever," one of the nonprofit's directors, Ferry County rancher Arron Scotten, said. "We want every dime to go back into the community."

The other four grants

will go to individual operations for fences or additional human presence around wolves. The recipients are: Okanogan County rancher Craig Boesel, \$40,265; Stevens County rancher John Dawson, \$20,000; Ferry County ranchers Bryan and Deb Gotham, \$19,000; and Okanogan County rancher Vic Stokes, \$11,242.

"There's going to be a lot of accountability," said Dave Hedrick, a Ferry County Conservation District commissioner. "We're going to keep close track of how they spend the money, whether there's success or failure."

With its application, the Cattle Producers submitted endorsement letters from county commissioners and Stevens County Sheriff Kendle Allen and Ferry County Sheriff Ray McCumber. The officials said counties would contribute money to the effort and vouched that the goal would be to increase non-lethal control of wolves.

"On behalf of Stevens County, we pledge to you that the commissioners will stay involved and create a success story," wrote Steve Parker, county board chairman.

In written comments submitted to the department of agriculture, WDFW questioned whether the grants could be spent on a program that involved the sheriff's offices. WDFW also said the cattlemen's proposal wasn't in line with lawmakers' direction to use the money for community-based non-lethal measures. WDFW did not have objections to funding the nonprofit group or individual ranches.

WDFW also recommended against funding a proposal by Western Wildlife Outreach, a conservation group, that emphasized distributing fladry and lights. Efforts to obtain further comment from WDFW were unsuccessful.

Hedrick said WDFW's comments and the legislation that set up the grant program influenced the panel.

"All the stuff in (the Cattle Producers') proposal are good ideas, but to try to fit them in (the legislation) — we couldn't get there," he said. "The things we funded all involved getting stuff on the ground."

"There's some blow-back on the decision, but that's OK," Hedrick said. "I knew it was going to be tough."

Nielsen said the Cattle Producers' proposal was truly community-based. "To me, our proposal fit that to a 'T,'" he said.

Idaho computer programmer creates future of small farming

Farmer works on affordable tech for small producers

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

ATHOL, Idaho — Luke Black has big plans for his small farm.

He and his wife, Emily, even use the process of "mining" cryptocurrency — digital currencies such as Bitcoin — to heat their chicken coop. They have installed the computer "miner" on a wall and use fans to blow the heat into the coop to keep their chickens warm.

Market garden beds on their 10-acre farm will soon have sensors that send data about the crops to a server in his house. A full-time computer programmer, Black wrote the server software and designed and built their irrigation controller.

He also wants to develop artificial intelligence that would take information about the soil, crops, marketplace and weather and automatically make decisions about the farm, alerting employees about work that needs to be done.

"Sorry, farm managers of the world, but if I can replace that job with a computer, then I don't have to pay that and that's more money for the workers and for us," he said.

Luke, 36, spent most of his



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Emily and Luke Black on their farm near Athol, Idaho. Luke aspires to use computerized artificial intelligence to run their 10-acre farm.

childhood on his grandparents' farm outside Rathdrum in northern Idaho. Emily, 32, comes from a cattle ranch in Montana. Luke raises hops and heritage grains. Emily likes the market garden and raising chickens for eggs.

"Anything to make our lives easier with technology, I'm completely on board with that," Emily said, calling herself the "supporter" in Luke's plans for the farm. "I help with anything, but that's not my passion. Mine's digging in the dirt and being on the ground with (the chickens)."

Luke eventually hopes to reach tech-level salaries while farming. He says many other computer programmers are also interested in farming.

"All of us younger, mil-

lennial tech guys are realizing we can't be in the tech world much longer," he said. "It's hard on your body, sitting all day, working those hours and stress. The problem is you can't make a living farming."

Large agriculture uses some IoT — the initials for the Internet of Things — connecting physical devices to the internet, but it's difficult to get cost-effective information about crops in small-scale farming, he said.

"Small farms are not extremely profitable, but what Luke is developing can be affordable for the small farm," said Colette DePhelps, a University of Idaho Extension area educator for community food systems in Moscow.

"Luke is a farmer doing

the development side of it, so he gets agriculture," she said. "That's going to create a responsiveness in the system that might not happen if it came from the technological sector (and) folks who did not have experience in agriculture."

Luke sees a "revolution in the making." The farmers of the future will be programmers, he said.

"I don't think you're going to be able to be a successful farmer without knowing how to code," he said. "Whether people like it or not, what's going to end up happening is people like me are going to get robots on the fields that can run 24 hours a day, that don't take a break, and can produce things far cheaper than most people will be able to do."

Elk herds horn in on cattle pastures

By **CRAIG REED**
For the Capital Press

ROSEBURG, Ore. — The mild winter in Western Oregon has produced plenty of green pasture forage for livestock, but some elk herds are also loving it.

The elk rest and relax during the day in nearby forested area and then dine on the green grass during the night.

Many of the ranchers who own those pastures and the livestock are not too pleased with the wildlife intrusion.

"They're robbing feed that is intended for livestock," said Veril Nelson of the elk. Nelson is the owner of a red Angus operation east of Sutherlin, Ore. His pastures have had many nightly visits from a herd of 50 to 60 elk over the past couple of months.

"One of those mature elk weighs as much as a yearling cow, 600 to 700 pounds," the rancher said. "They certainly eat as much as a yearling beef animal. They hide in the timber during the day to rest and ruminate, then they're back out at night, eating enough for a 24-hour meal."

Tim Miller of Siletz, Ore., runs cattle on five properties. He said he has elk issues at four of those locations.

"If I can't keep the elk out, I'm a month later getting the cattle onto those pastures," he said.

Miller is working to keep



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife

Ten state-managed feeding sites along the Elkhorn Range in north-eastern Oregon are intended to keep elk and deer from venturing onto private lands where they can damage fields, fences and hay barns.

the elk out. He has built 6-foot electric New Zealand fence around two of the pastures and is in the process of fencing a third property. He has also obtained a hazing permit. Those permits allow ranchers to run or scare off wildlife with vehicles or shotgun blasts.

Craig Herman, a rancher in the Bandon, Ore., area, is chairman of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association's Private Lands Committee. He said there has been "a lot of frustration" with elk herds on private property. He explained in addition to losing pasture forage, fence damage caused by elk is also a major issue and expense for ranchers.

"One woman in the Newport (Oregon) area is getting out of the cattle business be-

cause she can't keep her fences up due to the elk," Herman said. "When elk are spooked, they'll go right through a fence, and then you have the problem of your own cattle getting out."

Tod Lum, a big game wildlife biologist in the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife office in Roseburg, said complaints about elk this winter have been about the same as in the past. He understands the situation ranchers who are trying to turn a profit with their cattle face.

"It's very attractive for an elk to look at a neon green field and be attracted to it, especially if they're living in the timber. When they graze on a field all night, the rancher has a valid damage complaint."

Lum said property owners

with at least 40 acres can obtain landowner preference tags to take an antlerless elk and to hopefully discourage the rest of the herd from returning. Additional antlerless elk tags can be obtained by hunters who are approved by the landowner and the biologist.

"That's a win-win for the hunter and the landowner," Lum said.

The biologist added a hazing permit is also an option. It allows a landowner to lawfully harass the wildlife, but he said that process has to start early before visiting a field becomes too much of a habit for elk.

The ranchers and the biologists admit filling the LOP and hunter tags are not easy pasture shoots because after being harassed once or twice, the elk sense daylight and have a tendency to leave the pastures as darkness is fading.

Herman would like to see ranchers compensated for forage and fence damage by the state, but knows that reimbursement is probably not available.

"We have meetings with ODFW and they're polite and listen," Herman said. "I appreciate what ODFW is dealing with, but I don't think those folks appreciate what landowners are dealing with. Forage loss and fence damage are major issues. ODFW needs to manage the wildlife populations better, maybe have longer hunting seasons."

Idaho bill clarifies who owns stock watering rights on federal land

By **SEAN ELLIS**
Capital Press

BOISE — A House committee has approved a bill that would further codify in state law a landmark Idaho Supreme Court decision on who owns stock watering rights on federally administered land.

Siding with two Owyhee County ranchers in a case known as the Joyce Livestock decision, the court ruled in 2007 that the federal government can't own those rights because it doesn't own cattle and therefore can't put the wa-

ter to beneficial use.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the ranchers filed overlapping claims to those rights during the Snake River Basin Adjudication.

Because those rights were deferrable, which means there is no time limit on filing for them, most ranchers chose not to file for them during the SRBA.

But the federal government did and during the SRBA, the adjudication court decreed up to 20,000 stock watering rights to the BLM.

The Idaho Legislature last year passed a bill that codified the Supreme Court decision in state law and set up a process by which ranchers can file for those claims.

House Bill 603, authored by Rep. Judy Boyle, a Republican rancher from Midvale, would require the director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources to send a letter to the federal agency requiring it to "show cause" to the depart-

ment why the rights should not be lost.

If the BLM can't do that, the rights would be forfeited.

Boyle said the fact that those rights haven't been forfeited by BLM has created a gray area for cattlemen who are unsure of what will happen if they file for them.

Boyle said the court was clear that the federal government doesn't own those rights.

"The facts are, the federal government doesn't own livestock and can't put (the water) to beneficial use," she said. "They haven't used it, so legally they forfeited it. But we still have to go through the" forfeiture process.

The House Resources and Environment Committee voted unanimously Feb. 19 to send the bill to the House floor with a "do-pass" recommendation.

Rep. Mike Moyle, a Republican rancher from Star, said those "show cause" letters should have been sent to

the federal government a long time ago.

If the tables were turned and ranchers had lost the court case, "I believe every one of those ranchers would have received a letter," he said.

"Those letters should have gone to the federal government a long time ago," Moyle said.

Boyle's bill also says that if the federal government ever acquires a stock water right, it shall never be used for any purpose other than watering livestock unless otherwise approved by the state.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Director of Governmental Affairs Russ Hendricks told Capital Press the Joyce Livestock decision was a huge victory for livestock owners and he applauded efforts to further codify the Supreme Court decision in state law.

"It's precedent-setting across the West," he said. "The federal government is obligated to follow state water law."

LEGAL

Request for Proposals Fiscal Year

July 1, 2018 - June 30, 2019

The Oregon Beef Council is soliciting proposals for projects in the following areas:

- 1) Positive Producer Image
- 2) Studying Legislation
- 3) Education related to beef
- 4) Generic promotion of beef

Any individual or organization may propose projects in any of the categories listed above.

Projects must meet the Beef Council's mission of enhancing the beef industry's image of profitability of Oregon's beef industry. Approved projects must comply with the Beef Promotion and Research Act and O.R.S. 577

To present a proposal you must complete and submit an Authorization Request Form by March 16, 2018 at 4:00 p.m.

Download an Authorization Request Form from orbeef.org or by contacting the Oregon Beef Council office (503) 274-2333 or via e-mail at julie@orbeef.org.

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