

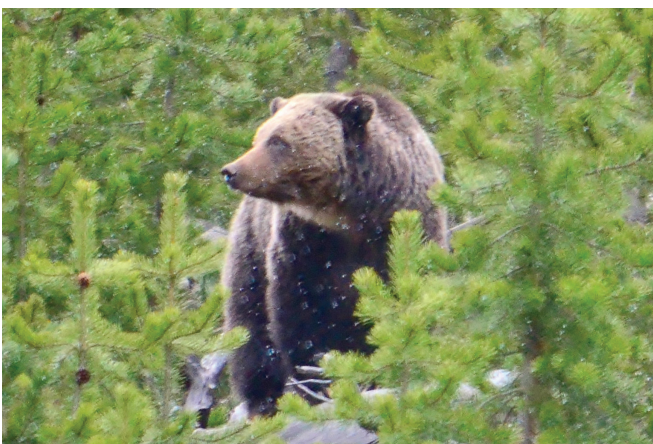
Cattlemen say grizzly plan flawed

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

A federal plan to import up to 200 grizzly bears into Washington’s North Cascades contradicts its own premise that grizzlies are needed to prevent their extinction because the plan admits they are already extinct, the U.S. Cattlemen’s Association says.

“Because the Northern Cascades Ecosystem grizzly bears are at risk of local extinction, action is needed at this time to avoid the permanent loss of grizzly bears in the NCE,” the plan states.

However, the document says only four confirmed sightings in the NCE in the last decade were all in British Columbia and that they do not meet the accepted definition of a population — two adult females with cubs or one adult female tracked through two litters, Kenny Graner, USCA president, states in an Oct. 17 letter to the National Park Service



File Photo

A cattlemen’s group says the federal government is contradicting itself in its plan to move up to 200 grizzly bears into Washington state.

and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“Thus, no population exists in the NCE to restore,” Graner wrote.

There was an apparent lack of collaboration with local citizens, businesses and organizations in development of the plan despite the agencies awarding nearly \$550,000 to do the work, Graner wrote.

The plan fails to account for safety of local residents and livestock, he said.

The plan states grazing leaseholders likely would only see an intermittent impact because the number of bears released would be small and 10 miles from nearest grazing lands. Relocated bears would be less carnivorous than grizzlies in the Greater Yellowstone

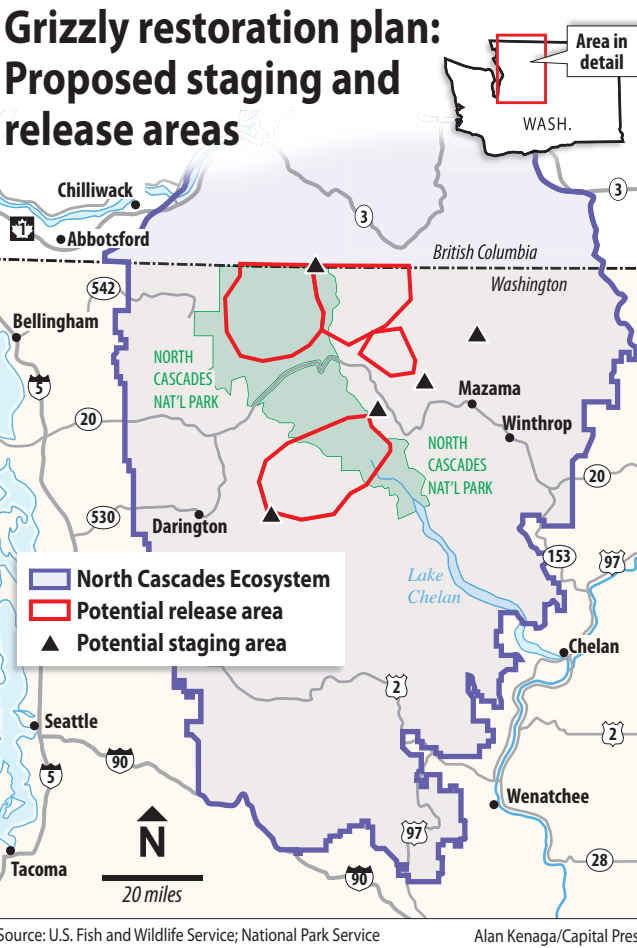
Ecosystem based on feeding habits in their source area, the plan says.

USCA takes exception to all of that because three of the plan’s four alternatives eventually call for up to 200 grizzlies, which is a “significant increase” that would harm livestock, specialty crops and fisheries, Graner wrote. The fourth alternative calls for no importation of bears.

Cattle weight and conception decline under stress of predators, grizzlies are known to range up to hundreds of miles and compensation plans for livestock depredations are “rife with problems,” Graner wrote.

He concluded the agencies should reconsider their plans and consult with appropriate local communities on next steps.

The agencies’ public comment period ended Oct. 24. About 600 people overwhelmingly spoke against the plan at a meeting in Okanogan, Oct. 7.



Import procedure change alarms Oregon seed industry

Seed industry worries about backlogs, damage, increased costs

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Federal agencies want to require seed imports to first be quarantined at centralized exam stations before being delivered to Oregon warehouses, alarming the state’s seed industry.

The new protocol would be a major departure from a longstanding agreement that currently allows imported seed to instead be quarantined directly within Oregon warehouses.

Oregon’s seed industry is alarmed by the planned change, since requiring seed shipments to first make a pitstop at one of three exam stations near ports along Washington’s Puget Sound is expected to cost an extra \$1,800 per container.

“That’s going to have an enormous impact. Someone has to absorb those costs,” said Angie Smith, executive director of the Oregon Seed Association.

Under the current protocol, which was developed in 2004, containers are delivered straight to Oregon seed warehouses for quarantine, where they’re opened by Oregon Department of Agriculture inspectors for testing.

Those samples are then sent to the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service for analysis while U.S. Customs and Border Protection officials conduct annual inspections at the warehouses to ensure they’re following quarantine procedures.

The new protocol, set to become effective in December 2020, would require the seed imports to be unloaded and quarantined at a centralized exam station near the port of entry, then tested and re-loaded for shipping to Oregon warehouses.

The federal government wants to make the change because CBP inspectors no longer want to incur the cost of traveling to about 20 Oregon warehouses a year, and also because they want to visually inspect containers as they’re opened, said Mindy Duerst, office manager at the Ioka Farms seed company.

“They have a really big job and we are a small piece of that,” she said.

Oregon seed companies plan to meet with federal officials in November with the hope of ironing out some of their concerns, which aside from cost include worries about seed storage, handling and testing, she said.

For example, seed samples at the centralized exam stations will likely be drawn at random from containers, rather than from every seed lot within the container as Oregon warehouses currently do, Duerst said.

The reduced testing regimen raises the possibility that seed companies would be paying more for a process that actually leaves them more exposed to threats, she said. “We don’t want more pest risks.”

It will cost money to store imported seeds at the centralized exam stations, which could be prone to backlogs of product waiting to be tested or fumigated, Duerst said. That, in turn, could create germination problems for which Oregon seed companies will be held liable by their customers.

“No one up there is going to take responsibility for that,” she said.

The physical process of unloading and re-loading tightly packed bags of seed into containers may also be problematic for personnel at the centralized exam stations, Duerst said. “What are you going to do when it doesn’t all fit?”

Imported seed is important for Oregon seed companies that either use it to grow new seed crops here or mix it with Oregon-grown seed for cover crop or forage products, she said.

The industry hopes to work out a compromise with the federal agencies, potentially by taking such steps as paying an additional fee for the inspectors to review Oregon warehouses, she said.

After several meetings with federal representatives, however, Smith of the Oregon Seed Association isn’t optimistic that a deal can be struck.

“The rules are written and they intend to follow them to the letter,” she said.

Representatives of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service did not return calls for comment.



Bryan Schmidt

A swath of vegetation was cleared from a rail corridor owned by Yamhill County, Ore., that farmer Bryan Schmidt said damaged a fence and allowed his cattle to escape. Schmidt attached two strands of wire across the opening as a temporary repair.

Escaped cows trouble opponent of Oregon ‘rails-to-trails’ project

County accused of damaging fence while clearing rail corridor

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Though his cattle are safely back where they belong, Oregon farmer Bryan Schmidt is still disturbed by the reason for their escape.

Schmidt said he rounded up six Angus cows that were “traipsing around the countryside” on Oct. 16 after a contractor hired by Yamhill County tore through his fence the previous day while clearing vegetation.

The incident is emblematic of a broader disrespect shown by county officials to Schmidt and other opponents of a “rails-to-trails” project touted by the local government, he said.

“The attitude is: ‘We don’t care, Mr. Schmidt. You’re a fly, get out of our face,’” he said.

The contractor had been clearing brush along the corridor of the county-owned railroad easement that’s proposed for conversion into the Yamhelas

Westsider recreational trail, said Christian Boenisch, Yamhill County counsel.

“We were told they didn’t see or deliberately remove any fencing,” Boenisch said.

It’s possible the fence was difficult to see for the contractor due to the thickness of the vegetation, he said.

The brush was removed to provide access for specialists who will conduct “geotechnical work” on the trail and bridges along the route, he said.

“It’s not bridge construction. We’re still in the design and engineering phase,” Boenisch said.

Schmidt initially said he felt “bullied” but allowed that the fence may have been damaged due to “ignorant or negligent” activity.

The county has long been aware of his cattle pasture’s proximity to the railroad easement, which has been extensively surveyed over the past year, Schmidt said. The cows were even featured in a county-produced promotional video about the trail several years ago.

“If there’s cows there, how do they think they stay

in?” he said.

Apart from his cattle’s brief adventure, Schmidt said he’s troubled by the implications of the county’s “excavation” work, which shows they are moving ahead with the trail project.

Oregon’s Land Use Board of Appeals recently ruled that Yamhill County had insufficiently studied the potential “farm impacts” of the trail, such as forcing changes to pesticide spray regimes and exposing fields to trespass and contamination.

Due to that decision, the county must reconsider the project.

However, LUBA separately ruled that Yamhill County’s contract with an engineering firm to design three bridges along the trail isn’t a land use decision that must be evaluated for potential effects on agriculture.

“Petitioners do not identify any actual, qualitatively or quantitatively significant impacts on present or future land uses that are attributable to the agreement itself,” LUBA said, referring to Schmidt and another landowner who challenged

the contract.

Schmidt said he’s concerned the county is removing a broad swath of vegetation to provide access for heavy machinery needed for bridge-building.

“They weren’t just keeping to the contour of the creek. They cleared quite a lot on both sides,” he said.

Once the project is far enough along, that will provide the county with an argument against abandoning it due to the amount of money already invested, Schmidt said.

The engineering work will cost more than \$500,000, which is being paid from a \$1.2 million grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The county also paid \$1.4 million for a quit claim deed to the 12.5 mile rail corridor, though it initially intends to only convert less than three miles into a trail between the towns of Carlton and Yamhill.

“Our argument is these guys are prepping it, so there’s pressure,” Schmidt said. “They can go to the public and say, ‘Look what these farmers did.’”



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