

Cattle Producers win state support to watch for wolves

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Cattle Producers of Washington organization has been awarded a \$397,440 state grant to prevent conflicts between cows and wolves in northeast Washington.

The amount nearly doubles state support the group got in 2019 and boosts a program running low on money. The cattlemen's group helps about 20 ranches protect herds in Ferry and Stevens counties.

"We'll probably be able to cover twice as many cattle," said Stevens County

rancher Scott Nielsen, the program's director. "We will go where the need is."

The award was the full amount the Legislature appropriated this year for grants to nonprofit groups to curb wolf-livestock conflicts.

Conservation district representatives from four counties evaluated the applications. Fish and Wildlife commented on the proposals. The state Department of Agriculture handles the paperwork.

The Northeast Washington Wolf-Cattle Collaborative, a range-riding program more closely



WDFW

The Cattle Producers of Washington organization has been awarded a state grant to prevent conflicts between cows and wolves.

associated with environmentalists, applied for \$156,237, but did not receive funding.

However, the wolf-cattle collaborate did receive \$320,000 directly from the Legislature for range-riders, while the Cattle Producers were shut out.

Fish and Wildlife places a high priority on increasing human presence around cattle to prevent attacks by wolves. If the attacks are apparently unstoppable by non-lethal measures, the department resorts to killing wolves, inciting legal and political turmoil.

With more money, the Cattle Producers will add conflict monitors and trail cameras. Nielsen said he

expects the group will have seven riders watching cattle before mid-July.

The cameras will help riders identify where wolves are roaming, he said. "If we are not seeing wolf activity in an area, there's no reason to spend a lot of time on it," he said.

The Cattle Producers received a \$210,600 grant in 2019. In its most recent application, the group said its program needs to grow to meet demand.

"I think it's been a good program. I think it benefits the ranchers, and I think they're buying into it," Nielsen said.

UI cancels weed control tour following incident

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The University of Idaho canceled the July 8 Snake River Weed Control Tour at its Aberdeen Research and Extension Center after someone sprayed glyphosate on about 1 acre, destroying plantings in research trials.

University researchers said the herbicide was sprayed from a four-wheeled, all-terrain vehicle during the first week of June, killing litchi tomato and quinoa. Litchi is a promising trap crop for pale cyst nematode, an important pest in potatoes.

Aberdeen-based UI researcher Pamela Hutchinson said it appears someone from outside the university system acted intentionally. Four-wheeler tracks that weaved between plot stakes were found. The center does not have a sprayer on such a vehicle.

An in-house investigation documented damage, said Mark McGuire, who directs the university's system of nine research and extension centers and six affiliated centers. That investigation did not identify who caused the damage or "who might be interested in destroying these plots," he said.

UI notified local law enforcement immediately and "just really moved into keeping the research going and determining what we can do to resurrect these plots for current research," he said.

McGuire said the university will analyze samples and the progress of any future plantings. If only glyphosate were sprayed, new plantings would survive because that herbicide is for emergent plants and does not stay in soil, he said.

Hutchinson said the incident was reported to the Idaho State Department of Agriculture official working on the pale cyst nematode project, and to the Bingham County Sheriff's

Office. The sheriff's office has a service agreement with local police.

Aberdeen Police Chief Chuck Carroll on July 1 said there is no evidence to identify a suspect, and the investigation is ongoing. People can call 208-785-1234 to offer information.

"We've lost a whole year of research," Hutchinson said. She doesn't have enough seed to replant the litchi trial for the research needed.

Pale cyst nematode was found in Idaho in 2006. A major eradication effort has made progress, and PCN has not spread outside regulated areas.

Hutchinson, UI's potato cropping systems weed scientist, said some people worry litchi will spread like a noxious weed. It has not escaped or become weedy since it was first planted in Shelley in 2012 with Idaho Potato Commission funding, she said. And no such problems have occurred in the federally funded Aberdeen project, now in its sixth year. Litchi can be killed the same year it is planted.

The work at Aberdeen involves multiple research partners. Planting litchi requires an ISDA permit so it can be tracked.

Hutchinson said the research shows litchi will cause PCN eggs to hatch, but will not allow them to grow to maturity and produce more eggs.

Weeds must be controlled in litchi, including some that can host PCN to maturity, she said.

Hutchinson said the quinoa research focuses on herbicides that can kill that crop where it is not wanted, and kill weeds that compete with it where it is wanted. A goal is to produce data useful to the IR-4 Project, a longtime USDA effort to assist in identifying and registering pest management products.

She said it appears quinoa was sprayed incidentally. It was in the same block as litchi.

Ruling goes against USDA sheep experimental station in Idaho

By **KEITH RIDLER**
The Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — U.S. officials and a sheep industry group have filed notices to appeal a federal court ruling involving an eastern Idaho sheep research facility long targeted by environmental groups concerned about the potential harm to grizzly bears and other wildlife.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture and American Sheep Industry Association filed the notices late last month to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. A judge's ruling in April prevents grazing in significant areas used by the Agriculture Department's U.S. Sheep Experiment Station.

Grazing was suspended in 2013 following previous lawsuits by environmental groups contending the areas contain key wildlife habitat that is a corridor for grizzly bears between Yellowstone National Park and Glacier National Park. Conservation groups contend grizzly bears have been killed because of sheep station activities.

The groups also say bighorn sheep, which can acquire deadly diseases from domestic sheep, and greater sage grouse use the area.

Grazing resumed following the release of a 2017 environmental impact statement considering the effects of sheep grazing on wildlife.

The Western Watersheds Project and two other groups filed a new lawsuit in early 2019 challenging the government's decision allowing sheep owned by the University of Idaho to graze in the Centennial Mountains of Idaho and Montana.

A federal judge in April agreed with the environmental groups that the government hadn't adequately examined all of the impacts with its 2017 environmental review.

"It's really good news for wildlife that the sheep experimental station is



USDA file photo

Sheep graze at the U.S. Sheep Experimental Station near Dubois, Idaho.

basically down to its headquarters area, and they're not going to be grazing sheep in the Centennial Mountains," said Erik Molvar, the Western Watersheds Project's executive director.

The sheep station is operated by the Agriculture Department's Agricultural Research Service. The sheep station supports research using domestic sheep owned by the University of Idaho, some of it involving sheep grazing at higher altitudes.

Specifically, Chief U.S. Magistrate Judge Ronald E. Bush ruled the government hadn't sufficiently examined the project's potential effects on grizzly bears and bighorn sheep, and didn't objectively analyze alternatives.

Bush ruled the government did adequately examine the effects on sage grouse.

The sheep station uses grazing allotments not belonging to the Agricultural Research Service. Bush ruled that the government didn't adequately examine direct and indi-

rect effects of sheep grazing on those allotments.

He said the government must review the project again in line with environmental laws, and until that review is complete, sheep grazing isn't allowed in those areas.

The Agriculture Department has said that the sheep station conducts research on lands ranging from about 5,000 feet to nearly 10,000 feet in elevation.

The "lands contain subalpine meadow, foothill, sagebrush steppe, and desert shrubland ecosystems," the agency noted. "This diversity

provides unparalleled research opportunities."

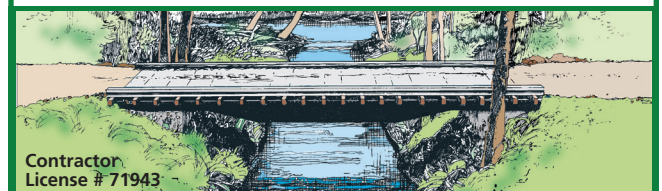
The Sheep Experiment Station, based near Dubois, Idaho, has not only been targeted by environmental groups but has also been on the federal budget chopping block under the administrations of both President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump.

Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, who represents the area, has played a crucial role in restoring funding.

"We'd like to see the sheep station converted into a research station that focuses on native ecosystems," Molvar said.

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