

## After 12 years in Washington, D.C., Alexis Taylor visits all 36 counties during first year as Oregon Department of Agriculture director



### Alexis Taylor

**Birthplace:** Dubuque, Iowa  
**Education:** Bachelor's degree, Iowa State University  
**Family:** Single  
**Resides:** Milwaukie, Ore.  
**Career:** Director, Oregon Department of Agriculture (2016-present); Deputy undersecretary, USDA Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services (2013-17); Legislative assistant, U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont. (2011-13), Legislative director, U.S. Rep. Leonard Boswell, D-Iowa (2006-11)  
**Hobbies:** Hiking and exploring the outdoors, and stand-up paddle boarding with her dog, a sheepdog-poodle mix named Frankie.  
**Did you know:** Taylor spent eight years serving in the U.S. Army Reserves, including one tour in Iraq with the 389th Combat Engineer Battalion.

Sources: www.oregon.gov; Capital Press research

Capital Press graphic

# UNDERSTANDING OREGON

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**  
Capital Press

The walls and shelves in Alexis Taylor's office at the Oregon Department of Agriculture are lined with framed photographs from her earlier career in Washington, D.C. There's Taylor with retired congressman Leonard Boswell from her home state of Iowa, whom she served as legislative director for five years. There's Taylor next to Tom Vilsack, secretary of agriculture under former President Barack Obama. And there's Taylor smiling alongside the president and first lady Michelle Obama at the White House.

All together, Taylor spent 12 years in the nation's capital, including the last four years with the USDA, where she oversaw Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services — including the Farm Service Agency, Risk Management Agency and Foreign Agricultural Service.

As her political appointment came to an end

in 2016, Taylor began her job search in the Midwest to be closer to her family's farm outside Holy Cross, Iowa. A friend and co-worker at the USDA then told her about a position in Oregon, leading the state Department of Agriculture in Salem.

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**LEFT:** ODA Director Alexis Taylor rides with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on the Columbia River to see the problems associated with flowering rush, an irrigation-clogging noxious weed.

**TOP:** Taylor visits a seed-cleaning plant owned and operated by grass seed grower Bob VanderZanden in Washington County.

Photos courtesy of ODA

**"I need that real-life context with farmers and ranchers, so when I'm sitting here in my office with my staff talking about an issue, I've gotten to see the people it's impacting."**

Alexis Taylor, ODA director

## Streaked horned lark lawsuit targets Oregon farm exemptions

### Environmental group claims federal policy violates Endangered Species Act

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

An environmental group is challenging the federal government's decision to exempt common farm activities from the prohibition against

"taking" streaked horned larks.

In 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the lark as "threatened," which would usually disallow "take" of the species by killing, harming or harassing the birds.

However, the agency enacted a special "4(d) rule" under the Endangered Species Act that exempted "normal farming and ranching activities" from the "take" prohibition in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Those activities include planting, mowing, spraying, tilling and harvesting.

Streaked horned larks were once



National Park Service

The streaked horned lark.

common in the Pacific Northwest but have disappeared from 90 percent of their range and now inhabit the Willamette Valley, islands on the

Columbia River and portions of the coast and Puget Sound in Washington.

Because the species prefers flat ground with little vegetation, activities such as plowing, mowing and burning fields can actually create habitat for the birds.

However, these practices can also kill or injure streaked horned larks during their nesting and breeding season, which lasts from April until August.

Farm operations in the Willamette Valley, where the majority of

the birds live, were broadly exempted from the "take" prohibition because the federal government wanted to "allow landowners to continue those activities without additional regulation."

For that reason, the Fish and Wildlife Service decided against modifying the 4(d) rule to require farmers to avoid disturbing streaked horned lark habitat during the sensitive nesting and breeding season.

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## Washington to study moving wolves from east to west

### UW to search South Cascades

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Washington lawmakers took two tentative steps last week to hasten the day wolves are off the state's protected-species list. The pending plan passed on

the session's last day appropriates \$183,000 to study moving wolves from northeast Washington to unoccupied territories to the west.

It also allocates \$172,000 to the University of Washington to search for wolves in the South Cascades.

If wolves are moved or confirmed in the South Cascades, they would be big steps toward delisting.

Lawmakers are realizing the burden that wolf recolonization has put on four

northeast counties, House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Brian Blake said Friday.

"I think some of the barriers are starting to break down," said Blake, D-Aberdeen.

Wolves have surpassed recovery goals in the northeast corner, but are too few or non-existent elsewhere to meet the state's objectives. A decade after the Department of Fish and Wildlife identified Washington's first pack,

the South Cascades doesn't have a confirmed wolf.

Blake said hunters tell him that wolves are in the region.

"We know there are wolves down there, but Fish and Wildlife has been so busy putting fires out in (northeast) Washington that they haven't had the time or resources to put into the South Cascades," he said.

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