

Wyoming, Idaho grizzly hunts stay on hold

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

At the request of the Earth-justice environmental law firm, a federal judge in Missoula, Mont., has extended his temporary restraining order on grizzly bear hunts in Wyoming and Idaho another 14 days.

U.S. District Judge Dana Christensen issued a 14-day stay on Aug. 30 and renewed it on Sept. 13. The hunts were scheduled to begin Sept. 1 and would have allowed for up to 23 bears to be killed outside Yellowstone National Park in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, with 22 in Wyoming and one in Idaho.

If the judge rules in the states' favor at the end of the

month, there still could be time for hunts, said Rebekah Fitzgerald, a Wyoming Game and Fish Department spokeswoman.

"We are disappointed the hunt continues to be postponed. We feel Wyoming has put together a strong grizzly bear management program that allows for protection of the bear population and conservative hunting," Fitzgerald said.

She said she does not know the likelihood of further restraining order extensions and that the season is scheduled to go through Nov. 15.

The Sierra Club of Greater Yellowstone issued a statement calling the extension a critical win for grizzlies still on the road to recovery.

The department has said 718 grizzlies are in the ecosystem and the criteria for recovery was 500.

Ranchers support the hunts, having lost cattle and sheep to grizzly bears. Wyoming paid \$455,000 for grizzly livestock kills in 2016, \$509,000 in 2015 and \$301,000 in 2014, according to the state.

One rancher, Mary Thoman, wrote in an Aug. 29 USA Today column that if the grizzly population continues to grow unchecked it will be impossible for ranchers to earn a living. Her ranch lost 445 sheep to grizzlies in one year and has given up federal grazing permits because the loss has been so great, her attorney said.



Associated Press File

Grizzly bear hunts in Wyoming and Idaho remain on hold for two more weeks.



Capital Press File

The Organic Trade Association wants to establish a voluntary checkoff to fund organic research and promotion.

OTA continues efforts for organic checkoff

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Down but not defeated after the USDA nixed an official organic research and promotion program, the Organic Trade Association is forging ahead with efforts to establish a voluntary checkoff program.

The organization last week pledged not to walk away from an industry-funded program and has formed a steering committee to coordinate and lead the efforts.

"The Organic Trade Association recognizes great demand for coordinated organic research and promotion, and the organic sector is ready to work together on innovative solutions that will have key benefits for organic," Laura Batcha, OTA executive director and CEO, said.

There is a critical need to educate consumers about organic, to provide more technical assistance to help more farmers transition to organic and to promote the organic brand, she said.

OTA lost its long battle for an organic checkoff when USDA pulled the plug on the formal process to establish a checkoff in May.

After reviewing nearly 15,000 comments from industry stakeholders, including farmers, USDA terminated its proposed rule for a checkoff citing a "split within the industry in terms of support" for a checkoff.

The No Organic Checkoff Coalition, representing 6,000 organic farmers across the country, led the charge against a checkoff — contending a federal, mandated checkoff was not the right solution for the growing domestic industry.

The coalition found many faults in the OTA proposed checkoff, primarily that it was more likely to promote the needs of large processors over those of family farmers.

Jim Gerritsen, an organic farmer and president of the Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association — which was an early member of the coalition — told Capital Press

last week OTA represents large-scale corporate processors.

"So that's who was going to benefit from the checkoff anyway. So they might as well go to them directly," he said.

"OTA is becoming pretty inconsequential. Their direction has nothing to do with organic agriculture. Their unwillingness to stand up for organic integrity is the real cutting-edge issue here," he said.

The organization just wants to see an increase in organic sales and doesn't care how that comes about, he said.

He doubts OTA's efforts for a voluntary checkoff will get any buy-in from organic farmers.

"I can't imagine any organic farmers earning their living from organic farming signing up for this. It's going to be the corporations," he said.

And with corporations paying for the program, he doesn't think much of the funding will go to research for organic production, a priority for farmers, he said.

If those corporations wanted to support domestic organic farmers, they could make a pledge to buy U.S.-produced organic crops and not import dubious, so-called organic crops, he said.

Volunteers harvest corn for Puget Sound food banks

More than 8,000 ears picked

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

About 100 volunteers in Snohomish County, Wash., harvested approximately 8,750 ears of corn for Puget Sound food banks Sept. 7, reviving a gleaning tradition that had been dormant for several years.

Dan Bartelheimer of Sno-Valley Farms grew the corn on about 3 acres. "We've been doing something like this for eight to 10 years," he said.

The last couple of years, however, there were no volunteers to harvest the field. Bartelheimer said the Rev. Jim Eichner of the Holy Cross Church of Redmond, an Episcopal church, organized volunteers for an unprecedented turnout. Eichner also oversees the Food Bank Farm.

"It worked the first year we tried it, and we're definitely going to continue it," Bartelheimer said.

The harvest gave people a taste of farming, he said. "It's always fun for the first half-hour, hour."

Bartelheimer, who is also president of the Snohomish County Farm Bureau, said other farmers in the county are interested in hosting gleaners at the end of their harvest.

"I think something like this creates a lot of goodwill between the farmers and community," he said.


The Snohomish Conservation District helped organize the event.




Snohomish Conservation District

Volunteers pick corn Sept. 7 in Snohomish County, Wash. They picked approximately 8,750 ears of corn for Puget Sound food banks.

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