

Conservation district to Hangman Creek farmers: Tell your story

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Walt Edelen



Vicki Carter

FAIRFIELD, Wash. — Farmers in the Hangman Creek watershed need to share their success stories with the state Department of Ecology in the face of increased scrutiny from the agency, Spokane Conservation District staffers say.

The creek is being called the most-polluted water body in the state, district water resources program manager Walt Edelen said at an April 12 informational meeting.

“It raises environmental hackles, gets people upset,” he said. “There has been a perception that maybe agriculture doesn’t really care, or they’re not really doing enough. This is what we’re dealing with.”

An environmental group, Spokane Riverkeeper, sued the Environmental Protection Agency in 2015, saying that control measures were not reducing pollution in the creek. Under a legal settlement reached in March, the state Department of Ecology will drive through the watershed in the spring and identify at least 10 priority problem sites on livestock or tillage operations.

Ecology will first make contact in April or May with a phone call, then a letter, Edelen said. Letters will be sent to landowners. A landowner could receive multiple contacts if several parcels are identified.

A farmer can meet with both Ecology and the conservation district in an effort to

find a solution to a problem, he said.

“We’ve been successful in some cases and there have been times when Ecology has come back and said, ‘That’s not working, we want more,’” Edelen said.

The district has several voluntary programs available to growers, including Farmed Smart, available to dryland farmers through the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. Ecology offers a “letter of safe harbor” to growers who meet the criteria of the program.

A similar Farmed Smart program for irrigated farms is in the works, and eventually a livestock program is possible, said Ty Meyer, agriculture manager for the conservation district.

It’s not certain that Ecology would automatically offer safe harbor for those programs, Meyer said, “but we’re building a pretty robust program that producers have to meet a high standard.”

If farmers show an effort to make improvements, Ecology will likely not issue a fine or penalty, Edelen said.

During the meeting, several farmers expressed their

frustration. Some told of working with the department to make changes and still receiving warnings, or worrying that Ecology could change its requirements.

Several farmers also questioned Edelen’s appearance in a video on the Spokane Riverkeeper website. The video was made by Spokane River Forum, which is not connected to Spokane Riverkeeper, about various uses of the river. Edelen represented the conservation district on it. In addition to Ecology and the Riverkeeper representatives, the video includes fly fishermen and farmers.

Even if all farmers are in compliance with Ecology, the creek wouldn’t necessarily be as clear as Ecology and the Riverkeeper group desire, due to its natural sediment load, Edelen said. However, the creek has been clearing up earlier each year, he said.

Ecology also plans to hold meetings, conservation district director Vicki Carter said.

She and Edelen urged growers to calmly educate the department about their practices, share stories of successful efforts and improve the evaluation process.

Newhouse seeks new grizzly comment period

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse is asking Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to reopen a public comment period on plans to reintroduce grizzly bears in the North Cascades so that “local residents who were ignored can be heard.”

Newhouse, whose district encompasses part of the North Cascades, sent a letter to Zinke on April 12 warning of “grave impacts” to North-central Washington residents if grizzlies are brought in and imploring Zinke to “stop ignoring the local community.”

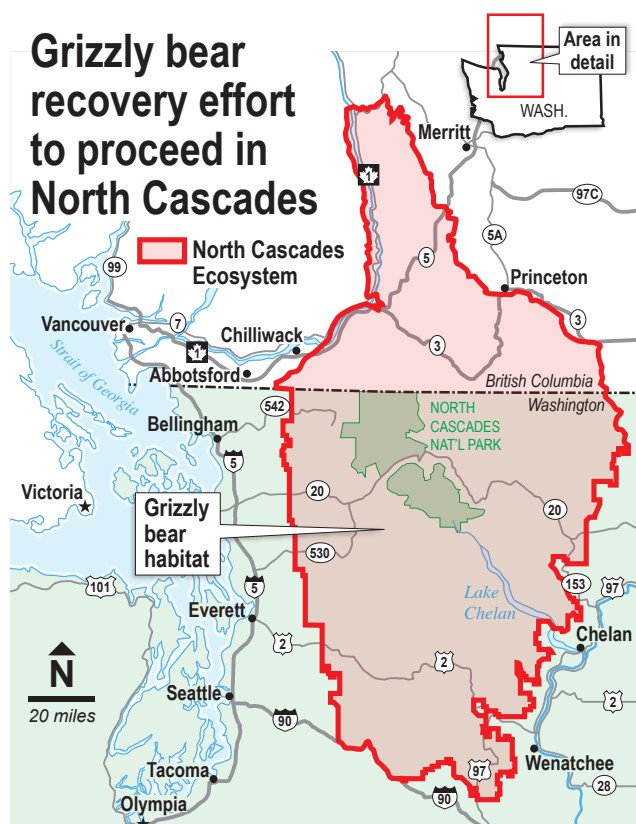
The Washington state Republican said his constituents were disrespectfully treated in the previous process and felt their concerns were not taken seriously.

At a public forum in Okanogan County, “many residents were not allowed to express their concerns and were treated in an unacceptable manner by the federal employees conducting the session,” Newhouse wrote.

Zinke’s March 23 announcement of support of grizzly bear recovery in the North Cascades “flies in the face” of his stated goals of “restoring trust and being a good neighbor,” Newhouse said.

“Just as my constituents have consistently expressed their steadfast opposition to this proposal, I will continue to stand in opposition to

Grizzly bear recovery effort to proceed in North Cascades



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; National Park Service Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

a plan that threatens the way of life in Northcentral Washington,” Newhouse wrote to Zinke.

Grizzlies will negatively impact ranchers, recreationists and rural economies and their reintroduction violates state law, he wrote.

Newhouse told Capital Press that he doesn’t know why Zinke supports grizzlies in the North Cascades when so many of his other decisions have been on the opposite end of the spectrum. Zinke has said he grew up in Montana where grizzlies are

iconic, Newhouse said.

North Cascades National Park Superintendent Karen Taylor-Goodrich has said the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make the final decision on North Cascade grizzlies at year’s end and will not need Zinke’s approval.

Newhouse said he believes Zinke has the authority to give him what he’s asking for so that people can make their comments and be heard. He said he hopes agencies listen.



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FFA members grow produce for their school




FFA members at the Lind-Ritzville Middle School in Lind, Wash., grow produce for the school lunches as part of the Farm to School class.

By Taylor Enns
Washington FFA State Secretary

LIND, Wash. — Lind-Ritzville’s Middle School FFA Chapter has a program known as “Farm to School” where students have the opportunity to plant, manage, harvest and process all of the produce grown for their school lunches. The project started when a group of sixth-graders expressed their desire to grow produce to sell at a local farmer’s market as a fundraiser. While they are working to get to that point, right now they are focusing on setting a strong foundation for the program.

This is the third year that the class has been offered and they are on track to provide quite a bit of produce through the end of this year and into the beginning of next year. Cucumbers, potatoes, radishes, cherry tomatoes, salad greens, and sugar snap peas are some of the most popular menu items to date. They currently grow the produce in a greenhouse and a garden and then process it in the newly remodeled home economics room.

School kitchens generally aren’t able to process

fresh produce, and this has been an obstacle for Mrs. Klindworth, the advisor of the program, and her students. To overcome this, they have applied for and received multiple grants that have allowed them to completely remodel the old home economics classroom into a prep room for the produce.

This program allows students to not only see their food go from seed to table, but also to learn about soil quality and management, plant disorders, and how to solve them, how to manage gardens, set up irrigation, how to safely harvest, and finally, how to process each produce item. Students also have the opportunity to manage the garden through the summer as part of their Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) which is a required component of FFA membership. The local health department also provides training on food safety and the students are able to obtain their Washington state food handlers permit.

Overall, this is an incredible opportunity for students to get hands on experience and to begin truly understanding where their food comes from at an early age.

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