

Wolf researcher settles with WSU, exits

School to pay Wielgus \$300,000

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

Washington State University wolf scientist Robert Wielgus has reached an agreement with the administration to leave his job as director of the university's Large Carnivore Conservation Lab.

Large Carnivore Conservation Lab, Wielgus was looked to as an expert by state wildlife managers and lawmakers as wolves began moving into Washington a decade ago.

Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen said that Wielgus had credibility with ranchers because he was with WSU, but trust eroded as Wielgus downplayed the danger wolves present to livestock and then blamed a rancher for depredations.

"I think he was trying to show wolves are not an issue," Nielsen said. "We saw that bias time and time again in his work."

The state Department of Fish and Wildlife funded a

cally flawed. They also said there was an "inherent disconnect" in Wielgus drawing conclusions about the behavior of individual wolfpacks based on statewide numbers.

"I know that particular study by Dr. Wielgus had a rebuttal or two, which is the normal scientific process," Fish and Wildlife wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said. "No single publication is the end all, be all."

In 2016, Wielgus told the Seattle Times that a rancher turned loose cows "on top" of a wolf den.

WSU officials publicly rebuked Wielgus. The school said that Wielgus' claim had no basis in fact. The cattle were turned loose on grazing allotments more than 4 miles from the den. The school also blamed Wielgus for stirring up "anger and confusion."

Nielsen said that Wielgus' accusation was more damaging than the study. "You have to understand (the den's location) wasn't available to the rancher," he said.

The following year, Wielgus restated the accusation in an email to Fish and Wildlife's Wolf Advisory Group. He also advocated making lethal control of wolves on public land contingent on ranchers signing contracts to prevent depredations.

Wielgus-led study in 2014 that purported to show that killing wolves breaks up packs, encouraging breeding and leading to more attacks on livestock the following year. The study mirrored one that Wielgus and others did the year before on cougars.

While the cougar study influenced Fish and Wildlife, the wolf study apparently did not.

Three University of Washington researchers looked at the same wolf information — collected from Idaho, Montana and Wyoming — and came to the opposite conclusion, that lethal control reduces depredations.

The UW researchers said Wielgus' work was statisti-

Idaho-administered Produce Safety Rule nets comments from border

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press



Pamm Juker

ONTARIO, Ore. — Idaho State Department of Agriculture efforts to administer the new federal Produce Safety Rule will work well if the agency sets clear expectations, makes the system practical for multi-state growers and can easily adapt to future changes in federal standards.

Those sentiments emerged as clear themes at an ISDA-hosted meeting May 15 in Ontario, Ore., part of a key produce-growing region that includes neighboring communities in southwest Idaho. ISDA is developing administrative rules tied to a new Idaho law.

"It just brings a little more awareness about what we have got to do with our growers on being up to par on this subject," said Jeff Robins, operations manager with Champion Produce, a packing shed in Parma, Idaho. Champion already has a food-safety program.

"We've got improvements to be made," said Jackie Williams, owner of Williams Fruit Ranch in Emmett, Idaho. For example, the orchard will evaluate its apple juicing, which is contracted to a third party.

Produce-industry representatives said ISDA farm inspections could cause problems where growers are based in Idaho but have fields in Oregon.

ISDA said the standards are the same no matter which agency administers the rule and inspects farms, and that an Idaho-Oregon operator would not need separate inspections.

The Produce Safety Rule establishes science-based minimum standards for growing, harvesting, packing and holding produce generally consumed raw. It currently applies to hops and wine grapes as well.

In a law passed March 20 to take effect July 1, the Idaho Legislature authorized ISDA to administer and enforce the federal rule and conduct on-farm inspec-

tions. The department has said the state's agriculture industry requested this due largely to existing relationships with ISDA. Federal grants are covering the effort so far.

At the May 15 meeting, industry representatives speculated about how packing sheds would be covered, and expressed concern about the rule's water-quality standards changing unexpectedly.

ISDA Chief of Staff Pamm Juker said the rule covers packing sheds that share ownership with a farm. As for water quality, any proposed change would involve its own comment period and compliance deadlines.

ISDA's draft administrative rule includes procedures by which the state could request the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to grant a variance, such as when a local growing condition interferes with standard compliance. A variance would be granted only to a grower who scientifically demonstrates safety would not be reduced and produce would not be adulterated, Juker said.

The Produce Safety Rule is in effect for large farms. Mid-sized farms must comply by next Jan. 28. Small farms have until January 2020, but those averaging less than \$25,000 in annual revenue for three years are exempt.

ISDA is taking comments on proposed administrative rules until May 31. Meetings are scheduled at 10 a.m. Pacific time on May 22 at Fairfield Inn and Suites, Moscow, and at 10 a.m. May 29 at Best Western Plus Burley Inn, Burley.

Washington ranching rivals agree on one thing: wolves

Groups 'fed up with wolves'

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Two rival Washington cattlemen's groups have issued a joint communique stating their shared discontent over wolves.

The statement from the Washington Cattlemen's Association and Cattle Producers of Washington stemmed from a summit last month in Ellensburg.

The Washington Farm Bureau also participated and sent out the announcement that agricultural organizations are "fed up with wolves."

It was the first time the three groups have spoken as one on the subject.

"I thought we should all try to get on the same page," Cattle Producers President Scott Nielsen said Wednesday. "I'm going to try to work much more closely with these other two groups."

The Cattlemen's Association and Cattle Producers are often on different sides of issues, such as the value of the beef commission and electronic identification

of cattle. On wolves, the Cattle Producers has been the sterner critic of the Department of Fish and Wildlife. It dropped out of the department's Wolf Advisory Group in 2015, while the Cattlemen's Association and Farm Bureau have stayed on.

Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, was one of several legislators at the summit. "That meeting had the makings of ugly," he said.

"What I saw that was impressive was that people sat down and said, 'We have a situation with wolves, and we need a collaborative approach,'" Dent said. "I thought it was a major success."

House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Brian Blake also went to the summit.

"I think it opened up some new communications between the cattle organizations about how important it is for them to find common ground," said Blake, D-Aberdeen. "Anytime you have an industry with multiple organizations with different positions, it makes them less of a force in the overall discussions."

The groups agreed that wolves in north-

east Washington should be removed from the state's endangered species list. They also said that counties should have more authority to manage wolves and that ranchers should get more information about the movement of wolves fitted with radio collars.

Efforts to reach the department for comment were unsuccessful.

Sarah Ryan, executive vice president of the Cattlemen's Association, said the two groups have policy disagreements, but found common ground on wolves.

"It was kind of a big deal," she said. "There's going to be continuing collaboration on wolves."

The Cattle Producers, the smaller group, has a higher profile in northeast Washington. That's where the state's wolves are concentrated and livestock losses are heaviest.

Nielsen said he wanted to tell ranchers about the severity of the problem for northeast cattlemen.

"I think they were stunned to hear what's really going on," he said. "I think that was highly successful."

Water concerns cause Northwest hay stocks to be tight, producers say

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

On-farm hay stocks are up from a year ago in Idaho and Oregon and down in Washington, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service.

But an Oregon producer and shipper and an Ellensburg, Wash., exporter both said on-farm stocks are sold and that overall inventories are low.

"I think inventory numbers are skewed. NASS will get bit in the butt because so many alternative crops are going in, dryland crops because of the shortage of water. NASS missed the mark the last three years," said Scott Pierson, Silver Lake grower and vice president of the Oregon Hay Growers Association.

People are ordering hay way earlier, fearing volumes will be low because of the lack of water, especially in the Klamath Basin, Pierson said. California producers are switching into almonds, he said.

Corey Rogers, president of Ward Rugh Inc. in Ellensburg, Wash., said new crop

alfalfa prices will be up because inventory is so tight. A lot of the Idaho and Oregon on-farm stocks are probably sold but have been slow to move because of issues with trucks. Pierson said Obama administration regulations are hampering trucking. Hours of operation were limited by new regulations.

A May 10 NASS report shows Oregon with 330,000 tons of hay on farms on May 1, up 22 percent from a year earlier and down 1.4 million tons since Dec. 1.

Idaho is at 660,000 tons, up 29 percent from a year ago and down 1.5 million tons since Dec. 1.

Washington, at 230,000 tons, is down 30 percent from last May and 920,000 tons lower than Dec. 1.

U.S. stocks are 15.7 million tons, down 36 percent from a year ago and down 70.6 million tons since Dec. 1, according to NASS.

Shawn Clausen, a Warden, Wash., grower, said Washington supply is short and acres are down because of low prices. People haven't been replanting alfalfa, he said.

Mike Cobb, an Ephrata, Wash., grower, said he thinks



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

One of three balers working in Ben Schaapman's first-cutting alfalfa just south of Quincy, Wash., in May two years ago. This year's Columbia Basin harvest is just starting.

Idaho and Oregon inventories are up because production was up last year and the light winter required less feed.

Washington inventories are down because it's closer to Ellensburg exporters, he said.

"Exporters like our hay and have been pretty aggressive contracting ahead of time on the 2018 crop," Cobb said.

For high-quality hay, exporters are paying \$185 a ton, up \$20 from last year and feeder hay is \$145, also up \$20, he said.

"Those are good prices but compared with 2013 and 2014, they're low. I don't like to see \$200 hay because then everyone jumps in and starts growing hay and it crashes. I can make it work at an \$165 average," Cobb said. "Everyone needs to win, to get their share. I'd rather have the market steady than a roller coaster."

First cutting alfalfa is just starting in the lower and upper Columbia Basin. It's about a month out in Silver Lake and southcentral Oregon since it's at a higher elevation, 4,300 to 4,800 feet above sea level.

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Weekly fieldwork report

Ore.

Wash.

Idaho

Calif.

Item/description (Source: USDA, NASS, NOAA)	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of May 15)	5.7	5.5	5.8	7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	2%	4%	26%	2%
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	24%	13%	10%	70%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	2%	3%	13%	5%
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	31%	7%	17%	30%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of May 15)	33-50% above	Normal/ 33% above	33-50% above	40% above/ Normal (South)

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