Two conservation district supervisors face possible ouster

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Thurston County, Wash., Conservation District Supervisor Linda Powell reads a statement to the Washington State Conservation Commission at an Aug. 29 hearing in Lacey on whether to hold a public hearing on removing Supervisors Eric Johnson and Richard Mankamyer. Powell defended her fellow board members against allegations of misconduct.

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

LACEY, Wash. — Two Thurston County Conservation District supervisors will face a public hearing in October on whether they should be removed from office, the Washington State Conservation Commission decided on Aug. 29.

Eric Johnson and Richard Mankamyer, both farmers, are accused of hindering the district's operations and treating staff inappropriately. Another conservation district supervisor, Linda Powell, defended the two, saying the accusations stem from their questioning how the district spends money.

"At worst Eric Johnson and Richard Mankamyer are overzealous whistleblowers," Powell told the commission. "Keep them. We need real farmers on the board."

The state commission convened the special meeting after a staff investigation found grounds to oust Johnson and Mankamyer. Conservation district supervisors are appointed or elected locally, but state law gives the state commission authority to remove supervisors for neglect of duty or malfeasance.

The commission staff investigated after receiving a letter in November from former supervisor Samantha Fleischner complaining about Johnson and Mankamyer. The allegations against Johnson and Mankamyer include administrative matters such as not approving meeting minutes, not signing time sheets and, in Johnson's case, missing a meeting important to district finances. Other complaints are related to personal interactions with staff members.

Johnson and Mankamyer were not at the meeting. In a joint response submitted to the commission by their lawyer, Shawn Timothy Newman, they said they "intend to vigorously contest these allegations."

"It is evident that (conservation district) staff did not want to lose power to a 'strong board' and engaged in a campaign of hostility and obstruction against Johnson and Mankamyer," according to Newman.

Newman warned that removing the two will lead to "protracted and multiple lawsuits" and proposed the state commission defer to the outcome of a recently filed recall petition.

The commission decided to go ahead with a public hearing on removing Johnson and Mankamyer, though it also authorized its lawyer to negotiate an agreement that would make the hearing unnecessary. The commission agreed to hold the hearing in October, though it will set the time, date and place later.

The commission also decided to hold the hearing under less-formal rules than called for by the state Administrative Procedures Act, another option presented to the commission. Commission members said they wanted a less time-consuming hearing that could resolve the issue faster.

Johnson said Aug. 30 that he would prefer a more formal hearing to present his case. "I want an administrative hearing in front of a non-partial judge," he said. "I'm just afraid that if it isn't an administrative hearing it won't allow us to give an accurate side."

Efforts to reach Mankamyer were unsuccessful.

Powell said after the meeting that she wished the commission had chosen the more thorough hearing.

"I'd like to see all the facts come out," said Powell, who was appointed to the board in November. "There's a lot of emotion and dreamed-up information. Where are the facts?"

The state commission didn't allow public comments on the substance of the allegations. Some 18 people did comment generally on whether there should be a hearing. Most criticized Johnson and Mankamyer, accusing them of strong-arm tactics and opposing environmental projects.

Some came their defense. Thurston County rancher Rick Nelson, a former conservation district supervisor, said the district's priorities need to be changed. "It's there to serve the farmers," he said.

Powell, who called herself a "homesteader" trying to be self-sufficient on her property, said she was acquainted with Mankamyer and didn't know Johnson at all when she joined the board.

"In my seven months on the board, I have seen no malfeasance or neglect of duty. In fact just the opposite," she said. "Johnson and Mankamyer have legitimate concerns that justify their insistent questioning of the staff."

Judge puts Idaho, Wyoming grizzly bear hunts on hold

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Courtesy U.S. Department of Interior

A federal judge in Missoula, Mont., delayed grizzly bear hunts in Idaho and Wyoming for 14 days while he considers whether the bears should be protected again.

Grizzly bear hunts in Idaho and Wyoming have been delayed by a federal judge while he decides whether to reinstate federal protection for the bears.

The hunts were scheduled to start Sept. 1 but stopped by a temporary restraining order for 14 days on Aug. 30 by U.S. District Judge Dana Christensen in Missoula, Mont.

The judge wrote that the hunt would cause irreparable harm to the bears "because once a member of an endangered species has been injured, the task of preserving that species becomes all the more difficult."

Tim Preso, Earthjustice attorney, called a 2017 federal government decision illegal that delisted some grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem from the Endangered Species Act.

Earthjustice filed for the temporary restraining order on behalf of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity and National Park Conservation Association.

Idaho and Wyoming were planning the first hunts in more than 40 years that would allow for up to 23 bears to be killed outside Yellowstone National Park. The Wyoming Game and Fish Commission said the bears have exceeded recovery criteria since 2004 and that management is necessary.

There are 718 grizzlies in a suitable habitat area within the Yellowstone ecosystem and the criteria was for 500 bears, Renny MacKay, a Wyoming Game and Fish Department spokesman, has said.

Wyoming pays ranchers for loss of livestock on a formula that figures there are more kills for every one reported, he said. The state paid $455,000 for livestock kills by grizzlies in 2016, $509,000 in 2015 and $301,000 in 2014, he said.

Christensen granted the temporary restraining order 2 1/2 hours after Earthjustice asked for it and without giving the federal government or Mountain States Legal Foundation time to review it or comment, said Cody Wisniewski, MSLF lead attorney.

"Plaintiffs argue the federal government didn't follow proper procedure and didn't have authority to delist just part of the species," Wisniewski said. "But the ESA was never designed to allow permanent federal management. Rather, the goal was to allow the federal government to step in and aid states to recover a species and then turn management back over to the state. The Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem is recovered (for grizzlies) by all accounts."

MSLF represents the Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation, Wyoming Stock Growers Association, rancher Charles C. Price and W. and M. Thoman Ranches LLC.

"My clients are not people flying in and out of the West to drive through the national parks or go on hunting trips. They are people who live here, people who work on this land and people who put food on our plates," Wisniewski told the court.

As grizzlies have increased ranchers have faced mounting losses to sheep and cattle and more frequent attacks on humans, said Nathan Harden, MSLF spokesman in Lakewood, Colo. Thoman Ranches lost 445 sheep to grizzlies in one year and has given up federal grazing permits because their losses have been so great, he said.

Conference aims to grow local food economy

Capital Press

Experts, advocates and educators seeking more vibrant local food systems will join Idaho community leaders to discuss challenges and opportunities to strengthen local food economies during an Oct. 18 conference in Boise.

The conference, Balancing Profitability and Access in Local Food Systems, is hosted by the University of Idaho with support from Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education. It will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Riverside Hotel.

Participants will explore economic approaches to cultivate a local food economy, create jobs and invigorate small farms and businesses.

Panelists from across Idaho will examine ways to bring more locally produced foods to mainstream markets to strengthen small- to mid-sized farms.

Speakers will include Neva Hassanein, a University of Montana professor of environmental studies and author of "Changing the Way America Farms: Knowledge and Community in the Sustainable Agriculture Movement," and Lauren Gwin, Oregon State University associate director of the Center for Small Farms and Community Food Systems.

Registration is $45 at https://idahofood2018.eventbrite.com. Scholarships are available, and more information is available from U of I Extension educator Lauren Golden at lgolden@uidaho.edu.

GROWING BUSINESSES FROM THE GROUND UP.

Our local experts don't just know your industry, they live it.
With years of real-world experience, they understand the details and demands of your unique business. And they're always ready to roll up their sleeves and lend a hand. See how good your relationship with a bank can be. Visit ColumbiaBank.com.

Member FDIC Equal Housing Lender
Columbia Bank WHERE RELATIONSHIPS RULE
36-1/102

REDUCE DAMAGE TO YOUR CROPS

ZP® AG
PELLETS • OATS

- ZP Ag is available in various forms (Pellets, Oats) and can be broadcast in many different applications, including Fruit and Nut Tree Orchards, Vineyards and Nurseries.
- The proven zinc phosphide formula controls a variety of pests such as voles, gophers, ground squirrels, as well as rats and mice.

RESTRICTED USE PRODUCT
For use ONLY by Certified Applicators

PCQ® Ag
PELLETED BAIT

- Restricted Use product for control of California Ground Squirrels, Meadow & Pine Voles, Rats and Mice
- Broad label for a variety of baiting situations*, in and around Fuit Tree Orchards (apply after harvest)
- Versatile, durable pelleted bait with proven palatability
- PCQ Ag is registered for sale in Washington, Oregon and the following states: NV, MI, PA, MA, VA, NC, GA

For more information, contact your local Motomco Territory Manager OR Cody Massey at 307-267-6556 or cmassey@motomco.com

MOTOMCO
THE WORLD LEADER IN RODENT CONTROL TECHNOLOGY®
3699 Kinsman Blvd., Madison, WI 53704 U.S.A. • (800) 418-9242
www.motomco.com
36-2/102