

Washington conservation districts weigh uniform election dates

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

All Washington conservation districts would elect supervisors during the same week in March under a proposal due to be presented Thursday to the state conservation commission.

The election week could be publicized statewide, possibly increasing interest from candidates and voters, according to a staff report.

The week of voting would replace a system that allows conservation districts to hold elections anytime they choose in January, February or March. Polls can be open for as few as four hours.

Some conservation districts complain a uniform election schedule would upset their practice of picking supervisors at their annual meeting or plant sale. “That’s something the commission is going to have to weigh,” said Bill Eller, the conservation commission’s elections officer.

Washington has 45 con-



Washington conservation districts will consider changes to their election dates.

servation districts, which are governed by two appointed and three elected supervisors.

All registered voters who live in the conservation district are eligible to cast ballots, but the elections are held outside normal elections. The elections are organized by the districts and publicized by legal notices, websites and word of mouth. Turnouts are often low.

To increase turnout, the League of Women Voters in 2015 recommended standardized voting dates. Nothing came of it. Putting candidates on general election ballots would be a new

expense for conservation districts.

In May, the state conservation commission staff put out “talking points” on election reform. One point was that districts are traditionally led by “a specialized panel of influential members of the community who have technical expertise in agricultural land use practices.”

The commission appointed a committee to study how to improve the current system. Considering the merits of putting conservation district candidates on general election ballots was not part of the committee’s mandate, Eller said.

The committee suggested holding elections in March because county election officials are occupied in January and February with a regular election, Eller said. Counties can’t run conservation district elections, but they can assist.

The committee left it up to the commission to pick a week in March.

Ten conservation districts submitted comments to the proposal, and most

were critical.

One district said it liked a flexible election schedule because it has a small staff and holding an election in March would conflict with its plant sale.

Another official said she liked to get past the election early in the year so she could move ahead with writing the district’s annual report. One district commented that March was a busy month for its constituents.

The King County Conservation District opposed a March election week for a different reason. It plans to elect supervisors on the statewide election date in February. The district said it chose the date to sync up its election with other elections.

“Moving conservation district elections to March is a step backwards, not forward,” the district said in written comments. “One of the key complaints lobbied against CD elections is the perception that they are ‘off cycle,’ ‘exclusive,’ or ‘secret’ — the election no one ever heard of. ...”

EU lawmakers approve U.S. beef agreement

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

The European Parliament gave U.S. beef producers something to be thankful for on Thanksgiving Day, approving a U.S.-EU agreement to give U.S. beef more access to European markets.

Announced in August, the agreement gives the U.S. sole access to the EU market for 35,000 metric tons of duty-free beef from non-hormone-treated cattle annually by year seven of the plan.

The agreement wins back duty-free access originally allotted to the U.S. through a 2009 memorandum of understanding between the EU and the U.S.

The MOU created a 45,000 metric ton duty-free quota for the U.S. to export beef from non-hormone-treated animals. But the EU also allowed other countries to send beef to European markets under that quota.

National Cattlemen’s Beef Association has been working on the issue for quite some time, and the EU government’s approval of the agreement is great news, Kent Baucus, NCBA senior



Associated Press File

The EU Parliament has approved an agreement that will allow more American beef into Europe.

director of international affairs, said.

It’s a great step forward, but U.S. beef still faces protectionist restrictions in Europe. It’s not just tariffs and quotas, it also involves non-trade issues such as production technology, antibiotics and all sorts of things that aren’t science-based, he said.

“This is not a final destination for us ... we see this as a step in the right direction,” he said.

The objective is free and fair trade and it’s going to

take a lot of negotiation and trust with European consumers, but NCBA sees the approval of the agreement as Europe being willing to talk and work with the U.S., he said.

Lack of capacity for the U.S. in the duty-free quota has been a source of frustration on both sides of the Atlantic, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation.

“The European Union is one of the highest value destinations in the world for U.S. beef,” Dan Halstrom

USMEF president and CEO, said in a statement Friday morning.

“Consistent access will not only benefit U.S. producers and exporters but also European importers and their clientele,” he said.

The U.S. is currently allowed to export 11,500 metric tons of non-hormone-treated beef annually to the EU with a 20% tariff before being subject to costlier duties.

Approval of the new agreement by the European Parliament is “outstanding news for the U.S. beef industry and our customers in Europe,” Halstrom said.

The issue goes back to the EU’s ban on beef from cattle treated with hormones, Baucus said.

The EU banned the use of synthetic hormones in its own cattle production in 1981 and banned the importation of beef from cattle treated with hormones in 1989.

Because that violated the World Trade Organization’s Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement, the U.S. took the issue to the WTO and won the case in 1999, he said.

Idaho potato grower, seed growers of year named

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Ritchey Toevs of American Falls was named Grower of the Year, and Clen and Emma Atchley of Ashton were named Seed Growers of the Year at the annual Big Idaho Potato Harvest Meeting, which the state Potato Commission hosted Nov. 13 in Fort Hall.

Potato Growers of Idaho Executive Director Keith Esplin said Toevs “is a leader in the industry, a very forward thinker,” and the Atchleys “have been involved on the cutting edge of the seed industry for many years.”

Potato Grower Magazine gave out the awards. PGI and the Idaho Crop Improvement Association, which administers the state’s seed certification program, named the recipients.

Toevs just completed two three-year terms on the commission. The second-generation farmer grows about 1,100 irrigated acres of potatoes for processing and on additional ground grows rotation crops wheat, barley, mustard and sugar beets. The farm started in 1946.

“It was a surprise, and we appreciate the recognition,” he said. But it is the entire industry that should be honored — “the resilience and the cooperative spirit of the whole industry.”

Toevs said his farm emphasizes “looking for research-based solutions and decision making” in a host of areas,



Ritchey and Joanne Toevs of American Falls, Idaho.

from water and fertility management to variety selection.

“In the ’80s, we farmed by the field,” he said. “Now we farm by the square foot, with a lot of prescription application.”

“We are part of a very sophisticated and efficient supply system,” Toevs said. “We have suppliers that meet our needs, and in turn we need to work to anticipate the needs of our customers.”

The Atchleys farm about 5,000 irrigated acres and 2,500 acres of dry land. They grow potato seed, wheat and wheat seed and canola seed. At their Ashton Hi-Tech Seed greenhouse operation, they raise mini-tubers in a protected environment.

The Atchleys have worked within the industry to improve cooperation and research for the benefit of growers, said Emma Atchley, who is also a state Board of Education

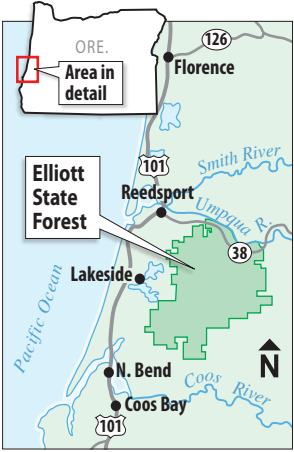
member. They continuously evaluate processes, equipment and infrastructure to operate as efficiently as possible, “and make our inputs more effective, and our outputs better,” she said.

“We are very conscious of sources of inputs, particularly seed,” Atchley said. “We have vertically integrated; we produce our own mini-tuber potatoes, which are lab (greenhouse)-grown and essentially disease-free.”

Their daughter and son-in-law, Laura and Clay Pickard, who own C&L Ranches, “came back to the farm, and have made a big difference in our operation and our success,” she said.

Oregon Supreme Court upholds ruling denying sale of state forest parcel

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press



Capital Press graphic

SALEM — The Oregon Supreme Court has ruled against the sale of a portion of the Elliott State Forest to a private timber company, drawing cheers from environmental groups that sought to protect wildlife habitat and public access.

In 2014, the Oregon State Land Board decided to sell a 788-acre tract of the forest near Reedsport — known as East Hakki Ridge — to Seneca Jones Timber Co., prompting a lawsuit from Cascadia Wildlands, Audubon Society of Portland and the Center for Biological Diversity.

A circuit court in Eugene originally threw out the case, though the Oregon Court of Appeals overturned the sale in 2014, finding it violated an old state law that prohibits selling any lands on the Elliott State Forest that were originally part of the Siuslaw National Forest.

The state Supreme Court upheld that ruling in a decision handed down on Nov. 27.

“Oregon’s highest court has spoken, and it is illegal for the state of Oregon to sell off the treasured Elliott State Forest,” said Josh Laughlin, executive director of Cascadia Wildlands. “Those who appreciate clean water, stately forests and access to our public lands are the big winners today.”

Established in 1930, the Elliott State Forest includes 93,000 acres in Coos and Douglas counties. Revenue from timber harvest goes to support the state’s Common School Fund.

Approximately 70,000 acres were transferred by the federal government from the Siuslaw National Forest for the Elliott State Forest, and in 1957 the Oregon Legislature passed a law preventing any of those lands from being sold. That includes East Hakki Ridge, located immediately south of the Dean Creek Elk Viewing Area along Highway 38.

Attorney Daniel Kruse of Eugene represented the

plaintiffs in the case. He said the State Land Board — made up of the governor, secretary of state and treasurer — had been operating under the assumption that they were required to maximize timber revenue from the Elliott State Forest.

“The state is not under a legal obligation to maximize revenue from these state lands,” Kruse said. “That is just not the standard, and the Supreme Court made that clear today.”

East Hakki Ridge is a mixture of 130- to 140-year old trees, Kruse said, providing nesting habitat for marbled murrelets, a small species of threatened seabird along the Oregon coast. The forest is also home to coho salmon, spotted owls and is a popular area for hunting and hiking, Kruse added.

“It’s a really beautiful mixture of native forests that have never been logged before,” he said.

Casey Roscoe, a spokeswoman for Seneca Jones Timber Co., said they are still looking at the ruling and “trying to understand what it will mean in the long run for the children of Oregon” by eliminating potential revenue for the school fund.

A spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of State Lands said the agency is also still reviewing the high court’s decision.

Another parcel in the Elliott State Forest, the 355-acre Benson ridge tract, was sold in 2014 to Scott Timber Co. is also currently subject to litigation by the same plaintiffs over habitat for marbled murrelet.

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