

# Oregon regulators to target ‘volunteer’ hemp plants

Rules will likely aim to prevent new cash crop from becoming weedy

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A wild-growing field of hemp is causing a headache for Jon Auw and other neighboring hemp growers in Oregon’s Malheur County. “Volunteer” male hemp plants have sprung up from seeds that scattered in the field last year, pollinating nearby female hemp plants and producing undesirable seeds, Auw said. “It’s just a hodgepodge of whatever sprouts, wherever it sprouts,” he said. The landowner who owns the wild-growing hemp refuses to control the plants, arguing that neighbors who

want seed-free hemp should grow their crops indoors, Auw said. That attitude doesn’t sit right with Auw, whose female hemp flowers are grown for cannabidiol, a compound commonly known as CBD that’s thought to have healthful qualities and is degraded by the presence of seeds. “You should be responsible for your pollen just like I’d be if my 2,4-D drifted over,” he said, referring to the herbicide. Oregon farm regulators are now in the early stages of crafting rules intended to thwart weed, pest and disease issues caused by such “volunteer” cannabis plants. At this stage, the Oregon Department of Agriculture is consulting with state legal experts to determine the extent of its power to regulate the newly burgeoning crop and get a handle on these problems.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File  
**Unwanted “volunteer” hemp plants are the expected target of pending Oregon regulations aimed at preventing weeds, disease and pests.**

“How do we use our existing authority to deal with the issues coming at us and promote coexistence within the industry?” asked Lisa Han-

son, the agency’s deputy director. The formation of a “rules advisory committee” of industry stakeholders to consider draft regulations probably won’t occur until next year, she said. “We’re very early in terms of thinking about it.” Even so, ODA wants to confront the issue of cannabis volunteers emerging from old or abandoned fields “sooner rather than later” due to complaints the agency has already received about unwanted seedlings, she said. “We don’t need any additional noxious weed pressures,” Hanson said. While ODA will need to consult with other state agencies that regulate marijuana — the Oregon Liquor Control Commission and Oregon Health Authority — the rules will likely focus mostly on hemp, over which it has primary licensing jurisdiction.

Cannabis includes both marijuana, which has psychoactive properties, and hemp, which doesn’t but is often cultivated for cannabidiol, or CBD, that’s most potent in unpollinated flowers. The potential for marijuana operations to have problems with volunteers is lower because they’re limited to under an acre, said Sunny Summers, cannabis policy coordinator at ODA. To compare, there is no size limit on hemp fields and the crop is being grown on more than 63,000 acres in Oregon this year. The planned cannabis regulations are aimed at preventing crop problems rather than targeting unlicensed hemp growers or those producing marijuana without approval, she said. “It’s not about trying to catch illegal marijuana guys. That’s for law enforcement.” By using legal authorities

to stop hemp from becoming a “ditch weed” familiar to the Midwest, the ODA’s rules would mitigate concerns about cross-pollination, said Hanson. However, it’s not the agency’s intention to require farmers to remove male plants from licensed fields or participate in a “pinning map” system to monitor hemp field locations. More likely, the agency’s rules will be comparable to those that prevent decrepit fruit orchards from becoming repositories for disease or brassica seed fields from generating weedy volunteers, she said. The agency would focus on gaining compliance but also have a regulatory backstop to ensure people don’t ignore the problem, Hanson said. “It’s a different crop with the same issues. It’s trying to figure out how to maneuver it.”

# WDFW low-key response to Inslee belies internal review

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife had a muted response to Gov. Jay Inslee’s criticism that it shoots too many wolves, but the agency sought alternatives and studied the weeks before removing the OPT pack in the Kettle River Range, according to its records.

Department leaders ultimately concluded that eliminating the pack was faithful to the state’s wolf plan. In a July 31 email authorizing lethal control, Fish and Wildlife Director Kelly Susewind thanked Eastern Region Director Steve Pozzanghera and others for a thorough review.

“These decisions are never easy, but their professional analysis certainly helps,” Susewind wrote. Fish and Wildlife subsequently killed the last four members of the OPT pack. Since 2012, the department has killed 27 wolves to protect livestock, many on federal land in the Kettle River Range.

Wolf advocates have been petitioning Inslee to intervene. On Sept. 30, Inslee told Susewind in a letter that annually shooting wolves in the northeast Washington mountain range was unacceptable.

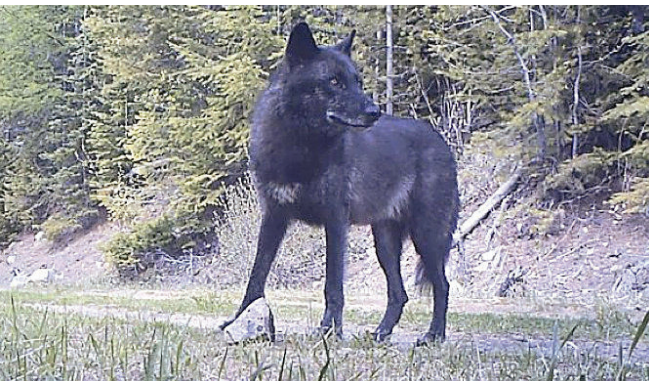
Inslee asked Susewind, who answers to commissioners appointed by the governor, to report back by Dec. 1 on efforts to reduce wolf-livestock conflicts, including by working with the U.S. Forest Service.

The department didn’t defend its actions. It issued a statement saying it and the governor have the same goal. “We all share the perspective that something has to change to reduce the loss of both wolves and livestock in this area,” the department stated.

Fish and Wildlife records, filed to defend against a lawsuit brought by wolf advocates, show the department has been hard-pressed to come up with non-lethal measures not already used by ranchers.

Some in the department, while agreeing lethal control was appropriate, wanted to delay shooting wolves and put another state-contracted range-rider on the ground. The recommendation that went to Susewind, however, noted that the ranch losing cattle, the Diamond M, already had help watching for wolves from a sheriff’s wildlife deputy.

Len McIrvin of the Diamond M said Thursday that range-riders haven’t been effective in stopping depredations. If range-riders patrol by day, the wolves attack by night, he said. “There’s no such thing as doing a good job for a range-rider. It’s just politically appealing,” he said. “We’ve always had a range-rider in there, but it’s the same old



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife  
**The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife has tried every alternative to killing wolves that attack livestock.**

thing. Non-lethals do not work, period. We’ve tried them all.”

The department attributed 29 attacks on cattle to the OPT pack, dating back to September 2018. Missing cattle are not counted. The department also doesn’t count cases in which scavengers pick the carcass and remove signs of wolf bites.

McIrvin said the Diamond M is still rounding up cattle from the range, but he suspects actual losses will be double or triple the official count.

Two other wolfpacks, the Togo pack in the Kettle River Range and the Grouse Flats pack in southeast Washington, have been attacking cattle owned by other ranchers and have been targeted for culling by Fish and Wildlife.

The OPT pack’s territory covered 226 square miles, and wolves had a history there of attacking cattle on an allotment leased by the Diamond M since the 1940s. Anticipating more conflicts, Fish and Wildlife and Forest Service officials met before the grazing season to discuss “possible creative solutions.”

Colville National Forest range staff officer Travis Fletcher said Wednesday that he doesn’t know of anything else to test, short of canceling grazing permits or closing allotments.

“Anything outside of that, we have tried,” he said. “I would say there’s not a producer we work with who hasn’t adjusted their practices in some way.”

The Forest Service won’t close allotments because wolves are not federally protected in the eastern one-third of Washington and aren’t in danger of become endangered or threatened, Fletcher said.

Ranchers have adjusted where and when they graze cattle, and taken other steps to distance their herds from wolves, without much success, Fletcher said.

“The wolfpack territories are very large,” he said. “You probably couldn’t throw a dart at a map of the Colville forest and not hit a wolfpack.”

A rancher grazing in the Smackout pack territory or set the “gold standard” for range-riding, but still lost cattle to wolves, Fletcher said. Range-riders find dead or injured cattle, but, he said, “it’s not been proven to me it’s a preventive measure.”

In response to attacks on livestock, Fish and Wildlife shot one OPT wolf on July 10. The pack, however, continued to attack cattle. The department recorded seven depredations in the following two weeks, leading to the decision to remove the pack.

# Fire ruins \$224K worth of hay at Oregon organic dairy

No one injured in blaze

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
Capital Press

ST. PAUL, Ore. — A large hay fire that ignited Oct. 6 at an organic dairy in Oregon was likely caused by spontaneous combustion, according to officials.

The blaze was reported at 10:22 a.m. at Sar-Ben Farms in St. Paul, about 20 miles north of Salem in the Willamette Valley.

Crews from five local fire departments assisted on scene, and smoke was visible for several miles. No people or cows were injured.

Steve Pierson, who owns the dairy with his wife, Susan, said the fire started inside a metal-roofed barn where they were storing about 800 tons of mostly alfalfa for winter feed. Sar-Ben Farms milks 290 cows, and is a member of the Organic Valley co-op.

Spontaneous combustion is not uncommon in hay bales, especially if the hay is wet. Because hay insulates, the internal temperatures can rise above 130 degrees. The moisture then causes a chemical reaction, producing flammable gas.

The hay was valued at about \$280 per ton, or \$224,000 total. What didn’t burn is now so wet that Pierson said it could begin to mold quickly, making it unsuitable for feeding his cows.

Buying more hay is not only costly, Pierson said, but because it must be organic, it may be more difficult to find.



St. Paul Fire Department  
**Fire trucks pump water into the hay storage barn at Sar-Ben Dairy near St. Paul, Ore.**

“There are way more conventional growers than organic growers,” Pierson said. “It’s just a major inconvenience at this point.”

Pierson praised the quick response by firefighters, who were able to save the barn and other nearby structures.

“That was a huge deal for us,” he said. “We should all be proud of the volunteer fire departments we have in our rural areas.”

Mark Daniel, a firefighter and spokesman for the St. Paul Fire District, said hay fires can be challenging because the bales are so tightly compressed, making for a lot highly flammable material.

The St. Paul Fire District was assisted on scene by the Aurora Fire District, Tualatin Valley Fire & Rescue, Woodburn Fire District and Dundee Fire Department. Daniel said the farm also

removed burning hay from the barn and left it to smolder in a field, away from buildings and property.

“They have irrigation on it right now,” Daniel said. “It will eventually go out.”

Pierson said he is not certain how moisture got into the hay bales that led to spontaneous combustion. A fifth-generation dairy, Sar-Ben Farms went organic in 2005 and sells milk to Organic Valley to make butter at a creamery in McMinnville.

Pierson said he has been amazed by the outpouring of support from his neighbors, some of whom have offered feed to help the family get by in the short term.

“It’s really cool to see that, when something like this happens, people are willing to step up,” Pierson said. “We appreciate it more than we can possibly verbalize.”

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