

Owyhee wilderness bill would maintain grazing

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Grazing and road usage would continue under proposed legislation that calls for designating more than 1.1 million acres of the Owyhee River Canyonlands in Malheur County as wilderness.

The bill, introduced Nov. 7 by Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, both D-Oregon, reflects stakeholder collaboration.

The area is important to the local economy because it includes significant grazing land, recreation destinations and other assets. Recent research there has focused on preserving sage grouse and other wildlife habitat, and native grasses.

The Malheur County Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act — largely a result of collaboration among ranchers, business people, conservation groups, university researchers and others — aims to maintain and improve rangeland, preserve grazing, and protect areas important to wildlife and recreation.

The legislation supports science-based, adaptive management of federal lands “to make efficient ranching a continued conservation tool and ensure real-time management responses to threats on the ecological integrity of the lands,” the senators said in a joint statement.

Adaptive management aims to encourage flexibility by allowing for adjustments based on current or recent results. To help ensure management actions produce ecological improvements, the legislation calls for creating a monitoring network of ranchers, businesses, environmental groups and land managers.

Grazing would be allowed to continue, including in newly designated wilderness areas. The legislation would provide funding for research, active-management activities and monitoring as well as enforcement of anticipated uses. It would maintain existing roads, and establish “loop roads” to encourage tourism while improving access for firefighting.

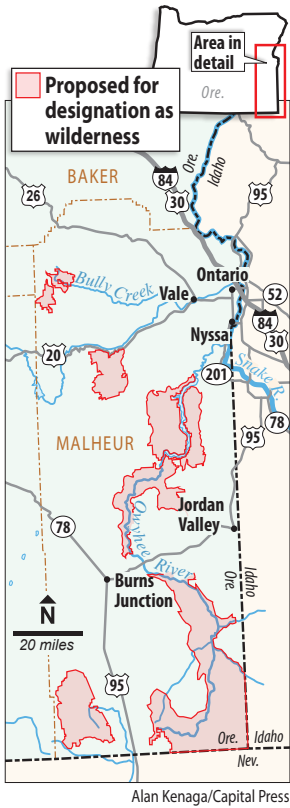
The legislation would not create a national monument, amend the Taylor Grazing Act, impede current projects, impact water rights or irrigation districts, or affect management of Owyhee Reservoir.

It would give wilderness protection to parts of the Trout Creek Mountains, Castle Rock, Leslie Gulch, Honeycombs, Three Forks and Jordan Craters. Wild and Scenic River management would be used on 14.7 miles of the Owyhee River below Owyhee Reservoir.

The legislation “ensures the safeguarded protections of desert wildlife habitat, native and rare plants, and vast wild places for future generations to enjoy” while also making sure ecological health drives management, Friends of the Owyhee said in an online newsletter.

The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition, which includes ranchers and business owners, for more than three years has played a key role in discussions that led to the legislation.

OBSC Chairman Steve



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Russell said in the senators’ joint statement that the coalition hoped for resolution of land designations and “a unique BLM (U.S. Bureau of Land Management) model that protects grazing and other traditional land uses while providing for local guidance. We also hoped to create economic opportunities for Malheur County. The final result accomplishes what we set out to do, and we sincerely appreciate the dedication of everyone involved.”

Coalition board members, ahead of testimony scheduled Nov. 13 before the Malheur County Court in Vale, said in a statement that the legislation ensures ecological health is the driving factor in land management decisions, provides management continuity regardless of land designation, secures a place for county citizens to direct land management priorities and strategy, and recognizes all valid existing rights.

“It’s important that everyone in the county understands the intent of this bill, and the positives it offers our county and communities,” OBSC vice chairman Mark MacKenzie said the statement.

He and Russell belong to the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association and “have been exceptionally good at keeping OCA abreast of their efforts,” association Executive Director Jerome Rosa said in an interview.

OCA hasn’t officially taken a position on the bill, but its Public Lands Committee likely will discuss it during the OCA annual convention slated in Bend Nov. 21-23, Rosa said.

Though the legislation calls for continuing grazing and road use in wilderness areas, “we definitely want to make sure that the terms of this new wilderness designation will hold up and will not be compromised by previous wilderness-designation definitions,” he said. OCA wants to make sure the bill’s new definitions “will hold up when and if they are challenged by conservation groups.”

“We are learning more about the bill,” Oregon Farm Bureau National Affairs Director Gail Greenman said. The bureau’s board of directors has not yet taken a position.

Apple marketers face big crop

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Cold weather took a bite out of Washington’s 2019 apple harvest but the crop is still large enough to pose a marketing challenge.

The state’s total fresh crop, forecast at 137.3-million, 40-pound boxes on Aug. 1 was estimated at 138.2 million on Nov. 1.

That’s about 7 million to 10 million boxes fewer than most people expected because several days of freezing temperatures, dipping to 11 degrees in Richland, kept several million boxes worth of apples from being harvested, said Brian Focht, manager of the Washington Apple Growers Marketing Association in Wenatchee.

A cold front hit southern growing regions harder than the north which was unusual, he said.

Even with the shortfall, the crop is 17.8% larger than last year’s crop of 117.2 million boxes.

“It will still be a very challenging crop to market profitably because of the volume and what’s happening in the

Washington fresh apple estimate

Variety	2018*	2019**	Percent change
Gala	27.5	32.5	18.1
Red Delicious	29	27.2	-6.1
Fuji	15.2	18.1	19.3
Granny	13.5	17.7	31.6
Honeycrisp	12.1	17.3	42.2
Others†	7.4	9.1	23.3
Golden Delicious	4.5	7.7	68.4
Cripps Pink	5.2	5.9	13.7
Ambrosia	1.6	1.7	10.5
Cosburn	0.9	0.6	-32.2
Cosmic Crisp	—	0.3	—
Total	117.2	138.2	17.8

* Close to final (Oct. 27) ** Estimate (Nov. 1) † Mostly varieties proprietary to companies.
NOTE: Totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: Washington State Tree Fruit Association

Capital Press graphic

market place,” said Desmond O’Rourke, world apple analyst and retired Washington State University agricultural economist.

Nationally, there were 17% more apples in storage on Nov. 1 than a year ago, according to the U.S. Apple Association.

Mexico and China have larger apple crops. China bounced back to normal after a down year, which means it will be exporting more, O’Rourke said.

Washington apple exports are doing very well at 4.6 mil-

lion boxes, up 48.6%, Sept. 1 through Oct. 31, versus the same period last year, O’Rourke said. Gains are notable in Canada, Mexico, Latin America, India and Taiwan, probably due to lower prices, he said.

Washington exported 30.7 million boxes of apples from the 2018 crop, compared with 45 million in 2017 and a record 50.6 million at 35.7% of the crop in 2014, a year of big volume and low prices that overall was an industry bust.

“That’s kind of where

NORPAC reviewing four purchase offers

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

The bankrupt NORPAC Foods cooperative is reviewing four offers to buy portions of its assets at a time its creditors are increasingly demanding to collect on their debts.

Albert Kennedy, the processing company’s attorney, said NORPAC was analyzing the four offers during a Nov. 12 court hearing on whether to terminate the “automatic stay” that prevents creditors from foreclosing on collateral under a Chapter 11 bankruptcy reorganization.

Kennedy urged U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Peter McKittrick not to immediately terminate the automatic stay so that NORPAC can “profitably” use

several more days to examine the purchase proposals, which it hasn’t yet had a chance to discuss with creditors.

CoBank, the company’s largest creditor, has a forbearance agreement not to seize collateral or take other remedial actions against NORPAC for defaulting on loan conditions until Nov. 15.

The bank and other creditors, including several farms who supplied NORPAC with crops on contract, had sought to terminate the “automatic stay” but Judge McKittrick said he’d hold off on making such a decision until a hearing on Nov. 18, after the forbearance agreement had expired.

Teresa Pearson, attorney for CoBank, said the bank has an interest in preventing NORPAC from enter-

ing a “free fall meltdown” but it also doesn’t want its “hands tied” when the forbearance agreement expires, since there’s no chance of actually reorganizing the company as a going concern.

At that point, it’s possible that transactions selling the company’s assets may solidify or the bank may extend more funding, but “something will have to happen,” Pearson said. It’s also possible that NORPAC’s assets will be sold under the control of a court-appointed receiver, which is a type of custodian that oversees a company’s finances.

Attorneys for NORPAC’s farm creditors said they wanted to maintain an orderly process and to gain clarity on the bankruptcy court’s role if the automatic stay is terminated.

Oregon hosts American Agri-Women Convention

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

TIGARD, Ore. — As a woman working in a field traditionally dominated by men, Kansas farmer Donnell Scott knows how challenging it can be to earn the respect of her male contemporaries.

“You do have to learn to speak their language, basically,” Scott said. “It’s not going to be easy, and you may have to go about it different ways.”

Scott, a member of Kansas Agri-Women, was part of a panel discussion featuring women who serve on state and local agricultural boards as part of the 44th annual American Agri-Women Convention on Nov. 8 in Tigard, Ore.

Oregon Women for Agriculture hosted the four-day convention for the first time since 2009, when it was held in Salem. Approximately 160 women registered for the event, which included nationally recognized speakers, workshops and tours of Oregon farms.

The Friday panel was aimed at inspiring women to apply for seats on agricultural boards, while juggling



George Plaven/Capital Press
Jeanette Lombardo, president of American Agri-Women, speaks during the organization’s 44th annual convention in Tigard, Ore.

work, school and family life.

In addition to Kansas Agri-Women, Scott is the first woman to be elected as president of her local county farm bureau in Manhattan, Kan. She has also worked as a meat quality inspector and food labeling expert, alongside mostly men in packing plants from Wichita to Nebraska.

Though it can be a struggle at times in male-domi-

nated industries, Scott said the key for women is to work openly, collaboratively and confidently in their skills.

“Really believe in yourself, that you can do it,” she said. “Just keep going forward. That’s what you need to remember.”

Karolyn Zurn, a fellow farmer and panelist from Minnesota, said she started as a mom with three kids before getting involved on the farm driving grain trucks and combines. She went back to college for sales and marketing, and realized her calling as an advocate for agriculture.

Over the years, Zurn has served with the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association, Northern Crops Institute, Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom and coordinated the North Dakota Common Ground Program — facilitating conversations between farmers and consumers — for four years. She is the first vice president of government issues for American Agri-Women, and a member of the Minnesota Farm Service Agency state committee.

Zurn said her initial fear was whether she had the know-how to effectively guide the different boards. But she said she had ample support from friends and family along the way.

“I have had a lot of backing,” Zurn said. “I don’t know what I would do without the people in my life who have helped me.”

Statistics show women are taking on more leadership roles in U.S. agriculture. According to the latest USDA Census of Agriculture, the number of women who are primary farm operators rose by 200,736 between 2012 and 2017, or 69.6%.

A total of 13 women now lead state departments of agriculture, including Oregon, Idaho, Colorado, Florida, Ohio, Oklahoma, Hawaii, South Dakota, Maine, Missouri, Utah and Virginia. That tops the previous record of 10.

Lisa Hanson, Oregon’s deputy director of agriculture, spoke at the convention and said the future is bright for women in agriculture.

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