

# Fewer suppliers means Oregon Christmas trees may cost more

Associated Press

SALEM — Christmas trees in Oregon may cost a bit more this year as the supply of holiday firs in the state has dropped.

An oversupply of trees in 2015 led some growers to leave the market, meaning there are fewer trees to go around this year, which could push prices slightly up, The Salem Statesman Journal reported.

Tracy Fisher, a bookkeeper and office manager with Hupp Farms, located in the Silverton area, said the company has seen high sales and has turned down at least 50 inquiries for trees.

"People are just scrambling for Christmas trees," she said.

Fisher said Hupp Farms is selling noble firs for around \$5 per foot — with popular sizes ranging between 6 and 8 feet tall. She said those prices are slightly higher and more in line with 2005 levels. The farm has sold 22,000 trees so far.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, harvest and sales of trees dropped 26 percent in 2015 compared to 2010. USDA statistician Dave Losh said growers planted an overabundance of trees compared to the demand for them and as supply outpaced demand, prices fell and growers left.



Danielle Peterson/Statesman-Journal  
Gerald Beard and fellow workers bale and sort Christmas trees last week, at Hupp Farms in the Silverton area. Christmas trees in Oregon may cost a bit more this year as the supply of holiday firs in the state has dropped.

**'People are just scrambling for Christmas trees.'**

Tracy Fisher

bookkeeper and office manager with Hupp Farms

Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association Executive Director Bryan Ostlund says while supplies have tightened, there is no shortage of Christmas trees in Oregon.

"It's what mother nature provides us here in the Northwest," he said, later adding, "It's just a perfect natural growing environment for these conifers."

"Now it's just a matter of who's left," he said.

After evaluating dozens of options to raise revenue, the task force recommends an income tax surcharge and a surcharge on beverages at the wholesale level.

# Task force eyes tax hikes for fish, wildlife funding

By CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A task force convened to find ways to raise revenue for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Monday will recommend two tax increases to add \$86 million to the department's budget.

The next challenge will be selling them to the Oregon Legislature.

The agency, which has a biennial budget of about \$370 million, is looking for more money for conservation programs, maintenance and outreach. It gets about a third of its revenue from hunting and fishing license fees, and the remainder from state and federal sources.

Task force members acknowledged Monday that the roughly \$86 million ask every biennium will be politically challenging.

## Shortfall

The state faces a \$1.7 billion shortfall going into the next biennium, according to the Governor's Office.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is expected to release her balanced budget Thursday.

The tax force's recommendations will come in a legislative session that will likely be characterized by attempts to both cut costs and raise funds across the board.

Much of the discussion at Monday's meeting revolved around gaining traction for the additional ask — both in terms of support from members of the legislature and from the state's hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation and conservation communities.

Many at Monday's meeting pointed to the success of Measure 99 — which passed at the ballot box earlier this month to allocate state lottery funding for outdoor education — as an example of an initiative that leveraged the support of those Oregonians who value outdoor recreation such as cycling or hiking, but don't hunt or fish.

Oregon State Rep. Ken Helm, a nonvoting member of the task force, advised the task force to meet with all members of the Legislature and to gain the support not only of conservation groups, but also of Oregon businesses.

Task force members also met with Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, and Rep. Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, last week.

Barnhart is chairman of the House Interim Revenue Committee, while Witt is chairman of the House Interim Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

**Reps. Barnhart and Witt discouraged emphasizing either tax, said task force members.**

According to task force members, Barnhart and Witt discouraged them from emphasizing either tax and instead were advised to "lead with" the mission of ODFW and what it plans to do with the additional money.

## Conservation

That money, according to task force recommendations, is to be allocated toward additional conservation activities, improved hunting and fishing opportunities, increasing outreach and education efforts, and the cost of needed maintenance to department infrastructure that has been put off in prior budget years.

The largest chunk of the approximately \$86 million target — about \$46.7 million — would be dedicated to conservation efforts.

Stakeholders and legislators also appear to want to see more oversight for the department's ongoing work — another bill passed last year is intended to track in the coming years how many hours ODFW workers spend doing work on behalf of other departments.

A final report of the task force's recommendations is expected to be complete by the year's end.

# Wet weather heralds busy season for Oregon State University slug researcher

## Expert studying slug life cycle

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

It's the rainy season in Oregon, which means there's plenty of work for Oregon State University's new slug expert, Rory McDonnell.

With slugs emerging from their underground hibernation, McDonnell has found that Oregon's reputation as a haven for the slimy pests is well deserved.

"The populations are very large," he said.

The number and size of slugs is greater in Oregon compared to McDonnell's previous post as a research specialist at the University of California-Riverside.

"Sometimes, in California, I felt like I was trying to fit a square peg into a round hole," he said.

McDonnell assumed his new position as an assistant professor at OSU in mid-July, but autumn is when his research began in earnest.

During the dry season, he got his laboratory equipped

and met with farmers afflicted by the prodigious mollusks.

The wet weather has now allowed him to study the slug's life cycle with the aim of developing efficient ways to eliminate the pests.

Slug activity peaks in fall and spring, so McDonnell is out in the field, checking traps to see which species are most problematic in certain locations.

European brown garden snails are the worst offenders in nurseries, while gray field slugs are the primary culprits in field crops, he said.

Indeed, the gray slug is likely the most prominent slug pest worldwide due to its ability to adapt to a variety of environments and food sources, McDonnell said.

"It can be successful under a wide range of conditions," he said.

In March 2015, OSU organized a "slug summit" in Salem, Ore., where growers complained that damage from slugs has intensified in recent years.

That complaint prompted the university to seek additional funding from Oregon lawmakers to hire a slug researcher. The Legislature



Courtesy of Rory McDonnell  
Oregon State University assistant professor Rory McDonnell specializes in slugs. He's currently helping Oregon farmers find efficient ways to kill the slimy pests.

provided an additional \$14 million to OSU later that year, allowing the university to fill this slug position and several others.

McDonnell is exploring strategies to fight the pests.

For example, farmers could

use extracts from food or slug pheromones to attract them to a certain area of a field that's treated with a hefty dose of molluscicide. This approach may kill the slugs more effectively than spreading a lesser concentration of molluscicide across an entire field.

McDonnell and other researchers have identified slug attractants that work in the laboratory, and they plan to see if the substance also works outdoors.

"What happens in the lab isn't necessarily what happens in the field," he said.

Another technique would involve parasitic nematodes that kill slugs, which are used for biocontrol in Europe.

If such nematodes were found in Oregon, researchers would have to prove to the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service that the parasites don't affect native species.

"We only want to use tools that are safe and specific to the pest species," McDonnell said.

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