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Opinion

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OUR VIEW

Wetlands inventory a mixed proposition

The Oregon Department of State Lands is developing a statewide wetlands inventory map using multiple sources of information to show where wetlands are located.

It's a significant issue for farmers, who must obtain fill-removal permits from DSL before starting major ground-disturbing projects within wetlands. That can be expensive, particularly if you find out after the fact that you have a problem.

The goal is to show property owners where the agency has authority so they don't unintentionally break the law.

At first blush it's hard to argue with that. As we said, it could be an expensive mistake.

But we can understand why not everyone is seeing this as a gift.

There are a lot of farmers who have operated for years under the assumption their land wasn't a wetlands, in many cases because the available county and federal inventories are incomplete. If a parcel is on the list it's a wetland, but if it's not it still could be.

That's what Jesse Bounds found out.

After a fire destroyed two barns, his machinery and \$500,000 worth of straw in 2016, he obtained the necessary county permits to rebuild.

Then a neighbor complained to DSL. It discovered 12 acres

that had been farmed for years was actually a wetlands — a wetlands that didn't appear on the State Wetland Inventory and had gone unnoticed. A permit to mitigate the damage to the wetlands would cost \$57,000 per acre, a \$684,000 unexpected bill.

A lot of people don't think it's fair that one government agency — the county building department, for example — using the best available source can clear a property for building, then DSL can come along and declare it a wetlands.

So, the department is trying to update the inventory. In the process, some places now not known by the owner and

the county will be declared a wetland and open to increased regulation.

Some legislators say that's an expansion of the department's authority.

The department says it's not. Wetlands, whether known or as yet undiscovered, are subject to regulation under the Clean Water Act.

But what makes a property a wetlands? It has less to do with actually being wet than meeting three factors. Wetlands must include hydric soils, wetland vegetation and wetland hydrology.

Some wetlands are easily observable, others are not.

Hydric soils, which are

common in the Willamette Valley will, serve as a "wide net" for analyzing lands, but the agency will rely on the area's current hydrology and other technical factors to decide whether it's currently a wetland.

The Oregon Farm Bureau and others worry that once DSL determines a property is a wetlands it will remain so until its owner can prove otherwise. That's an expensive proposition. But, so is getting a permit if work must be done.

Legislators say they want to keep a close eye on the mapping program to ensure DSL stays within its statutory limits.

There's no better use of the legislative oversight authority.

OUR VIEW

Bizarre grizzly plans should be shelved — forever



On the heels of the painfully misguided efforts to bring gray wolves back to Washington state, a federal plan to add grizzly bears to the mix seems, well, bizarre.

Wolves were never transplanted into Washington state. They followed the food from British Columbia and Idaho. The first Washington wolfpack was fully documented in 2008.

Since then, ranchers — primarily those in northeastern Washington — have had to cope with repeated attacks on their cattle and sheep. Now, 19 of the 23 wolfpacks in the state are in northeastern Washington, where ranching is a major activity.

Some ranchers have tried to work with state wildlife managers to find non-lethal ways to keep the wolves away from their livestock. Others see it as futile because the wolves still eat what they want. Even when wolves don't kill their livestock, they traumatize the cattle and sheep, cutting into their weight gain.

To make a bad situation worse, some deeply troubled people — presumably from the pro-wolf camp — have been shooting cattle. Ranchers have offered \$15,000 for information on the shootings. They don't know how many calves and cows have been shot, only that they don't return at round-up.

State wildlife managers have tried to mediate the wolf issue by bringing in a high-paid consultant and by controlling information related to wolves.

Into this mess rides the National Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which plan to reintroduce grizzly bears in the North Cascade Range. They say the area can support upwards of 200 bears.

This idea has the potential to make the fumbled wolf management problem in the state look good. Unlike wolves, which usually try to avoid humans, bears have no fear of them. And they have a taste for beef, fruit and mutton. Unlike wolves, which rarely attack humans, grizzlies have no qualms about killing people.

The thing wildlife managers seem to leave out of their narratives is that grizzly bears, like other animals, follow the food. If the food is plentiful in the back country, they'll stay there. If food is more plentiful in the hundreds of acres of fruit orchards, herds of cattle, game animals or in town, they will go there.

That's no secret. Anyone who has ever been in bear country knows a hungry grizzly must be avoided at all costs.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, who oversees both the Park Service and the Fish and Wildlife Service, gave his blessing to the plan to reintroduce grizzlies in the North Cascades. We urge him to reconsider. Such plans would only multiply the region's predator problems for ranchers and everyone else.

The last thing Washington state needs is another apex predator taking over the countryside.

Guest
comment
Robert Giblin



Farmers step up efforts to reduce food waste

Topics like emerging cuisines, ingredients, restaurant themes, grocery store formats and cooking techniques often dominate food trend discussions. But another trend — reducing food waste — is cutting across all segments of the food industry, from farms to processors, marketers, grocery stores, restaurants, institutional foodservice and homes.

Americans waste nearly 150,000 tons of food every day, according to a study published in April in the journal PLOS ONE. Conducted by researchers at the Agriculture Department's Agricultural Research Service, the University of Vermont and the University of New Hampshire, the study is the first to explore links between diet quality, food waste and environmental impacts.

Looked at another way, American consumers each waste about 1 pound of food per day. About 20 percent of all food served on the plates of Americans goes into the trash every year, in a country where one in seven people are food insecure.

Last month, the American Farm Bureau Federation joined a collaborative effort — "No Taste for Waste" — to reduce food waste and loss. The campaign provides a resource for consumers interested in reducing household food waste, while informing the public about how farmers take steps to fight food loss in their fields.

Among the Farm Bureau members leading the food waste reduction charge are April Clayton and John Boelts.

April and Mike Clayton grow organic apples and cherries at Red Apple Orchards, on the eastern slope of the Cascade Range in Washington state. "We have to sort the 'uglies' from the 'pretties' at the farm and packing shed. Consumers are focused on bigger, brighter and prettier," she says. "They don't want bruises or cracks, but if Americans were more willing to buy fruit that wasn't as beautiful, that would help reduce waste dramatically."

The Claytons have adopted new practices, such as planting apple trees close together and pruning thinner, to reduce water usage while improving both fruit quality and the amount of marketable fruit.

Making sure that harvested food gets put to good use has been a life-long passion of John Boelts, who grows leafy greens and melons in Yuma County, Ariz. Years ago, his father helped set up a rural food bank and worked with other local growers to donate unmarketed produce and fill trucks destined for local food banks and other locations nationally.

He says that a critical role of the "No Taste for Waste" program will be to educate consumers about the role of improved farming practices in producing more high-quality food and reducing waste, and in helping to reduce hunger.

Meeting the national goal of reducing waste 50 percent by 2030 will require concentrated efforts at all levels, not just as a trend but as a change in consumer lifestyles.

Robert Giblin writes on agriculture. His column appears courtesy of the American Farm Bureau Federation.