

# State opposes deregulation of biotech bentgrass

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Bureau

CORVALLIS — Oregon farm regulators are objecting to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed deregulation of a genetically engineered grass variety that escaped field trials more than a decade ago.

Last year, USDA reached an agreement with Scotts Miracle-Gro, which developed the glyphosate-resistant biotech creeping bentgrass, to lift federal regulations on the crop as long as it's not commercialized.

Scotts would also conduct a 10-year management plan to control the grass, but some farmers have complained that the proposal will allow the company to eventually wash its hands of the problem while leaving them with spray costs and potential export barriers.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has come out against the proposal, arguing it's inappropriate to deregulate the bentgrass while it's still infesting areas of central and Eastern Oregon.

"We think it needs to be eradicated before deregulation," said Lisa Hanson, department's deputy director, during a meeting this week of the Oregon Board of Agriculture.

The state claims the biotech bentgrass doesn't meet the federal requirements for deregulation because it "clearly falls into the category of a plant pest and noxious weed," according to a letter sent to USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.

"It is invading irrigation canals and displacing native

species in riparian areas in the affected Oregon counties," the state's letter said, noting that the crop should remain regulated until "a means to eradicate this pest becomes available."

The state also recommends that USDA convene a task force to evaluate the impacts of deregulation.

Biotech bentgrass is of particular concern near waterways because they can allow the crop to spread to new areas and potentially get out of control, said Helmuth Rogg, the state Department of Agriculture's plant program director.

There are also limited chemical methods for treating the bentgrass, he said. Not only is it resistant to glyphosate, but other herbicides often can't be used in irrigation canals without potentially harming crops.

Canals can be treated with herbicides before they're used to convey summer irrigation water, but that time window poses another challenge, Rogg said.

"The problem in early spring is it's not easy to identify," Rogg said.

At that point, the variety looks much like any other grass, he said. The crop is more distinctive in late summer.

Scotts developed the bentgrass for golf courses and began testing it with USDA's consent in a "control area" in central Oregon designated by the state, but the cultivar escaped field trials in 2003 and continues to be found in Jefferson and Malheur counties.

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

# The Harbor announces new executive director

The Daily Astorian

The Harbor, Clatsop County's domestic violence and sexual assault resource agency, has announced that Melissa Van Horn is the new executive director.

In February, she began filling the vacancy created by Julie Soderberg's departure. The selection was made after a regional search and selection process.

Van Horn has spent the last 20 years engaged in community work and service. She is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, where she served as an aviation electrician's mate/plane captain and fueling skids supervisor, supervising and training 32 naval airmen.

Her resume also includes over five years of development, administration, communications and marketing experience

in the nonprofit sector and social services.

Prior to the appointment as executive director, Van Horn has been connected with The Harbor as an advocate, consultant and board member.

"Domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking are crimes that affect the health of the entire community," she said in a statement. "As such, I look forward to continuing to serve and partner with businesses, social service agencies and townspeople in this new capacity."

"As a survivor, I am deeply dedicated to our program because we aide in the empowerment of survivors. We at The Harbor play a key role in working to end violence in our world."

Last September, Soderberg tried to temporarily suspend programs at The Harbor, complaining about the commitment of the board of directors.

# Ag regulators may seek power to 'stop work'

State explores refined authority

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Bureau

CORVALLIS — Food manufacturers and pesticide applicators could be subject to "stop work" orders under new regulatory authority being considered by Oregon's farm regulators.

The state Department of Agriculture may seek new regulatory power to halt specific unlawful actions that endanger public safety.

Currently, the department can suspend or revoke the license of a food establishment or pesticide applicator that's violating the law, but such sanctions may be overkill in some situations, said Lauren Henderson, the agency's assistant director.

"We don't have anything that's specific to an activity. It's all or nothing," he said during this week's meeting of the Oregon Board of Agriculture in Corvallis.

Revoking a license or obtaining a temporary restraining order in court also involves fairly high legal hurdles, Henderson said.

Taking such drastic steps would be overly burdensome for the agency and the business in the case of minor violations, such as a faulty thermometer in a refrigerated meat cooler, he said.

Under the proposed "stop work" authority, the Department of Agriculture could simply require a company to cease using that cooler until it's fixed, he said.

"We're looking at something very narrow and prob-

ably short-term," Henderson said.

The proposal is in a very early stage but the agency is considering it as a possible "legislative concept" for the 2017 legislative session, he said.

Henderson acknowledged the "stop work" idea has met with some trepidation among regulated companies.

"The industry as a whole is pretty nervous about us having that authority," he said.

Aside from possibly affecting pesticide applications, the proposal could impact on-farm processing, such as dairymen who make farmstead cheese.

Doug Krahrmer, a blueberry farmer and board member, said companies should have a way to challenge a "stop work" order.

"I would caution you to put some sort of judicial mechanism in there, so if a grower or an owner takes issue with

a stop work order, there is a quick way to get adjudication," he said.

The U.S. Department of Labor did not provide such recourse when it issued "hot goods" orders in 2012 that halted the sale of perishable fruit based on alleged labor violations, he said.

Krahrmer said he would characterize the actions as "tyrannical" and he doesn't ever want to describe the Department of Agriculture that way.

Katy Coba, the department's director, said the agency is still examining similar authority in other states and recognizes the importance of protecting due process while ensuring public safety.

"It's finding in statute the right balance," she said.

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# Coast Guard rescues surfer caught in ebb tide

The Daily Astorian

GRAYS HARBOR, Wash. — The U.S. Coast Guard rescued a surfer caught in an ebb tide near Grays Harbor's north jetty Wednesday.

The Coast Guard's command center at Air Station Astoria in Warrenton received a report from Grays Harbor's

911 dispatch of two surfers in distress and issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast seeking assistance from nearby mariners.

A 47-foot motor lifeboat from Station Grays Harbor eventually reached the scene and recovered a 29-year-old male surfer wearing a drysuit and using his board as a float-

ation device. He was then taken to Station Grays Harbor but declined further medical care.

The other surfer, a 46-year-old male, had made it safely to shore prior to the Coast Guard's arrival.

"The Coast Guard supports safe recreational use of our beautiful coastline and encourages safe prac-

tices similar to the surfers that needed help today," Chief Petty Officer Matthew Degerolamo, the chief duty officer at the command center, said in a statement. "The surfers used the buddy system, dressed appropriately for the water temperature and used a floatation device to stay afloat."

# Migrating whales pass the Oregon Coast

Gray whales make their spring migration

By **LYRA FONTAINE**  
EO Media Group

CANNON BEACH — Locals and spring break visitors had the opportunity to spot gray whales swimming north, part of the 6,000-mile round-trip migration the mammals make each year.

Ecola State Park was one of the 24 designated sites for the Spring Whale Watch Week hosted by Oregon State Parks and Recreation.

About 300 volunteers were stationed along the coast last week, helping state park visitors identify and learn about the expected 20,000 gray whales heading to summer feeding grounds in the Arctic's Bering and Chukchi seas.

Volunteers spotted 1,552 gray whales statewide, the state reported.

Ecola State Park whale-watching volunteers had already spotted 14 whales on the morning of March 22.

"It's a good day to see them," said volunteer Carl Hosticka, from Tualatin, using binoculars to look for whale spouts. "The sun illuminates the spouts so they will be easier to see."

Gray whales will keep swimming past the coast until October or November, Oregon State Parks and Recreation ranger



Lyra Fontaine/EO Media Group

Volunteer Carl Hosticka helps visitors scan for whales.

Luke Parsons said. Resident gray whales that stay in the central Oregon Coast area also show up later in spring.

"These whales are the first-wave migration, the males and the immature females," Parsons said. "The majority of the mothers and the calves start showing up in late April and May."

When it gets dark in the Arctic around October, gray whales head back south. Hosticka also volunteered for the Winter Whale Watch Week in December, when gray whales can be seen traveling from the Arctic to lagoons in Baja California, Mexico, where they mate and give birth.

Volunteers, trained with the

Whale Watching Spoken Here program, taught visitors about whale migration and feeding habits.

Gray whales, which prefer to eat organisms near the bottom of the ocean such as small crustaceans, do not eat much while migrating.

"There isn't much for them to eat along here," Hosticka said. "They bulk up and swim day and night because they can sleep with half their brain."

How long does it take for gray whales to migrate to the Arctic? It depends on the whale.

"Some of them are in a hurry and it will take them three or four months, and for some it

takes even longer," Parsons said. "The mothers will travel quite a bit slower with their little babies. It's nonstop for several months just to get there. They're dedicated animals."

The length of an average female gray whale, 45 feet, was displayed in the grass using measuring tape. Females are usually larger than males, and their milk is rich, made up of more than 50 percent fat, Hosticka said.

Instead of teeth, gray whales have rows of bristly plates called baleens, which allow them to filter the food and water they scoop off the ocean floor with their mouths.

On the journey north from Baja California, the babies continue to nurse and begin learning how to eat.

"The mothers are teaching them tricks of the trade," Parsons said.

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