

Comment taken on forest restoration around Sage Hen Reservoir

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The Boise National Forest’s Emmett Ranger District will take comment through May 14 on the Sage Hen Integrated Restoration Project. Work is proposed on 67,800 acres, and around the Sage Hen Reservoir, north of Horseshoe Bend, Idaho.

Surface fuel loads and low- to middle-elevation “ladder” fuels have increased, and species composition has been altered, due to multiple missed fire cycles, a purpose statement said. Risk of habitat loss increased while biodiversity decreased, and an uncharacteristic fire would threaten public health and firefighter safety.

BNF said in a news release that proposed actions include reducing hazardous fuels through prescribed burning, mechanical and other treatments; harvesting timber through non-commercial thinning and reforestation; replacing culverts to improve passage of aquatic organisms; managing or decommissioning roads; and improving campground and trailhead infrastructure.

The project aims to improve resilience to disturbances by restoring and managing vegetation, improve watershed and habitat conditions, and benefit recreational opportunities and economies, BNF said.

Tussock moths in the past several years damaged Douglas firs in part of the project area. Proposed timber sales aim to reduce forest density and



The area near the Sage Hen Reservoir.

create space to plant various species that are more adaptive, BNF spokesperson Venetia Gempfer said.

Randy Fox of the Idaho Conservation League and multi-stakeholder Boise Forest Coalition said the project is important given the site’s condition and its increased use for recreation as the population grows.

The watershed includes some critical habitat for bull trout, a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act. Fox said work should be designed so recreation, for example, does not add sediment to streams and degrade habitat.

“We support forest restoration activities that are wisely implemented, and we are working through the Boise Forest Coalition to help ensure all activities associated with the project are designed in such a way to help meet those goals,” he said.

The Sage Hen site is part of the state’s shared-stewardship initiative to promote landscape-scale improvements to forest health through inter-agency cooperation.

High crude oil supply, low demand equal low fuel prices

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Large crude oil supplies and shrinking demand will mean diesel fuel and gasoline prices will remain low for a while, an economist says.

The drop in oil prices was caused by a feud between the Russians and Saudi Arabians, who increased crude production at a time when storage was maxed out and worldwide demand was low due to the coronavirus quarantine, said Randy Fortenbery, small grains economist at Washington State University.

Even with a new agreement to reduce production, supply will continue to exceed demand, Fortenbery said.

The recent drop of crude oil futures into negative territory was “dramatic” for oil, but has previously occurred for some other commodities, including onions in the 1960s and nearly to zero for hogs in 1998, Fortenbery said.

A negative price on the day a futures contract expires or delivery has to happen means sellers were willing to pay buyers to take inventory, Fortenbery said.

Fuel and fertilizer prices could drop as a result of low oil prices, Fortenbery said. Diesel “rack” prices, the price refiners charge to deliver fuel to a wholesaler, fell about 15 cents per gallon in the Spokane area in recent days, Fortenbery said.

It will take a while for those



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File
Washington State University small grains economist Randy Fortenbery says low fuel prices will linger.

lower prices to appear at the pump, he said. Refiners will likely charge a price based on what they paid for the oil currently in storage. The diesel manufactured today isn’t from the crude that had a negative price, it’s oil bought a month or more ago, Fortenbery said.

“You kind of have to work through some inventory before the low-price commodity shows up at the wholesale or retail level,” he said.

Even though the U.S., Mexico and the 15 member countries of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, have potentially agreed to reduce production, it takes a while to close the “spigot” globally, Fortenbery said.

“We’ll continue to see oil sup-

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ply in excess of storage capacity and demand needs for the next several weeks,” he said. “That will put pressure on crude oil prices in the short run.”

How long that lasts also depends on how long it takes the economy to reopen and people to resume driving, flying or using other forms of transportation, he said.

Cheaper fuel should make shipping commodities more attractive, Fortenbery said.

However, lower fuel prices don’t give any single nation an advantage, he said.

For example, wheat merchants around the world are all paying lower fuel prices, so U.S. producers do not have an advantage over their wheat-producing competitors, he noted.

Another factor is the value of the U.S. dollar, he said. Increased uncertainty in financial markets has caused the dollar to strengthen against most foreign currencies, he said.

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