

# USDA announces new strategy to improve forest conditions

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

The fury and intensity of the 2018 wildfire season has sparked a renewed push for more active management of federal forests.

Three days after visiting the site of the 229,651-acre Carr fire — which has killed six people and destroyed more than 1,000 homes near Redding, Calif. — USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue announced a new strategy for treating overstocked forests to reverse the trend of increasingly large and destructive “megafires.”

Perdue outlined the plan in a 28-page report Aug. 16 at the U.S. Capitol, joined by U.S. Forest Service Interim Chief Vicki Christiansen and a bipartisan group of senators including Ron Wyden, D-Ore., Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., Steve Daines, R-Mont., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska.

“On my trip to California this week, I saw the devastation that these unprecedented wildfires are having on our neighbors, friends and families,” Perdue said. “We commit to work more closely with the states to reduce the frequency and severity of wildfires. We commit to strengthening the stewardship of public and private lands.”

The strategy, titled “Toward Shared Stewardship Across Landscapes,” calls for the Forest Service to coordinate with states to prioritize restoration projects where they can have the greatest benefit on the landscape, with

states convening local partners to discuss what conditions look like on the ground.

According to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho, wildfires burn twice as many acres each year as they did 40 years ago. From 1983 to 1992, fires burned an average of 2.7 million acres per year, while the latest 10-year average shows fires are now burning 6.5 million acres per year. The 2018 wildfire season is on pace to eclipse that total, reaching 5.9 million acres as of Aug. 20.

Statistics from the NIFC also show fires are getting bigger on Forest Service land across the West. Over the past decade, there have been 2.5 times more fires of at least 1,000 acres, 3.5 times more fires of at least 10,000 acres, and 3.6 times more fires of at least 100,000 acres, compared to the 1980s.

As of Aug. 20, The NIFC reported 109 large fires in 12 states, including 13 in Oregon, 11 in Idaho, 10 in Washington and 10 in California. Large fires are defined as burning 100 acres or more of timber, and 300 acres or more of grass and rangeland.

Christiansen, the interim Forest Service chief, said the situation calls for a new approach to land management.

“We will use all the tools available to us to reduce hazardous fuels, including mechanical treatments, prescribed fire, and unplanned fire in the right place at the right time, to mitigate (wildfires),” Christiansen said.

# USDA: Small farms bear greater food safety costs

Larger growers can spread costs over bigger revenue base

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press



Photo courtesy of Washington State University

Complying with the Food Safety Modernization Act will consume a much larger chunk of small farmers’ revenues compared with their larger counterparts, according to USDA.

Fresh produce growers with annual sales above roughly \$3.5 million can expect to devote less than a third of 1 percent of revenues on complying with the federal statute, which was enacted in 2011, according to a recent USDA study.

Meanwhile, those with less than \$500,000 in annual sales will likely spend about 6-7 percent of their revenues to meet FSMA requirements, such as water testing, worker training and recordkeeping, the study found.

The added expense may prompt some smaller farmers to stop growing fresh produce crops affected by FSMA, or convince them to sell off their operations altogether, said John Bovay, the study’s lead author and an assistant professor at the University of Connecticut.

“Clearly, farms aren’t operating on huge profit margins, especially small farms,” Bovay said. “Consolidation is definitely an option.”

When comparing farms by size, the cost of complying with FSMA increases sharply as farms attain revenues of about \$500,000, after which the expense mounts more slowly and then levels off

Small farmers will spend up to 7 percent of their revenues complying with the Food Safety and Modernization Act, compared to 0.3 percent for large growers, according to USDA.

once revenues hit about \$3.5 million, the study said.

In effect, the total costs of training workers or testing water are relatively fixed, but bigger farms can spread those expenses across a larger revenue base, Bovay said.

“Compliance cost increases with revenue, but at a decreasing rate,” he said.

When the rules associated with FSMA are fully implemented in 2022, the actual cost for large farms may actually be less than the 0.3 percent estimated by the study.

That’s because large growers have already been required by major retailers to adopt food safety practices that will be mandated by FSMA, Bovay said. “It’s going to accentuate the advantage the big guys have, because the big guys are already complying.”

Because following the law’s mandates will probably cause a small reduction in the supply of fruits and vegetables, the associated increase in prices will help mitigate costs for the farming industry as a whole, he said.

# Washington judge blocks shooting wolf to protect cattle

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Two environmental groups obtained a court order Monday barring the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife from killing a male wolf in the Togo pack to stop attacks on cattle in Ferry County.

Thurston County Superior Court Judge Chris Lanese issued the temporary restraining order at the request of the Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands. The order will remain in place until at least Aug. 31, when the court will hear more arguments and consider extending the order.

Lanese’s order shelves, at least temporarily, a lethal-removal policy that Fish and Wildlife worked out with its Wolf Advisory Group, an 18-member panel that represents ranchers, hunters, conservationists and animal-welfare advocates.

State Rep. Joel Kretz, whose northeastern Washington district has lived with the consequences of wolf revival, said the ruling undercuts a policy meant to reconcile livestock production and

wolf recovery.

“It’s all out the window now,” he said. “I’m the most frustrated I’ve ever been in 14 years of being a legislator, maybe my whole life, over this thing.”

The hearing came about Monday because the two environmental groups won a commitment in Lanese’s court last spring from Fish and Wildlife to give a one-day notice before killing wolves. The pack was blamed for attacking a calf Saturday, its third depredation in 10 days. The department announced early Monday that it would target the pack’s only known male wolf beginning at 5 p.m. The notice gave the groups time to file their objection.

At a hastily arranged hearing in a nearly empty courtroom, Lanese granted the restraining order. He cited a law that suggests no one will suffer substantial harm by delaying the agency’s actions, but that the two environmental groups would suffer irreparable injury if the wolf were shot.

Cattle Producers of Washington President Scott Nielsen said he was angered but

not surprised by the ruling.

“This is what we thought would happen,” he said.

“It’s really bothersome that Thurston County is now telling us how to manage wolves,” Nielsen said. “It will have an unintended effect on social tolerance in this area.”

The Center for Biological Diversity and Cascadia Wildlands argue the department’s policy on killing wolves to stop attacks on livestock is illegal because it was developed with too little scientific and public review.

“Wolves are part of Washington’s wildlife heritage, and agency management of these magnificent animals should be based on science, follow the law and allow for full public input,” Cascadia Wildlands legal director Nick Cady said in a written statement.

Fish and Wildlife developed the protocol through an informal and expensive process. The department paid a consultant, Francine Madden, \$8,000 a day to lead Wolf Advisory Group meetings and coax people with differing viewpoints into a consensus.

The policy obligates ranchers to employ non-lethal preventive measures, but committed wildlife managers to consider “incremental removal” if the measures fail. The department adopted the policy in hopes that intervening after three depredations within 30 days or four depredations in 10 months will save livestock and require shooting fewer wolves to deter attacks.

“We’ll continue to work with the producer to deploy non-lethal preventive measures,” Fish and Wildlife wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said after Monday’s hearing. “Unfortunately, I would expect conflict between livestock and wolves to continue.”

Fish and Wildlife argued in court that shooting one wolf would not damage wolf recovery in Washington. The pack has at least two adults and two pups, maybe more adults and pups. The department said it intended to kill the male and leave the female alone to increase the chances the pups would survive.

Washington culled wolf packs in 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2017.

# OSU field day highlights mechanical cultivation tools

About 100 attend inaugural event

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

Until recently, managing weeds at Gathering Together Farm meant using cultivation technology circa the 1950s.

John Yeo, cultivation manager and agronomist at the 65-acre certified organic farm in Philomath, Ore., estimates they were spending \$3,000 per month on labor just to pull weeds. In that sense, he said investing in new mechanical equipment was a no-brainer.

The farm purchased an in-row weeder earlier this summer from Kult-Kress Cultivation Solutions, which Yeo was on hand to demonstrate Thursday during the first mechanical cultivation field day at Oregon State University.

About 100 people attended the daylong event, hosted by the OSU Small Farms Program. The lineup included speakers, vendors and demonstrations at the university’s vegetable research farm in Corvallis.

Yeo said he was excited to see the knowledge of cultivation being resurrected, and passed along to the next generation of farmers.

“That’s the focus of this workshop,” he said.

Gathering Together Farm grows more than 300 varieties of 50 different vegetable crops. But as an organic operation, Yeo said they cannot use herbicides to treat weeds, meaning they must rely on mechanical tools.

Eliminating weeds between rows of crops is the “holy grail” of mechanical



George Plaven/Capital Press

Steve Heckerroth, CEO of Soletrac in Albion, Calif., shows the company’s electric eFarmer tractor during the first mechanical cultivation field day at Oregon State University.

cultivation, Yeo said, and already the Kult-Kress weeder is paying dividends. The equipment hooks onto his tractor, raking the soil to disrupt weeds without harming the vegetable seedlings.

The equipment cost about \$1,000 per row, Yeo said, but will quickly pay for itself in labor savings.

“It’s not going to eliminate it, but it will dramatically reduce the amount,” he said.

Clare Sullivan, a small farms extension agent for OSU based in Redmond, helped to organize the field day with assistance from a two-year Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant through the USDA.

Mechanical cultivation has always been a component

of integrated weed management, Sullivan said, but with a decrease in labor and rising production costs, it is becoming more important for small and organic farmers to become more efficient.

Sullivan said she hoped growers would find inspiration at the field day by seeing firsthand how new equipment works, and how they can integrate the tools on their farms.

“I’m really hoping they have some ‘aha!’ moments, seeing how some of these tools work in the field,” she said.

Joe Sutton, chief operating officer of Sutton Ag Enterprises, an equipment dealer and manufacturer based in Salinas, Calif., said Europe is well ahead of the U.S. in

accelerating mechanical restoration equipment.

“Their labor problems and cost of labor is much more extensive than it is here,” Sutton said, adding that it costs as much as \$45 per hour to hand-weed in some parts of Switzerland. “That’s why they’re so much more advanced there.”

Sutton Ag Enterprises builds 30 percent of the equipment it sells in-house, while also serving as the sole U.S. distributor for 15 European companies, such as Steketee finger weeders out of the Netherlands.

“It all comes down to labor and saving time,” Sutton said. “If you can mechanically treat and save the time, it’s always going to be a plus.”

## Tires LES SCHWAB Weekly fieldwork report

Item/description	Ore.	Wash.	Idaho	Calif.
• Days suitable for fieldwork (As of Aug. 21)	7	6.3	6.9	7
• Topsoil moisture, surplus	0	0	0	0
• Topsoil moisture, percent short	89%	71%	69%	70%
• Subsoil moisture, surplus	0	0	0	0
• Subsoil moisture, percent short	85%	65%	65%	70%
• Precipitation probability (6-10 day outlook as of Aug. 21)	33-50% Above	40-50% Above	33-50% Above/ 33% Below	Normal

## YOUR FARM TIRE HEADQUARTERS

Les Schwab Tire Centers are proud to sponsor the Fieldwork Report. We have over 475 stores throughout the West! [www.LesSchwab.com](http://www.LesSchwab.com)



**Grass Expertise. LET'S TALK!**

**WHEN SEEDING GRASS WITH AN AIR TRUCK, APPLY HALF OF SEED NORTH/ SOUTH & THE OTHER HALF EAST/WEST TO AVOID OPEN SKIPS**

**GREENWAY SEEDS**  
greenwayseedandindustries.com  
Caldwell, Idaho • Alan Greenway, Seedsman  
Cell: 208-250-0159 • MSG: 208-454-8342

**Over 40 Years Experience**

**Alan Greenway, Seedsman**

34-3/108