

Bill ratifying wolf delisting heads for state Senate vote

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The fate of an environmentalist lawsuit over the removal of wolves from Oregon's list of endangered species will soon be decided by the state Senate.

Under House Bill 4040, the Legislature would ratify last year's decision by state wildlife officials to delist wolves, effectively neutralizing a legal challenge filed by several environmental groups in the Oregon Court of Appeals.

The Senate will soon vote on HB 4040 having passed a key legislative committee on Tuesday and earlier having passed the House.

Proponents of the bill, including the Oregon Farm Bureau and the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, argue that livestock producers could



Courtesy of Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
OR-3, a 3-year-old male wolf from the Imnaha pack, is shown in this image captured from video taken by a state employee in 2011 in Wallowa County.

be excluded from any potential legal settlement between the environmental plaintiffs and Oregon's wildlife

regulators, thereby circumventing the public process in setting wolf management policy.

Environmentalists and animal rights advocates fear the delisting will lead to hunting and argue that the bill will preclude judicial review of whether the delisting decision was based on sound science, which the Legislature should not attempt to answer.

State Sen. Chris Edwards, D-Eugene, said it's not unprecedented for lawmakers to weigh in on thorny policy issues instead of having them hashed out during prolonged litigation.

"As public policy makers, we do intervene when we believe it's healthier to resolve a situation rather than let it happen in a courtroom," he said.

Edwards joined two Republican colleagues on the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources in voting in favor of the

bill, which passed the committee 3-2 and is now headed for a vote on the Senate floor.

The two other Democrats on the committee — Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, and Sen. Michael Dem-brow, D-Portland — said they were uncomfortable with lawmakers trying to influence the legal process from the outset.

Prozanski said he would have preferred a bill that would require the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and Oregon Farm Bureau to be included in any settlement negotiations, rather than render the lawsuit moot.

"I'm concerned about us being asked to intervene at this stage in a judicial proceeding," he said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Oregon biotech fish labeling bill dies

Bill fails to pass muster in state Senate committee

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A bill that would require genetically engineered fish to be labeled in Oregon has died in committee, but the proposal will likely be resurrected next year.

House Bill 4122 was approved 32-27 earlier this month by the state House and was referred to the Senate Committee on Health Care, which did not act on the bill by the Legislature's Tuesday deadline.

Supporters of the bill said it would bolster Oregon's fishing industry by allowing consumers to easily discern between local wild-caught salmon and a biotech variety

approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last year.

Critics of the bill argued that labeling would unnecessarily alarm consumers about the safety of such fish and claimed the bill was premature because the FDA is still determining whether federal labeling guidelines for such salmon are appropriate.

State Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson, the committee's chairwoman, said during a Tuesday hearing that she was generally supportive of the bill, but it was "dropped in our lap" only recently, so there wasn't sufficient time to discuss it during this year's short legislative session.

Originally, HB 4122 would have lifted Oregon's ban

against local regulations on genetically engineered crops, which the Legislature approved in 2013 as part of a broader package of bills passed during a special session.

The Oregon Farm Bureau vigorously opposed reversing this pre-emption statute, arguing it would create a patchwork of conflicting county ordinances across the state. Proponents said local control was necessary due to insufficient regulations on biotech crops at the state and federal levels.

However, the initial language of the bill was replaced with the fish-labeling provisions, which won the approval of Oregon's salmon industry but continued to face opposition from biotech supporters and food manufacturers.

The Center for Food Safety, which supported both versions of the bill, will continue to educate legislators about genetic engineering in anticipation of proposals being revived in 2017, said Amy van Saun, legal fellow for the nonprofit advocacy group.

The fish-labeling component may be rendered moot by 2017, depending on federal action, said Scott Dahlman, policy director of Oregonians for Food and Shelter, an industry group that opposed the bill.

However, Dahlman said he wouldn't be surprised if the biotech pre-emption issue will be raised during the longer legislative session next year.

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State spends more than \$6.6 million on legal fees for Cover Oregon

DOJ does not expect to need additional money for cases

Associated Press

SALEM — Oregon has paid more than \$6.6 million on legal fees in ongoing litigation over the failed Cover Oregon health insurance exchange portal.

The Statesman Journal reported that documents released to the newspaper by the state Department of Justice show payments as high as \$960,900 made

between May 2014 and December to attorneys representing the state.

The state and Oracle Inc., the primary tech contractor on Cover Oregon, have been engaged in a lengthy, multi-case legal battle over who is responsible for the project's failure since 2014.

Though the \$6.6 million figure far exceeds the \$2 million the state set aside for the lawsuits, Department of Justice spokeswoman Kristina Edmunson said Tuesday the agency does not expect to need to ask the Legislature for additional money for the cases.

Ammon Bundy, others plead not guilty in Oregon refuge case

Some skeptical of federal court

By STEVEN DUBOIS
Associated Press

PORTLAND — Ammon Bundy and another 15 defendants pleaded not guilty Wednesday to federal conspiracy charges related to the 41-day occupation of an Oregon wildlife refuge. Several of the accused, however, expressed doubt that they enjoy the pre-

sumption of innocence.

Bundy sat at the main defense table while most of his co-defendants sat in the jury box as they listened to a government prosecutor read the indictment and U.S. District Judge Anna Brown tell them their rights.

Brown reminded the defendants they are considered innocent until proven guilty. One by one, she asked them if they understood. Bundy simply said "yes," but four co-defendants took the opportunity to express skepticism.

"It's difficult to understand

presumption of innocence when I've spent the last month in a jail cell and been led around in shackles and chains," Ryan Payne said.

Another, Jason Patrick, told the judge: "You're the federal government; you're going to do whatever you want."

The judge tackled several procedural issues during the nearly two-hour hearing, which started with Bundy, sporting a fresh haircut, blowing a kiss toward the Odalis Sharp and her children. The family gospel band traveled from Kansas

in January to sing at the occupation. One daughter, 18-year-old Victoria Sharp, was at the traffic stop in which authorities arrested Bundy and fatally shot Arizona rancher LaVoy Finicum.

The judge set an April 29 trial date, though that seems likely to change. Assistant U.S. Attorney Ethan Knight said he expects to file a superseding indictment with additional charges after investigators finish examining firearms, electronics, American Indian artifacts and other evidence.

Brown warned Knight to make it snappy, saying the accused deserve a right to a speedy trial — not one in 2017. She also pressed prosecutors to start turning over FBI reports and evidentiary material to defense attorneys and their clients.

"They've been in custody for weeks. They need information," Brown said. She told prosecutors to produce at least some discovery material by March 4.

A total of 25 people are charged in connection with the takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, which began Jan. 2 and lasted until Feb. 11. The occupiers wanted

the U.S. government to relinquish public lands to locals and free two Oregon ranchers who they say were wrongly imprisoned for setting fires.

Defense lawyers and their investigators plan to visit the refuge Thursday and Friday, their first look at the scene. The judge denied Bundy's request to tag along with his attorneys.

One of the defendants, Kenneth Medenbach, told the judge he plans to serve as his own lawyer and made a motion to have his case dismissed for lack of jurisdiction. Brown scheduled a hearing for next week to go over those issues.

Hunter education certification offered

The Daily Astorian

Hunter education opportunities are available to get certified before spring turkey season, which runs from April 15 to May 31 statewide, plus a youth-only season April 9-10. Hunter education is required for all hunters under the age of 18 and encouraged for adults, too.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife offers two types of hunter education classes: a traditional classroom experience or independent study, which kids can do from home via workbook or online course. Both methods take about 12 hours to complete.

Independent study students can take one of three online courses or request a free workbook by emailing odfw.info@state.or.us. Fees range from \$13 to \$29 and include mobile-friendly options. Independent study students must also sign up for and complete a field day, where they practice safe firearm

handling and shooting with certified hunter education instructors. Registering for a class or field day costs \$10.

The workbook or the online course must be completed independently prior to field day. Field Days are as follows: 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. March 5 at BKS Sportsmen's Club, 92411 Abbot Road in Knappa; and 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 9, Rainier Rod & Gun Club, 28291 Old Rainier Road in Rainier.

Conventional classes are being held from 6 to 9 p.m. March 28 and March 30 and April 4 and 6 at the Rainer Rod & Gun Club.

The classes cover important issues like hunter ethics and respect for private landowners; wildlife management and identification; firearms handling

and safety; hunt preparation and techniques; survival; and introductory bowhunting.

For information, go to <http://bit.ly/1Qh5inH>

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