

Timber company spars with Oregon ranch over open range

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

The Weyerhaeuser timber company is asking the Oregon Court of Appeals to overturn a ruling that returned 17,000 acres its owns in Curry County to “open range” where livestock can roam freely.

On open range, landowners are responsible for fencing their properties to keep livestock out. Within livestock districts, the owners of livestock are responsible for fencing in their animals to prevent them from trespassing onto neighboring properties.

Last year, Weyerhaeuser successfully petitioned

Curry County to annex its 17,000-acre property into an existing livestock district five miles away, which meant neighboring ranchers would have to build fences across difficult terrain to stop livestock from wandering onto the land.

At the urging of Dement Ranch, a neighboring livestock producer, a state judge annulled the livestock district because Weyerhaeuser’s property wasn’t contiguous to the existing Curry County livestock district.

Allowing disconnected parcels of land to annex into a distant livestock district would “render open range somewhat meaning-

less,” since the landowners surrounding a “patchwork” of livestock districts would have to fence their properties, ruled Curry County Circuit Judge Jesse Margolis.

That’s particularly true since the Legislature required new livestock districts to be at least 2,000 acres, which could be circumvented by allowing smaller, isolated parcels to annex into existing districts, he said.

“In light of the interplay between livestock district land and open range land and the general minimum size limitation, and the simplified process to annex into an existing livestock district, the idea that any parcel of

land, no matter how small and no matter how remote from another livestock district area, could become a livestock district makes little sense,” Margolis said.

At a Dec. 13 hearing before the Oregon Court of Appeals in Salem, Weyerhaeuser attorney Dominic Carollo argued the judge wrongly determined there was an implied requirement that livestock districts must have contiguous boundaries when the statute allows any area to be annexed to them.

“Any area means what it says and we feel the case is that simple,” he said. “It’s whatever kind of area to be annexed. ... Nothing prevents it in statute.”



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

From left, Northwest Agriculture Business Center project manager Mike Peroni, Port of Chehalis Director Randy Mueller and Lewis County, Wash., farmer Dave Fenn look at drawings for a proposed grain storage and distribution center at a meeting April 16 at the port. Fenn is president of a growers cooperative that formed Dec. 13 to operate the center.

SW Washington farmers start grain co-op

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

In an effort to establish a new market for grain grown in their region, six farmers formed a cooperative Friday, intending to distribute it by rail from the Port of Chehalis in Lewis County, Wash.

The founding members of the Southwest Washington Growers Cooperative paid \$100 apiece for a share. The co-op and its partners, including the port, still need to line up public funding to build silos.

“I hope anyone in the area who grows grain and wants to sell it out of the area will join the co-op,” the cooperative’s president, Dave Fenn, said. “It’s not pie-in-the-sky. It will be an actual facility that will have extensive use.”

The campaign to grow and move grain stems from farmers seeking a new market. A food processor stopped contracting to buy vegetables from them in 2017. Another area cannery went bankrupt in 2008.

A Washington State University Extension survey found that Puget Sound brewers and bakers were interested in buying locally grown wheat, oats and barley. Farmers in the region, however, have no way other than trucks to move the grain to Puget Sound or Portland.

A grain storage and distribution center has broad support. The port has provided the land, and Lewis

County commissioners allocated \$800,000 for a rail spur that is expected to be built by late spring.

The Lewis County Farm Bureau contributed \$5,000 toward a \$35,000 conveyor belt to move grain from trucks to railcars this summer. Mike Peroni, project manager for the nonprofit Northwest Agricultural Business Center, said he was optimistic the rest of the money will be raised.

The belt would be temporary, but would allow farmers to immediately provide barley to Great Western Malting Co. in Vancouver, according to project organizers.

For the permanent silos and conveyance system, organizers hope to raise more than \$2 million. The facility could be built in phases.

Having some storage by 2021 probably will depend on whether state lawmakers allocate money in the 2020 capital budget, Peroni said.

The budget will supplement the main two-year capital budget legislators passed last year.

Peroni said publicly funded silos and distribution network would help farmers stay on the land.

“There’s a huge amount of public benefit in maintaining open space,” he said. “Western Washington is at a point where lawmakers and citizens need to decide if (commercial agriculture) is important or not.”

WDFW eyes 18 more properties totaling 6,900 acres

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Washington Fish and Wildlife has picked out more than 6,900 acres across the state to add to its million-acre land holdings.

The parcels of land, eight in Western Washington and 10 in Eastern Washington, range from 1 acre for a parking lot to 1,650 acres for elk habitat.

The department hasn’t appraised the properties, but the current owners are willing to talk, Fish and Wildlife real estate manager Julie Sandberg said.

Fish and Wildlife annually identifies land it wants to buy. Closing the deal and lining up state and federal money can take several years. Last year, the department started the process of acquiring nine pieces of land totaling more than 4,100 acres.

Fish and Wildlife buys land for wildlife and recreation. When it buys grazing land, it sometimes allows grazing to continue. “We are firmly committed to working lands when it’s consistent with our conservation mission,” Sandberg said.

Fish and Wildlife is taking public comments on its new crop of possible land acquisitions. Comments can be sent by email to lands@dfw.wa.gov or mailed to Real Estate Services, P.O. Box 43158, Olympia, WA 98504. Comments are due Jan. 3.

Here are the 18 new prop-



WDFW

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has its eyes on buying more property across the state, including land pictured here in Garfield County next to the Grouse Flats Wildlife Area.

erties Fish and Wildlife has its eyes on:

Asotin County

- Green Gulch: 643 acres to connect two sections of the Chief Joseph Wildlife Area to allow wildlife to move freely between the two sections.
- Harlow Ridge: 1,650 acres adjacent to the Asotin Creek Wildlife Area to protect elk winter range and calving areas.
- Mountain View: 770 acres to add to previous land acquisitions for hunting, hiking and wildlife viewing.

Chelan County

- Peshastin Mill: 1 acre for a parking lot for a trail along the Wenatchee River.

Clark County

- Horseshoe Falls: 20 acres for a riparian project to protect summer run steelhead.

Cowlitz County

- Modrow: 2.5 acres along the Kalama River for a building for the staff that operates the Modrow Fish Trap and Fallert Creek Hatchery.

Garfield County

- Grouse Flats: 720 acres to add to Grouse Flats Wildlife Area. The land has elk, deer, bears, cougars and wolves.

Grant County

- Flat Lake: 60 acres to buy two parcels in the Quincy Lakes Wildlife Area to ensure development won’t occur.

Grays Harbor County

- Davis Creek: 416 acres adjacent to the Davis Creek Wildlife Area. Land would connect Capitol and Chehalis state forests.

Jefferson County

- Discovery Bay: 6 acres adjacent to the Discovery Bay Unit of the North Olympic Wildlife Area.

Mason County

- Union River Estuary: 160 acres mostly surrounded by the Union River Wildlife Area.

Okanogan County

- Hunter Mountain: 420 acres to preserve sagebrush steppe and habitat for mule deer and wolves in the lower Methow Valley. According to Fish and Wildlife, the acquisition would help Okanogan County access rocks for public works projects. The acquisition also would help wildlife move north and south between state and federal lands.
- Rendezvous Inholdings: 208 acres for three parcels next to the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area.

Skagit County

- Samish River: 109 acres to improve fishing access to river.

Skamania County

- Moss Cave: 68 acres to ensure Fish and Wildlife has access to monitor the bat population.

Snohomish County

- Ebey Island: 58 acres adjacent to Snoqualmie Wildlife Area’s Ebey Island Unit.

Spokane County

- Chapman Lake: 507 acres to ensure fishermen have access to lake.

Yakima County

- Cleman Mountain: 1,105 acres for headquarters of Wenas Wildlife Area, and for hunting, fishing and other recreation.

Hay prices unlikely to move much in 2020: ‘I don’t see anything that’s going to push the price up’

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

Mild weather, healthy hay stocks and financially strapped dairy operations will likely hold hay prices in check in 2020.

Nationwide, total hay production in 2019 was up 6%, and alfalfa hay production was up 3%. USDA has not yet released statistics on Dec. 1 hay stocks, but the Livestock Marketing Information Center expects they’ll be up nearly 10 million tons year over year.

“That will not be good

for prices,” Steve Hines, University of Idaho Extension educator, said.

Dairies are just now getting milk prices above the breakeven level. They haven’t had cash to be able to stockpile hay, and they still aren’t buying, he said.

Weather is forecast to be mild this winter, pasture is good and drought isn’t an issue this year.

“We’re going in with a lot of hay, and it doesn’t look like it’s going to be one of those winters where guys have to feed a lot of hay,” he said.

That will delay demand

until closer to first cutting, he said.

“I don’t see anything that’s going to push the price up further than it’s been this year,” he said.

Hay prices are seasonal and typically continue to decline coming out of winter. Dairy producers are waiting for new crop, and beef producers are pushing cattle back out to range, he said.

Prices on dairy-quality hay in southern Idaho this past year jumped to \$220 a ton for a short time after first cutting because that new hay

got rained on and high-quality hay was hard to find. But they quickly went down to \$200 and ranged from \$180 to \$200 all summer. Feeder hay went for \$130 to \$150 depending on quality, he said.

Breakeven on hay above operating costs is \$75 to \$80 a ton. But above total costs, it’s \$130 to \$145 — making last year’s feeder hay prices

kind of a problem, he said.

Last week, Idaho hay prices were \$180 for dairy quality, \$150 for good quality and \$130 to \$140 for fair quality, he said.

“If you want to be profitable, you have to get into that dairy market. That said, what (else) are you going to grow that’s profitable?” he said.

Hay prices really come

down to milk prices, he said, adding that dairymen set the price of hay and until they get healthy and have cash flow, prices aren’t going to increase.

The price of milk is coming up, and Idaho is one of the few states that has increased the number of dairy cows. That’s going to increase hay demand a little, he said.

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