

Settlement deal reached over 15,700-acre Oregon thinning project

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The federal government has settled a lawsuit filed by environmental groups that objected to portions of a 15,700-acre thinning project in Oregon's Ochoco National Forest.

The U.S. Forest Service has agreed to refrain from logging within 150-300 feet of streams

within about 40 units of the Black Mountain Vegetation Management Project and pay \$100,000 in attorney fees to the plaintiffs.

Attorneys for the Forest Service did not respond to requests for comment about the settlement.

The complaint was brought earlier this year by the Central Oregon Landwatch and Oregon Wild nonprofit organizations, which alleged

the project failed to protect riparian areas that are critical for elk and fish.

Under the original version of the project, up to 3 million board-feet of timber was to be harvested from about 500 acres of riparian areas, said Oliver Stiefel, an attorney with the Crag Law Center who represented the plaintiffs.

A majority of those riparian acres

will now be preserved from logging under the settlement, he said. "There's still thousands of acres of upland logging that's on the table."

The original version of the project was expected to generate nearly 18 million board-feet of timber.

The settlement creates logging buffers of 300 feet on either side of larger fish-bearing streams and 150 feet on either side of smaller water-

ways, said Rory Isbell, attorney for Central Oregon Landwatch.

"Our intentions were to protect the most sensitive habitats," he said. "This settlement gives us what we wanted from the lawsuit."

Aside from providing shade and stream bank stability that benefit fish, riparian areas are also important to the life cycle of elk in the national forest, Stiefel said.



Capital Press File

The Northwest Ag Show will return to the Oregon State Fairgrounds and Exposition Center, Jan. 12-14, 2022.

Northwest Ag Show to return to state fairgrounds

Capital Press



SALEM — The Northwest Ag Show is returning to the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center for a live event, Jan. 12-14, 2022.

The show is presented by Harvest Capital Company.

"We're anxious to return to the state fairgrounds for a live show after the COVID pandemic forced us to conduct a virtual show this year," Joe Beach, the editor and publisher of the Capital Press and manager of the Northwest Ag Show, said.

More than 120 vendors, ranging from large-scale farm-equipment dealers to insurance and financial companies, vineyard supply companies and others have traditionally showcased their goods and services in two halls, the Jackman-Long Building and adjacent Columbia Hall, and on the grounds at the Fair and Exposition Center.

Several Oregon nonprofit ag organizations will participate in the show. Oregon OSHA will offer for-credit pesticide safety courses. Educational seminars will also be presented.

Companies interested in becoming exhibitors should contact Anne Long at 800-882-6789 or email events@mediagroup.com.

The show's title sponsor

is Harvest Capital Company.

Major sponsors include Kubota Tractor Company, Coastal Farm & Ranch and the Oregon State Fair and Exposition Center.

The show is owned by EO Media Events, a subsidiary of EO Media Group, and is produced by the Capital Press.

The Northwest Agricultural Show is one of the longest-running ag shows in the Pacific Northwest. The show was founded by Jim Heater and Lloyd Martin in 1969. The show was originally held at the Oregon State Fairgrounds. It was later moved to the Portland Coliseum and then to the Portland Expo Center.

In 2017 the show was taken over by EO Media Events. After a one-year hiatus, the show returned to the fairgrounds in 2019.

Because of the uncertainties prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2021 Northwest Ag Show was conducted only as a virtual event.

Washington fruit grower resists class-action suit

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A federal judge heard arguments Aug. 4 about whether to allow the grievances of two farmworkers against an Eastern Washington fruit grower to balloon into a class-action lawsuit involving 1,135 workers.

The suit, filed by Columbia Legal Services, alleges that Mexico residents Gilberto Gomez Garcia and Jonathan Gomez Rivera were mistreated in 2017 by Stemilt Ag Services.

Columbia Legal Services is asking U.S. District Judge Salvador Mendoza Jr. in Richland to certify that Garcia and Rivera can represent other allegedly wronged H-2A visa workers employed that year in 36 orchards owned or operated by Stemilt.

H-2A guestworkers are foreign nationals who come to the U.S. on a temporary basis to work in agriculture.

Stemilt's attorney, Brendan Monahan, said Garcia and Rivera would be poor representatives for more than

a thousand other farmworkers "who don't know we're in a courtroom today."

Rivera was a "remarkably slow worker," while Garcia courted insubordination by encouraging other apple pickers to slow down, Monahan said.

Both abandoned their jobs at Stemilt and sought work elsewhere, violating their visas, he said.

"What we haven't talked about yet is the plaintiffs' obligation," Monahan said.

The suit alleges discrimination, human trafficking, breach of contract and violations of Washington's Farm Labor Contractors Act. Expanding the case into a class-action lawsuit would increase potential penalties if Stemilt is found guilty.

The lawsuit accuses Stemilt managers of unlawfully introducing a minimum production standard and threatening to fire and "blacklist" H-2A workers who didn't pick fast enough.

Workers also had to wait on buses for up to an hour without being paid,

the suit alleges.

The lawsuit also alleges Stemilt failed to fully disclose the terms of employment.

Stemilt denies the allegations. Monahan acknowledged isolated problems at some Stemilt orchards, but said that the problems were not typical.

Stemilt had a contractual right to expect workers to make a sustained effort, but never had an ironclad three-bin-a-day policy across all orchards, he said.

Columbia Legal Services attorney Maria Diana Garcia argued that declarations from other workers show that Rivera and Garcia's experiences were representative.

According to court records, Rivera is a delivery driver in Mexico, who saw an ad in 2017 recruiting farmworkers to the U.S. Garcia, an electrician, had previously picked for Stemilt.

Both said in court declarations that they sought work in the U.S. because they couldn't earn enough money in Mexico to support their families.

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