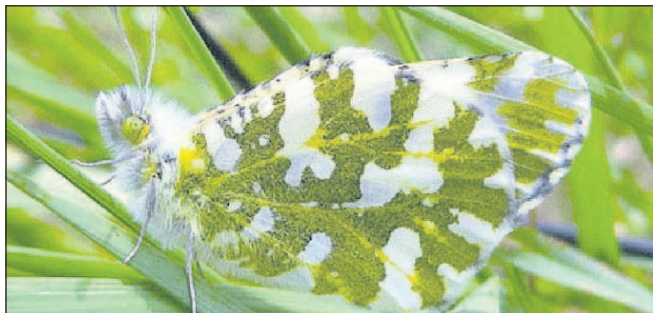


Washington butterfly up for ESA protection

Losing farmland hurt species

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The island marble butterfly, found only on San Juan Island in Washington, is a candidate for the endangered species list. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife report says loss of farmland has shrunk the butterfly's range.

coastal bluffs, a Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman said.

More than a decade ago, according to Fish and Wildlife, the butterfly was found in pockets away from the camp on small farms and in rural neighborhoods. Livestock and tilling take out the mustard plants that host the butterflies, yet the agency said it believed the land's use was compatible with the species.

"Since that time, the amount of farmland in San Juan County has decreased, with the greatest loss of farmland in San Juan County attributed to the subdivision of larger farms into smaller parcels, which have been developed," according to Fish and Wildlife.

"We conclude that development has substantively contributed to the extirpation of the

island marble butterfly outside of American Camp and remains one of several factors impeding successful recolonization of previously occupied habitats."

The species was once known on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, across the Haro Strait from San Juan Island. The butterfly had not been seen for 90 years until a Washington Department of Natural Resources biologist spotted one in 1998.

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation and other environmental groups first petitioned Fish and Wildlife to list the species in 2002. Xerces renewed the petition in 2012.

"There has been tremendous effort to assist the island marble butterfly over the years," Fish and Wildlife's

state supervisor, Erick Rickerson, said in a written statement. "But given the small population size, the threats to this species are significant. We will continue to work collaboratively with organizations and individuals on San Juan Island in our shared concern for the continued survival of this species."

Top threats identified by Fish and Wildlife include predation by spiders and wasps. Deer, rabbits and snails browse on plants that host butterflies, and storms have swamped habitat.

Potential, though undocumented, threats include butterfly collectors and vehicle collisions.

Male island marble butterflies are attracted to white objects that resemble females. The butterflies could be attracted to the white fog lines of the highway through American Camp and increase their risk of being hit, according to the Fish and Wildlife report.

Fish and Wildlife will take public comments on the proposed listing through June 11.

Comments may be submitted to www.regulations.gov or mailed to: Eric V. Rickerson, state supervisor, Washington Fish and Wildlife Office, 510 Desmond Drive SE, Lacey, Wash., 98506.



Idaho Department of Fish and Game

The Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel. The threatened species represents a potential roadblock to raising an Idaho dam and expanding its reservoir.

Threatened ground squirrel may impact dam project

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Water users want to raise Lost Valley Dam 130 miles north of Boise and triple the capacity of its reservoir to 30,000 acre-feet, but a threatened squirrel's presence nearby could impede or even derail those plans.

The Idaho Water Resource Board has approved spending up to \$30,000 to study mitigation options for the dam expansion's impact on the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel.

Lost Valley Reservoir Co. board member Doug McAlvain said the proposed expansion could be halted if population surveys and a related analysis don't produce viable mitigation steps for the squirrel.

Loss of its meadow habitat remains the biggest challenge for the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel, which was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act 18 years ago.

A 2003 Federal Register entry said the main threat to the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel is habitat loss as forests encroach on formerly suitable meadows, cutting off movement corridors and confining populations to isolated "habitat islands" that can reduce survival rates. A U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service species profile said fire suppression is thought to be a factor in habitat loss.

Fish & Wildlife said the squirrel ranges from Adams and Valley counties in Idaho's west-central mountain communities and south into Washington County. Populations have been found near New Meadows, Lost Valley Reservoir and other nearby locations. An estimated 54 population sites contain a combined 1,500 to 2,200 individual squirrels.

Range-wide monitoring shows known populations sta-

ble to slightly increasing over time, though the species' recovery status remains unclear, the agency said. Biologists found several new population sites as well as indications the squirrel responds favorably to habitat-restoration efforts at certain locations, especially in the Payette National Forest.

Miel Corbett, U.S. Fish & Wildlife regional spokeswoman in Portland, said the agency in 2016 initiated a five-year review that will evaluate the recovery status of the Northern Idaho Ground Squirrel. Recovery efforts emphasize restoring meadow habitat and providing connections between existing populations, she said.

The species inhabits dry meadows surrounded by Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir trees, at elevations from 1,500 to 7,500 square feet, Fish & Wildlife said. These squirrels need large amounts of grass seed, stems and other green, leafy vegetation to store fat reserves during hibernation from August or early September to late April or early May.

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game office in McCall in December and January advertised up to four jobs monitoring populations of the threatened squirrel in the state's west central region from April 9 to July 20. The job announcement said workers will measure distances between populations and note intersections among point-to-point connections. They also may mark squirrels for future recapture and study.

IDFG has been part of the interagency group carrying out the recovery plan since the outset, said Diane Evans Mack, regional wildlife biologist based in McCall. The department monitors squirrel populations, through surveys and other means, to derive annual estimates across the animal's range. Collectively the population data help paint a long-term picture, she said.

Baker & Murakami combination finds new efficiencies

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press



Baker & Murakami Produce

Onions travel to an automated weigher and bagger.

A merged, automated and otherwise fine-tuned Baker & Murakami Produce heads into the home stretch of the Northwest onion marketing season bullish on its position in the industry.

Baker Packing Co. and Murakami Produce, both of Ontario, Ore., on July 1 took equal ownership in the new Baker & Murakami Produce Co. LLP. The company grows, packs and ships onions supplied to a full range of customers including foodservice, retail and food-processing segments.

"We have built a lot of momentum this year and we are in a very good position moving forward," Baker & Murakami Chief Operating Officer Cameron Skeen said.

Combining two longtime Ontario businesses into one included substantial automation that streamlined operations and positioned the post-merger company to more effectively deal with the tight labor market, he said. Automation also led to better quality control.

Innovation in agriculture is positive at county, state and national levels, said Malheur County Economic Development Corp. Director Greg Smith, who is based in Ontario.

"While there may be short-term reductions in employment, it does lead to greater

stability and profitability for the industry," Smith said.

The former Baker Packing location at 153 S.E. First St. houses packing operations and the sales office. The former Murakami Produce facility includes the business office, and field and storage operations.

Following the merger and integration of the two large companies, Baker & Murakami has the same broad customer base but is more efficient and competitive, Skeen said. The company has better technology and more in-depth quality control that helps put a better onion in the hands of customers, he said.

"Our grading capabilities are much more extensive and sophisticated," Skeen said. The new grading equipment evaluates characteristics of the inside and outside of an

onion, and sorts by characteristics including color. The automated system also weighs, sizes and bags onions, and places them on pallets.

Automation and other internal changes helped Baker & Murakami streamline its workforce and in turn help the company deal with a persistent labor shortage.

Skeen did not release pre-merger or current employee totals. He said the merged company runs a single shift as the two independent predecessors each did. Employees added skills as Baker & Murakami moved ahead with new systems and processes.

Automation is the wave of the future, he said, and "we are trying to push ourselves for long-term success."

It hasn't been easy. "This year has been a real

learning curve with a lot of moving parts putting two companies together," Skeen said.

The united company found the right operating structure, and the right equipment, to change and improve upon what the predecessor enterprises did for years, he said.

"It has been challenging in that regard, but at the same time we feel like we are ahead of where we thought we would be," Skeen said. "I feel like we are definitely ahead of the curve for our area."

Southeastern Oregon and southwestern Idaho field nearly 30 onion packing and shipping companies, he said. The Northwest marketing season, during which onions go from growers and packer-shippers to customers, typically ends in May.

'Crooked calf' lawsuit seeks \$376,000 in damages

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Ranches in Nebraska and Idaho are seeking \$376,000 in a lawsuit that accuses an Oregon cattle company of negligence that resulted in deformed calves.

The complaint claims that Riverside Ranch Cattle and affiliated bovine reproduction companies in Prairie City, Ore., sold cows that had consumed toxic lupine plants while pregnant.

Those "recipient cows" had been implanted with embryos from Hoffman Ranch in Nebraska and Colyer Herefords in Idaho, which later bought the pregnant animals from the Oregon company.

The arrangement was part of an "embryo transfer," which allows cows with elite genetics to more quickly produce multiple offspring.

Under this process, hormone treatments cause a cow's ovaries to generate several eggs at the same time, which are then fertilized with sperm. The resulting embryos are then "flushed" from its uterus and implanted into

other cows that serve as surrogate mothers.

In this case, the plaintiffs allege that recipient cows were exposed to lupine during a critical point of their pregnancy while under the care of Riverside Ranch Cattle in the spring or summer of 2015 and 2016.

Alkaloids in lupine plants caused 23 of the 40 recipient cows bought by Hoffman Ranch to give birth to calves with defects such as crooked legs and malformed spines in 2015, according to the

complaint.

The lawsuit alleges that lupine consumption similarly caused "crooked calf syndrome" in 45 of the 64 recipient cows bought by Colyer Herefords in 2016.

The plaintiffs claim that 22 calves died or had to be euthanized due to the syndrome.

Riverside Ranch Cattle was negligent in failing to prevent the recipient cows from eating the lupines, resulting in a breach of contract, the complaint said.

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