

Cattle, calves rescued from deep NE Oregon snows

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
EO Media Group

IMNAHA, Ore. — Rescue efforts are still underway to save dozens of cattle stranded in up to 7 feet of snow on a northeast Oregon grazing allotment.

The cattle — many of which had young calves — were mired in deep snow on U.S. Forest Service land in the Upper Imnaha area, Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish confirmed Dec. 31.

Fish said the sheriff's office is investigating and "assisting with the retrieval of the cattle on the Forest Service grazing permits on the Marr Flat C&H Allotment."

Peter Fargo, public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, said in an email Dec. 31 that the county, the sheriff's office and

volunteers not only had been rescuing cattle, they "have been hauling hay and water with snowmobiles, side-by-sides and helicopters. The priority of the operation is first on everyone's safety and then saving as many cattle as possible."

He said the Forest Service instructed the permittee and ranch manager to remove all of the cattle in October.

Fargo estimated 70 head of cattle were still on the allotment Dec. 21 and as of Dec. 30 up to 25 animals were still unaccounted for.

Numerous volunteers were helping in the rescue efforts, according to county commission Chairman Todd Nash and volunteers with the county Humane Society.

Social media alert
One of the first wide-



Anna Butterfield/Contributed Photo
A snowmobiler rides alongside some cattle stranded in the Upper Imnaha area.

spread alerts came in a Facebook post by Craig Stockdale, who was one of the first to discover the cattle on the 200 Road south of Salt Creek.

"I just came upon them snowmobiling," Stockdale said Jan. 1.

He said his social media post mobilized rescuers —

both those out finding the cattle and those with facilities to care for the rescued livestock.

On Dec. 29, Kathy Gisler Reynolds, a volunteer with the Humane Society, also shared a post of the cattle. Photos posted on Facebook showed a cow up to its neck in snow and unable to move.

"I was alerted to yesterday by the ranchers who have been out there trying to save them," Reynolds said Dec. 30.

"Some were too weak to even move," she said of the cattle, adding that although rescuers were able to retrieve calves, some of the adult cows had to be euthanized.

Stockdale and Anna Butterfield, who with her husband, Mark, ranches northeast of Joseph, confirmed the cattle are on the Bob Dean Oregon Ranch managed by B.J. Warnock. Dean lives out of town, and Warnock was unavailable for comment Jan. 1.

County involved

Nash — who is a rancher and president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association — said Dec. 30 information on the situation was limited.

"The things we do know is that this was a Forest Service permit for the Upper Big Sheep Creek and the Upper Imnaha," Nash said. "It takes in a large area — 72,000 acres — known as the Marr Flat Grazing Allotment. They had a viable permit to go on sometime in the spring. They were supposed to have all cattle removed, according to the Forest Service permit."

"There is a rescue effort being made right now to try and rescue as many as possible. We've committed county resources to it. There've been a number of people who have volunteered or have contributed time," he said. "There's been helicopters that have flown feed into some that were extremely isolated and the rescue continues. Those are the basic facts that I do know."

Senators target sheriff's cougar policy

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Two western Washington state senators have introduced a bill to stop Klickitat County Sheriff Bob Songer from using hounds to track down cougars.

The legislation would bar sheriffs from hunting cougars, black bears and bobcats with dogs to protect people, livestock and pets.

The bill responds to Songer deputizing houndsmen to pursue predators in his south-central Washington county.

Songer's program hasn't led to more cougars killed, according to the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Nevertheless, the sheriff has displeased state wildlife officials and angered wildlife advocates.

"The motivation comes from the Klickitat County sheriff," said Sequim Democrat Kevin Van De Wege, who sponsored the bill with Kitsap County Democrat Christine Rolfes.

"I'm interested in and Christine Rolfes is interested in doing something that addresses Klickitat County," said Van De Wege, chairman of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

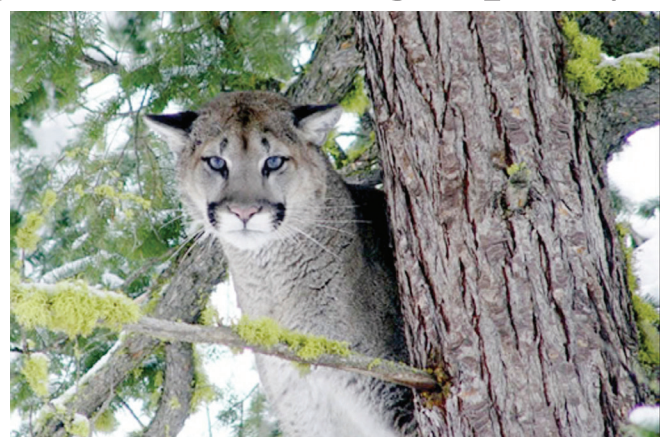
"In my opinion and the department's opinion, he is hunting down cougars that are not a problem," said Van De Wege.

Songer said Thursday that his office informs Fish and Wildlife about every cougar it kills and doesn't pursue cougars that aren't threatening people or property.

"That is some of the false narrative they play on," he said.

"The bottom line is we're not out there killing cougars to be killing cougars," Songer said. "My concern is public safety. That's number one, and also protection of livestock for the ranchers."

Sportsmen can't hunt cougars, bears and bobcats with hounds. The law, however, allows county, state and federal officials in their official capacities to pursue them with dogs.



A bill introduced in the Washington State Senate would stop Klickitat County Sheriff Bob Songer from deputizing houndsmen to pursue troublesome cougars.

The Van De Wege-Rolfes bill consists entirely of striking from the law the word "county."

Songer said he has been expecting such legislation since a judge in August dismissed a lawsuit filed by wildlife advocates.

"It doesn't surprise me they're taking that approach," he said. "I hope cooler heads will prevail in the Senate and this will go down in flames."

Van De Wege said he is reluctant to take authority away from sheriffs, but that he did not think the change in state law would have much effect outside Klickitat County.

"I think (Fish and Wildlife) has a very good track record of going after cou-

gars," he said.

Songer in 2019 announced that his office would keep a roster of houndsmen and be the primary agency in responding to dangerous animal calls.

The sheriff cited numerous complaints about cougars in populated areas.

Klickitat County rancher Keith Krepis said cougars became more numerous after an initiative passed in 1996 banning hound hunting.

The cougars, once rare, now prowl around homes, he said.

"People just don't get it," Krepis said. "Sooner or later a cat's going to eat a kid."

The sheriff can respond quicker than Fish and Wildlife, he said.

Grants to expand emergency response capacity at OSU veterinary diagnostic lab

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
Capital Press

CORVALLIS, Ore. — The Oregon Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory has received three federal grants to strengthen and expand its role in responding to large disease outbreaks in animals across the Pacific Northwest.

The lab is part of Oregon State University's Carlson College of Veterinary Medicine in Corvallis. It is primarily responsible for testing and diagnosing infectious animal diseases, including those in livestock such as pigs, sheep and cattle.

In the early days of the coronavirus pandemic, the lab was also used to test thousands of human samples for COVID-19, adding much-needed emergency capacity.

What followed was a stress test of the lab's systems and procedures, said

Justin Sanders, an assistant professor at OSU and section head of molecular diagnostics at the lab.

"We still needed to maintain our veterinary diagnostic mission," Sanders said. "Work did not stop in our veterinary role. That's really what these grants are funding. It's all related to our emergency preparedness response here for animal testing."

Between April 2020 and June 2021, Sanders said the lab tested approximately 75,000 samples for COVID-19, working in partnership with Willamette Valley Toxicology, which provided the appropriate accreditation for testing the human samples.

"We had the equipment and the expertise for molecular diagnostic testing," Sanders said. "We're a high-capacity, high-throughput diagnostic lab."

Maintaining that capacity will be key to quickly

detect and respond to animal disease outbreaks.

Sanders said diseases like African swine fever — a virus deadly to pigs that has not yet entered the U.S. but could hurt pork exports — pose a serious risk to Oregon's agricultural economy and food supply. The lab is also constantly surveying for the presence of diseases.

"The ability to rapidly identify and respond to agriculturally important pathogens and wildlife pathogens is critical to the economic health of the state," Sanders said.

The grants from the USDA National Animal Health Laboratory Network target different facets of the lab's emergency response work. The first grant, Sanders said, will pay for interagency drills where the lab can simulate a disease outbreak and practice implementing its plans and procedures.

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- Friday, Jan. 14: 8:30 a.m. until 2:00 p.m.

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