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THE BIG BLAST

A farmer remembers the Mount St. Helens eruption and its massive impact



Dan Wheat/For the Capital Press

Dennis Dean holds a jar of Mount St. Helens ash in a wheat field that was part of his farm 40 years ago when the mountain erupted. The field is 6 miles north of Warden, Wash.

By **DAN WHEAT**
For the Capital Press

WARDEN, Wash. — The morning of May 18, 1980, dawned a beautiful spring day with temperatures that were nudged upward by the bright sunshine.

Dennis Dean completed an early morning check of his cattle. They were fine and his wheat and peas looked good.

“Back at the house about 9 a.m., I was sitting on the back patio petting the cat, and thinking how beautiful a day it was when I heard a loud boom,” says Dean, who was 38 years old at the time.

He assumed it was a sonic boom from one of the military jets that occasionally raced across the skies of the Columbia Basin. He thought nothing more of it.

Being a Sunday, the Dean family headed to church. As song leader, Dean saw people talking in the back, reluctant to enter the sanctuary and sit down at the start of the service.

“We finally decided to stop the service and go see what all the commotion was about,” Dean said. “People were saying Mount St. Helens had erupted about 9 a.m., which explained the ‘sonic boom’ I had heard.”

Mount St. Helens, 200 miles to the west, was a volcano that had rumbled to life in recent weeks. Though scientists kept a close eye on it, few predicted the catastrophic explosion that sent its peak and millions of tons of ash spiraling skyward.

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Mount St. Helens blew up May 18, 1980, sending millions of tons of ash skyward. Much of it landed on farmland to the east, destroying or damaging many crops.

USGS

Low precipitation, rapidly melting snow put irrigation districts in bind

Water managers predict rough season ahead in Central Oregon

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

MADRAS, Ore. — Mike Britton says summer could be by far the toughest he’s seen in his 12 years as manager of the North Unit Irrigation District.

Low precipitation and rapidly melt-

ing snow in the Upper Deschutes and Crooked river basins of Central Oregon mean natural stream flows will be just 19-78% of average through September, leaving farmers and ranchers with less water for crops and livestock.

To make matters worse, Wickiup Reservoir — the district’s main source

of stored water — was only 60% filled as of April 30, a record low to start the season.

“This is going to be a tough year all the way around,” Britton said. “Our reservoir didn’t even come close to filling.”

Warm and dry weather played out across Oregon in April, exacerbating drought conditions statewide and

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Oregon basins experienced rapid snowmelt in April, including Ski Bowl Road Snow Course in southwest Oregon near Siskiyou Summit. Normally on May 1, the site would measure 21.5 inches of snow, though this year it measured just 0.8 inches.

Shavon Haynes/OWRD

Wolf advocates push curbs on lethal removal in Washington



WDFW

Four environmental groups are petitioning the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission to write a rule on when the state wildlife managers can shoot wolves to protect livestock.

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Wolf advocates are petitioning the Washington Fish and Wildlife Commission to limit shooting wolves on public, to require more from ranchers to protect grazing livestock and to put them under greater scrutiny.

Center for Biological Diversity attorney Sophia Ressler called Fish and Wildlife’s current approach to wolf-livestock conflicts “trigger-happy.” Non-binding guidance developed by an 18-member Wolf Advisory Group leans too heavily toward lethal removal, she said.

“The current protocol gives complete discretion to the department to act as they see fit,” Ressler said.

“We truly believe there is some serious disfunction in wolf management that is not being dealt with,” she said. “We think that there needs to be another process.”

The Center for Biological Diversity, Cascadia Wildlands, Western Watersheds Project and Wild Earth Guardians are proposing that the commission write an ironclad rule laying out under what circumstances the department can shoot wolves.

If the commission rejects the petition, the groups can appeal to Gov. Jay Inslee.

None of the four groups are among the conservation groups represented on the Wolf Advisory Group, which developed the lethal-removal protocol in 2017.

Under the protocol, ranchers are required to use non-lethal

means to deter wolves, but the department will consider culling a pack after three depredations in 30 days. The final decision rests with the department’s director, Kelly Susewind.

Fish and Wildlife wolf policy leader Donny Martorello said the protocol adds details to the state’s 2011 wolf recovery plan, which foresaw the department killing wolves to protect livestock as wolves recolonized Washington.

“The plan and protocol are guidance for us,” he said. “We’ve done a pretty job of getting within those documents. That part, I think, is working.”

The environmental groups contend the protocol has failed to protect wolves. They propose that

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