

Farm Bureau on board with orca recovery

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Distress over orcas has invigorated a push to give the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife more power to penalize landowners and immediately stop projects that might affect salmon. The Inslee administration, environmental groups and tribes say the department has too little authority to prevent rock-lined shores, especially in Puget Sound, from damaging fish habitat and starving orcas. As it has been in the past, the Washington Farm Bureau is leery about where this is heading. The department already has broad authority to regulate projects on dry land, Farm Bureau director of

government relations Tom Davis said. “We support orca recovery,” he told the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee on Tuesday. “But when it comes to regulatory expansion, we would just ask for caution. Orcas are now the rallying point for previously proposed salmon policies. The hearing Tuesday was similar to a 2017 legislative hearing, when orcas were not mentioned. At issue is how Fish and Wildlife enforces the law that prohibits property owners from damaging rivers and streams. In some cases, landowners must obtain permits from the department. The Washington Supreme Court ruled last year that the department’s authority does not end at the water’s edge.



Courtesy of NOAA
Orcas, also known as killer whales, travel off the coast of Washington.

The ruling affirmed that the department could require landowners to have permits before clearing brush or maintaining dikes. House Bill 1579, sponsored by Democrats, would change the fine for breaking the state’s hydraulic code to \$10,000 per violation. The fine now is \$100 per day.

this year and tied to orca recovery. “This is an opportunity to address the plight of the southern resident orca,” said J.T. Austin, policy adviser to Gov. Jay Inslee. Fish and Wildlife Assistant Director Jeff Davis said the department has historically enforced permits through criminal proceedings and wants more authority to first seek voluntary compliance and then issue civil penalties. “This is really a darn important bill from my perspective to protect orca, protect the investment you’ve all made in salmon recovery, as well as protecting our state and tribal fisheries,” he told legislators. The bill would declare any work that violates the state’s hydraulic code a public nuisance, broadly defined as anything that annoys others. Another provision would require smelt dippers to get a fishing license. Salmon eat smelt. Davis said the Farm Bureau wasn’t an “absolute no” on the bill. He said the Farm Bureau might support the bill if it specified which projects Fish and Wildlife has control over. Right now, he said, its jurisdiction is virtually unlimited. “It goes from the top of Mount Rainier all the way down to the stream bed,” he said. “The changes in this bill do not just apply to the Puget Sound and our concern about orcas. They apply statewide, so people who live all across the state have an interest in what the impact of increased regulation will do to them.”

Large crop depresses pear prices

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Wenatchee and Yakima wholesale pear prices are significantly lower than a year ago mainly due to a 19.8 million-box crop that’s 25.3 percent larger than last year’s. The average of industry asking prices were \$8 per box less than a year ago on Jan. 11 for U.S. No. 1 grade Bartlett and d’Anjou, according to USDA tracking. The average was \$22

to \$28.90 per box on 70 through 90 pears per 44-pound box compared with \$30 to \$36 a year ago. Bosc sizes 70s and 80s were down \$4 to \$5 per box at \$24 to \$28.90. “This year with a bigger crop, we expect pricing to slow but its lower than we’d like to see. We hope it comes up the last part of the season,” said Kevin Moffitt, president of Pear Bureau Northwest, the industry’s promotional arm. The season started with slow sales and early depressed pricing last

August and September because California pears stayed in the market longer and a record large table grape crop, Moffitt said. “Since November our domestic shipments have been good and we’ve made up some ground. It’s not harder to move, we just need to move more,” he said. The 15.8-million-box 2017 crop was the smallest in 20 years, which bolstered prices a year ago and contributed to a greater difference with this year’s much larger crop, he said.

Another hindering factor is season sales to China have virtually stopped, down 95 percent, at 1,086 boxes as of Jan. 15, because of Chinese retaliatory tariffs, Moffitt said. Sales to China began in 2012, peaked at 204,750 boxes worth \$4.8 million in 2014 and have fallen since to 29,800 boxes worth \$916,000 last year, said Jeff Korea, Pear Bureau international marketing director. They have fallen because of competition from Belgium and the Netherlands, he said.



Courtesy Bureau of Reclamation
The ‘glory hole’ at the Owyhee Reservoir funnels excess water into the spillway and out into the river below the dam.

Owyhee spillway repairs set

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Repairs are expected to start by summer on part of Owyhee Reservoir’s “glory hole” ring-gate spillway. The system, built into a rock outcropping just upstream of the dam, moves runoff water through a concrete chamber and into the river below with help from a floating steel ring on rack-and-pinion gears. “We are having some superficial damage on the concrete itself,” Owyhee Irrigation District Project Manager Jay Chamberlin said. “We’re going to have to go out there, do some demolition and knock loose portions off.” Crews in turn will find concrete reinforcement bars within the existing structure and begin to rebuild damaged areas.

Access poses a challenge because the damaged area is halfway around the structure and facing the reservoir rather than the dam, he said. Most equipment will be small so it can get to the site on scaffolding attached to the ring-gate structure. Pneumatic pumps will carry concrete. “Logistically, it’s going to be very difficult,” Chamberlin said. “You have the vertical drop and are out on the rock outcropping.” The system remains functional. The project’s start could be in May or June depending on how runoff season affects access, he said. Cost will be determined based on further review of the project’s scope of work, Chamberlin said, but “we’re hoping to keep it under half a million dollars.” The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation owns Owyhee Dam outside Adrian, Ore. The dam is operated and maintained by OI, Owyhee Project South Board of Control and the Old Owyhee Ditch Improvement District. Snowpack was well below average in the Owyhee drainage last year. It was around 99 percent of average Jan. 28, 2019, when Reclamation pegged the reservoir at 38 percent full and Chamberlin said Owyhee Reservoir contained about 240,000 acre-feet of water. The reservoir needs 500,000 to satisfy full allotments for all irrigated acres, he said. Maximum snowpack typically occurs April 1, and “whether there is enough time to accumulate desired levels remains to be seen,” said Brian Sauer, just-retired water manager for Reclamation’s Middle Snake River region. “We are going to need a little help from Mother Nature. There is some snow in the long-range forecast, so that will help.” When Owyhee Reservoir is full, he said, “barring any extreme drought, there is usually sufficient water for two years of adequate water supplies.”

Dwight, Steven Hammond have their grazing rights restored

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — Two ranchers who were convicted in 2012 of intentionally setting fires on public land in Oregon have had

their grazing rights restored. The Oregonian/OregonLive reports that former Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, in one of his last actions

before resigning, ordered the renewal of a 10-year grazing permit for Hammond Ranches Inc., run by Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son Steven Hammond. The decision was dated Jan. 2, but it wasn’t sent out until this week. Zinke ordered the U.S. Bureau of Land Management to renew the grazing permit through 2024. Last year President Donald Trump pardoned the Hammonds, whose case had prompted the armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon in 2016, led by two sons of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy. In February 2014, the federal government had rejected the Hammonds’

renewal application, citing their criminal convictions for setting fire to public land. “I find the pardons constitute unique and important changed circumstances since the BLM made its decision,” Zinke wrote in the decision. The Hammonds had been convicted in 2012 of arson on land where they had grazing rights for their cattle. They were ordered back to prison in early 2016 to serve out five-year sentences in a case that incited right-wing militias and inspired the 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which abuts the Hammond family ranch. But on July 10, 2018, Trump pardoned the father and son.

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HILARY S. FRANZ, Commissioner of Public Lands

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WHEN: February 14, 2019
12:30 pm – 4:00 pm
WHERE: Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife 4034 Fairview Industrial Dr. SE Salem, OR 97310
For more information, or to arrange special accommodations for meeting attendees, please contact Julie MacSwain at 503-414-3250 or mail to: julie.macswain@or.usda.gov

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