

UW scientists foresee wolves in Olympics

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Wolves likely will colonize the South Cascades and Olympic Peninsula and outnumber wolves in Eastern Washington within 20 years, according to University of Washington researchers.

UW conservation scientist Lisanne Petracca cautioned that the predictions are far from certain, especially the timing. Researchers are confident the state's wolf population will grow, but are less sure how fast wolves will spread.

Nevertheless, wolves can be expected to disperse west and settle in greater numbers than now seen in northeast Washington, Petracca told the Fish and Wildlife Commission on Saturday.

"We are pretty certain that wolves will begin to establish in the Southern Cascades and the northwest coast, and that they apparently will come to outnumber wolves elsewhere," she said.

UW scientists and statisticians, aided by Fish and Wildlife biologists, are trying to project the growth and spread of wolves in Washington over the next 50 years, inserting science into politically charged wolf management.

Washington's wolf population has increased yearly in the past decade and wolf packs saturate northeast Washington. Wolves, however, have been slower to spread west than expected by Fish and Wildlife.

No wolf packs have been documented in the South Cascades or Olympic Peninsula, though both forested areas are considered prime wolf habitat.

Even so, wolves may be more numerous in Western Washington by 2040 and outnumber wolves east of the Cascades 2 to 1 by 2070, according to the UW research.

In a preliminary presentation on the project, Petracca said researchers built a population model to project 15 different scenarios.

A baseline scenario assumed no changes to wolf management or survival rates. Researchers also assumed that highways, people and terrain would not stop wolves from seeking their preferred habitat.

The baseline scenario suggests "that if things just continue as they are that we're more certain than not that in 20 years, wolves will be on the Peninsula," Petracca said.

Another scenario assumed Fish and Wildlife will kill more wolves to protect livestock in northeast Washington. Under that scenario, wolves would still colonize the South Cascades and Olympic Peninsula, she said.

Petracca repeatedly stressed that the modeling results are not firm forecasts. "It's really difficult, actually, to try to build a model and estimate where wolves will go," she said.

"We truly have no idea how and when wolves will get to the South Cascades, into the Peninsula. We can try to estimate that as best we can, but it's really hard to do it," she said.

Fish and Wildlife and the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation counted 178 wolves in 2020, the latest tally.

By 2070, the wolf population could be about 500 and perhaps as many as 2,000, Petracca said. "We can see populations are going to grow, grow, grow."

USDA releases first National Hemp Report

Portland economist ponders whether industry value underrepresented

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Results are in for the USDA's first hemp acreage and production survey, which was sent to growers last fall to collect benchmark data for the newly regulated crop.

Industrial hemp was worth \$824 million in 2021, according to the inaugural report published Feb. 17 by the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Growers planted 54,200 acres of hemp in the open and harvested 33,500 acres. Hemp that wasn't harvested might have been damaged by weather or destroyed if it exceeded the legal limit of 0.3% THC, the psychedelic compound in cannabis that gets users high.

Another 15.6 million square feet of space — about 358 acres — was also dedicated to growing hemp "under protection," such as in greenhouses and hoop houses.

"Not only will this data guide USDA agencies in their support of domestic hemp production, the results can also help inform producers' decisions about growing, harvesting and selling hemp as well as the type of hemp they decide to produce," said NASS Administrator Hubert Hamer.

Unsurprisingly, hemp growers used largely to extract CBD and



Rows of hemp plants grow in Oregon.

Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

other cannabinoids made up roughly three-quarters of the crop's total value. Growers across the U.S. produced 19.7 million pounds of floral hemp valued at \$623 million, with an average price of \$39.60 per pound.

Oregon produced 2.39 million pounds of floral hemp worth \$235.4 million, making it the state's seventh-most valuable agricultural commodity ahead of potatoes and behind wheat.

California produced slightly more volume at 2.6 million pounds, though less of the crop was actually processed, contributing to a lower value of \$61.5 million. Washington's production was much smaller, at 630,000 pounds valued at \$1.4 million.

Idaho did not have a regulated hemp growing program in 2021. The state Department of Agriculture began licensing growers in November for the 2022 season.

While cannabinoids still dominate the industry, the survey did show an

emerging market for hemp fiber, grain and seed. Nationally, hemp grown for seed was valued at \$41.5 million, hemp for fiber was valued at \$41.4 million and hemp for grain was valued at \$5.99 million.

However, at least one economist based in Portland who specializes in hemp and cannabis research said he believes the survey underestimates key segments of the market.

Beau Whitney, of Whitney Economics, said that while the report contains many valuable points, "there are still nuances of the market that slipped through the cracks."

For example, he said state departments of agriculture reported 233,950 acres licensed to grow hemp in 2021. If NASS is correct, that means just 23.2% of the licensed acreage was planted, and just 14.3% was harvested.

Based on his own modeling, Whitney said he expected growers to plant 93,580 acres and believes the actual number was underreported.

Grants available for Skagit County farmers

Capital Press

The Skagit Community Foundation, the Northwest Agriculture Business Center and other organizations have created a program to assist Skagit County, Wash., agricultural producers who sustained flood and storm damage in November.

Funding is earmarked for damage not covered by insurance or federal and state relief programs. Applications will be reviewed, ranked and approved until funding is exhausted.

The maximum award amount is \$5,000. The average award is expected to be \$3,500. Applicants may receive a partial award.

Skagit County farms and ranches with a gross annual income of \$10,000 or more are eligible. Applications will be accepted between March 4 and 21. To apply, go to www.agbizcenter.org.

Applicants can apply in English or Spanish.

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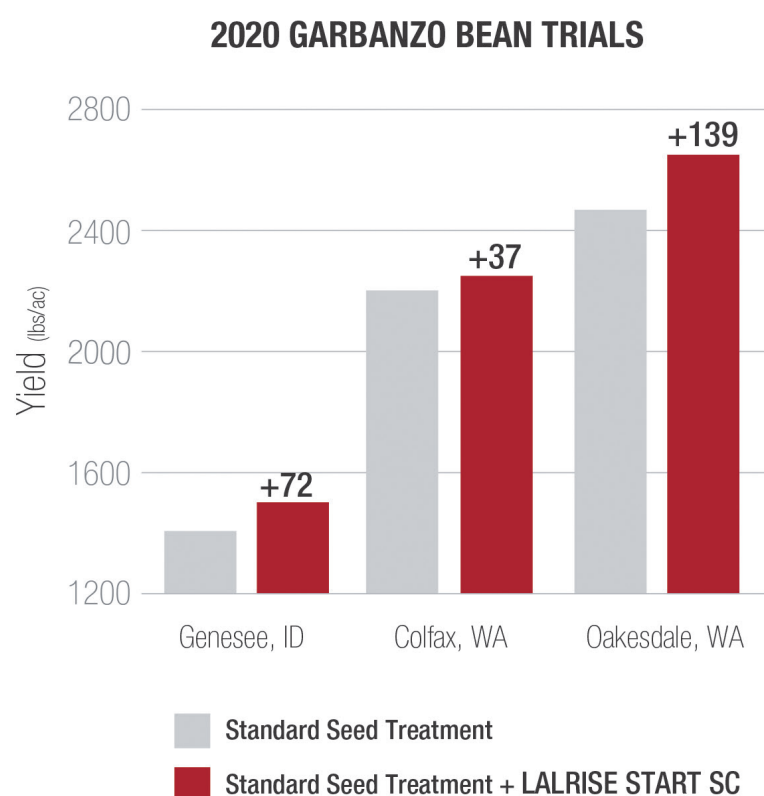
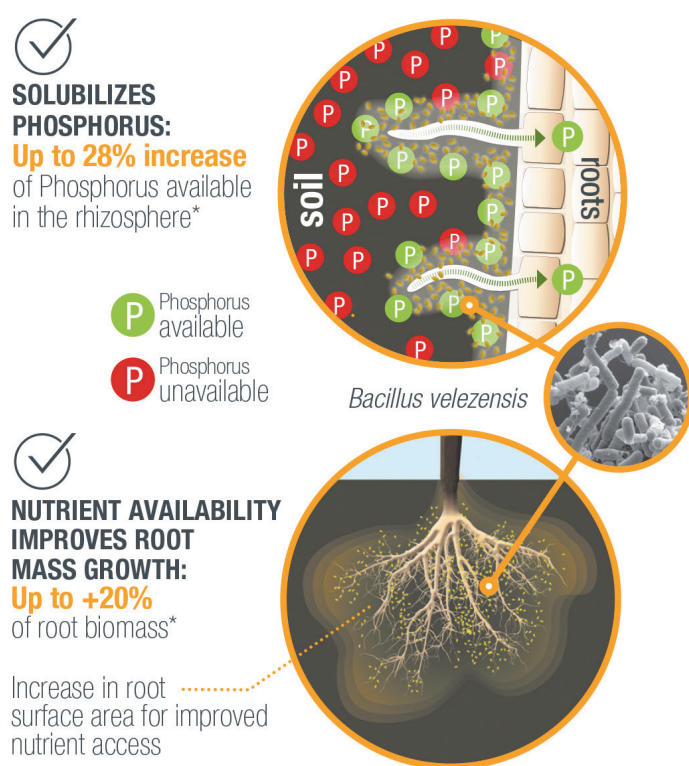
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