



CAPTURING CARBON



George Plaven/Capital Press

Oregon sets sights on sequestration to meet climate goals

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

CONDON, Ore. — Tom Rietmann drove his pickup truck off the gravel road and onto a rugged, grassy hilltop known as Devils Butte in rural Eastern Oregon.

The area, along Highway 206 between Wasco and Condon, is mostly empty save for wheat fields, cattle and the occasional abandoned schoolhouse or old family cemetery — conjuring images of early settlers and homesteaders on the American frontier.

As its name might suggest, farming atop Devils Butte is no easy feat. The land is particularly vulnerable to erosion, Rietmann said, with soil washing away in the rain and snowmelt.

Rietmann began working full-time on his family's ranch in 1981. Since then, he has adopted several practices aimed at controlling soil erosion such as reducing tillage, rotational grazing and replanting native vegetation.

The goal at first was simply to keep the soil on the property, but over time Rietmann said he has come to recognize added benefits for the environment.

One advantage is the increased ability to capture and store carbon from the atmosphere.

"If a plant is green and growing, it's not only converting carbon dioxide to oxygen, but it's also growing roots," Rietmann said. "So the roots are putting carbon into the soil."

Oregon officials are looking to farmers like Rietmann to increase soil carbon sequestration on farms and forests as a way to help the state reach its climate goals, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45% below 1990 levels by 2035 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050.

Commission proposal

Last year, Oregon Gov. Kate Brown signed Executive Order 20-04 outlining the state's climate objectives, and directing agencies to come up with plans for how to get there.

As part of the order, the Oregon Global Warming Commission has developed a natural and working lands proposal that calls for increasing carbon sequestration by 5 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year by 2030, and 9 million metric tons per year by 2050.

Carbon sequestered in natural and working lands across the U.S. reduced total greenhouse gas emissions by 12% in 2019, according to the Environmental Protection Agency.

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Tom Rietmann, of Rietmann Ranch, looks over Devils Butte on his Eastern Oregon ranch, between Wasco and Condon. This field has been enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program since 1986, swapping agricultural production for native grasses to control soil erosion. A co-benefit, Rietmann says, is sequestering carbon from the atmosphere.



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Capital Press

Example of a no-till drill at Rietmann Ranch, used to seed wheat and grain without conventional tillage to promote soil health and carbon sequestration.

Bill tracking foreign farmland ownership introduced in Senate

By **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — A bill intended to crack down on foreign ownership of American farmland and agricultural firms was introduced in the U.S. Senate Oct. 28.

The bill, called the Food Security is National Security Act of 2021, would give top U.S. food and agriculture officials, including USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack, a permanent voice on the Committee on Foreign Investment, an interagency committee tasked with

reviewing proposed mergers and acquisitions by foreign companies. The committee includes representatives from 16 U.S. departments, including Defense, State and Commerce.

The bill would also require the committee to consider new food and agriculture-related criteria when reviewing transactions that could result in foreign control of U.S. businesses.

The bipartisan bill was introduced by Senate Agriculture Chair Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., along with Sens. Chuck Grassley,



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R-Iowa, Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, and Jon Tester, D-Mont.

The legislation was prompted by concerns over foreign invest-

ments in American farmland. In recent decades, according to a USDA database, foreign investors have bought more than 35 million acres of U.S. farmland worth \$62 billion — about 2.7% of all privately held land nationwide, an area larger than New York state.

"As foreign entities continue their acquisitions of U.S. food and agriculture companies, American farmers and families deserve to know these transactions receive proper scrutiny," said Senate Agriculture Chair Stabenow.

The purpose of this bill, accord-

ing to Tester, is to ensure "foreign investments in American agriculture are thoroughly vetted so we can protect our producers and consumers."

The bill would make two major changes to the way foreign purchases are tracked.

First, it would require the Committee on Foreign Investment to take agriculture-related concerns, including food security and availability, into consideration when evaluating foreign investments.

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Biden administration leaves ESA 'habitat' undefined

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The Biden administration moved Oct. 27 to undo Donald Trump's Endangered Species Act reforms, proposing to give federal officials a free hand in designating habitat deemed critical for recovery of a species.

Opening a comment period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said it plans to repeal a definition that limited "habitat" to land that could support the species.

The agency said it will leave habitat undefined and decide case-by-case the area a species needs based on the best available science.

The agency also said it planned to repeal a rule that requires the benefits of designating land as critical habitat to outweigh the economic costs.

If finalized, the actions will restore the ESA's "original intent and purpose," Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks Shannon Estenez said in a statement.

By repealing the Trump ESA reforms, President Biden will fulfill a campaign pledge. It also sides with blue states such as Washington, Oregon and California that sued to overturn the rules.

The ESA proposals follow by a few weeks the Biden administration's announcement it will repeal Trump reforms to the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Biden administration is returning to complicated and burdensome rules that do little to advance conservation, Ameri-

can Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall said in a statement.

"Adding uncertainty to environmental regulations creates another obstacle for farmers as they work to keep America's pantries stocked," he said.

The Trump ESA reforms went into effect on Donald Trump's last full day in office. The next day, President Biden signed an executive order directing agencies to review Trump policies.

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