

Owyhee Land Exchange in Idaho advances

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The Idaho Board of Land Commissioners recently approved the Owyhee Land Exchange with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The swap, in the works for 12 years, involves ground federally designated as wilderness. BLM Jan. 20 released a Record of Decision that initiated a 45-day public-protest period and 60-day review by the Idaho governor's office. Also Jan. 20, BLM issued an environmental assessment and a finding of no significant impact.

The state, whose land is supposed to generate income for schools, will trade nearly 24,000 acres of endowment land within the Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness for 31,000 acres BLM owns outside wilderness boundaries.

The equal-value exchange reflects appraisals rather than acre-



Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission

Cattle graze in Owyhee County, Idaho. The state and the Bureau of Land Management plan to swap land in and around a wilderness area.

age, according to the Idaho Department of Lands.

The state will get non-wilderness ground adjacent to existing endowment lands that have access. BLM would increase its wilderness holdings and backcountry-recreation access.

The state plans to exchange 40 endowment parcels with 17 grazing leases for 11 federal parcels with 18 grazing permits. The state

plans to honor the BLM grazing permits by issuing land-use permits for the time remaining.

The Idaho Farm Bureau Federation and Owyhee County Commission last year issued letters supporting the exchange.

"Most people I talk to favor it because it works better with their individual operation," said Owyhee Cattlemen's Association President Scott Bunderson. "Oth-

ers are in favor of the trade but concerned with potential (BLM) grazing-preference loss in the transfer."

Most OCA members have a mix of Idaho and BLM grazing authorizations, he said.

State leases are about twice as expensive and carry higher risk they will change hands, though the state has been "very favorable to work with," Bunderson said.

BLM permits give the holder a renewal preference if he or she remains qualified, but the agency can reduce allowed grazing intensity on a site.

"A lot of this just cleans up a management issue for the state of Idaho and for the BLM," he said. He expects grazing opportunities to hold steady or increase.

Idaho Conservation League Public Lands Director John Robison said the state and BLM, following the multi-stakeholder initiative that keyed wilderness designation, "recognized the exist-

ing checkerboard situation wasn't serving the agencies' interests as well as it could."

Some state-owned parcels with habitat for bighorn sheep and sage grouse are remote and surrounded by rugged canyons, so they're hard for the Department of Lands to manage for maximum long-term financial gain, he said.

While some BLM holdings are easier to manage and closer to towns, they have fewer multiple-use amenities and are better-suited to grazing.

"We don't see increases or decreases in grazing as a problem because each agency will now be able to optimize its mission," Robison said. "BLM will be better able to manage for both habitat for bighorn sheep and sage grouse, and manage for wilderness experiences for outfitters and members of the public while still allowing livestock grazing where it currently exists."

Swine inspection lawsuit moves forward

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The U.S. District Court for Northern California is allowing a lawsuit challenging the implementation of USDA's New Swine Inspection System to proceed by denying USDA's motion to dismiss the case.

The lawsuit was filed in January 2020 by the Center for Food Safety, Food & Water Watch and the Humane Farming Association.

The groups allege the final rule to implement the vol-

untary new system eliminates important aspects of the inspection process and violates the Administrative Procedure Act and the Federal Meat Inspection Act.

USDA's traditional inspection system required federal inspectors to inspect swine before slaughter, tagging and separating animals indicating signs of disease. It also required federal inspectors to appraise the carcass of each animal, condemn animals found to be adulterated and supervise the disposal of the condemned animals.

The groups allege the new system permits plant employees to conduct pre- and post-slaughter inspection instead of federal investigators.

They also allege plant employees are not required to receive inspection training, which they contend will increase the amount of adulterated or contaminated swine products entering the food market and the risk of foodborne illness.

In addition, plaintiffs allege that increased line speeds in the new system will

diminish the ability of inspectors to identify potentially diseased or adulterated carcasses. They also allege the final rule for the new system revokes E. coli and salmonella testing standards and gives establishments the ability to determine microbiological sampling plans independently.

Lastly, the plaintiffs allege their members who want continue consuming pork will be unable to avoid pork from plants using the new system, given the number of plants likely to adopt the system and the absence of label-

ing regarding the location of swine slaughter.

The final rule promulgated by USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service went into effect Dec. 2, 2019. USDA sought to dismiss the lawsuit due to the plaintiffs' lack of standing.

In his ruling, Judge Jeffery S. Wright said, "... the court concludes there is a credible threat that plaintiffs' members face an increased risk of illness from consuming adulterated products because of the final rule, sufficiently establishing standing based on

potential future harm."

"We are pleased that the court recognizes the 'credible threat' posed by USDA's new swine inspection rules," Ryan Talbott, staff attorney for the Center for Food Safety, said in a press release.

"Those rules are disastrous for public health by transferring inspection duties to untrained plant employees and allowing increased line speeds. This all but ensures that tainted meat will be sold to consumers, increasing the threat of foodborne illness outbreaks," he said.

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California FFA winter update

By California State FFA Officers

California FFA has kept the winter months busy, while staying tied to the state theme "Elevate" and its three key pillars; elevating individuals, agriculture and community.

In November and December our state officer team hit the road visiting FFA chapters at schools that are open. The team put on workshops for students and learned about the communities around the schools.

While on the road the group made stops at various agriculture businesses learning about the industry that feeds us all. Educational videos and interactive worksheets have been created based on these visits as a classroom activity providing educational opportunities for students.

In December the California FFA Foundation held our annual "Giving Tuesday" event where an astounding \$76,213 was raised to supply FFA jackets to members across the state who may not be able to afford one. This day provided 952 jackets to members of California FFA and we thank all that contributed in making it possible. Our association is very fortunate to have such a supportive community.

As 2021 has begun California FFA is planning a full and engaging spring. Students will be able to attend a career webinar series with presenters from different backgrounds and jobs in agriculture. The series kicked off with Ms. Margo Parks of the Western States Petroleum Association. She shared with students the value of being a strong advocate for what you believe in. Many more are to come and we encourage students to attend and expand their sights on agriculture.

Along with this series students will be able to participate in a variety of leadership conferences, online contests and more. During March students who are sophomores, juniors or seniors can attend our Made for Excellence or Advanced Leadership Academy conference to learn personal leadership skills as well as how to work on a team.

We will be continuing a series of social media posts that began in December titled "Unsung Heros" where individuals who go the extra mile to help and support the association are recognized. It is our hope that this series continues at the chapter level as well to highlight those behind the scenes.

Above: California state officers offer a workshop at the Loyaltan FFA chapter.

Left: State officers visit the Corning FFA chapter.

Intertwined in the events of late winter and spring, planning for the annual state FFA convention is underway. We look forward to what is to come and celebrating the hard work and successes that the year has had.

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