

Skagit County elk damage could be \$1.5 million

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Skagit County, Wash- ington, farmers may report roughly \$1.5 million annu- ally in elk damage by the time a yearlong survey is done, the county’s assessor, Dave Thomas, said Wednesday.

The survey is about three-quarters finished, and 77 landowners have reported losses averaging \$15,000 per farm. Some farmers sub- mitted comments with their damage estimates, Thomas said.

“There are a lot of under- lying aspects to this that aren’t being reported in the survey results,” he said. “The most frustrating thing we’re hearing is that they’re having to go out and repair fences on a regular basis.”

The elk occupy valleys in eastern Skagit County and are in a herd that the state Department of Fish and Wildlife and American Indian tribes bolstered 15 years ago. Elk were rounded up around Mount St. Helens, trucked to Skagit County and



Elk gather in a field in Skagit County, Wash.

Don Jenkins/Capital Press

released in hills. The herd grew and elk moved down onto private land.

Farmers say elk are eat- ing food crops and livestock forage, damaging pastures and destroying hay bales, as well as breaking down fences. State lawmakers

directed the Department of Fish and Wildlife to get elk off farmland. The depart- ment has not had any appar- ent success.

The assessor’s office asked farmers to estimate their losses as part of a rou- tine survey of whether their

land still qualifies to be clas- sified as income-producing agricultural land.

As of December, the county assessor’s office had 99 responses from farm- land owners in the elk-oc- cupied valleys. More than three-quarters reported dam-

age, according to the asses- sor’s office. Some specified losses, while others esti- mated losses more roughly. If other farmers report simi- lar damages, losses will total \$1.5 million and be slightly higher than Thomas pro- jected midway through the survey.

Only property owners with land designated for agriculture received the sur- vey. Losses to gardens and other nonfarm property are not included. “If others had received the survey, the loses would have been much higher,” Thomas said.

Farmers are eligible to apply for up to \$10,000 in compensation for damage to commercial crops. Appli- cants must hire an adjuster, submit business and tax records, and open their land to hunters. No one has filed a claim since 2016, the Depart- ment of Fish and Wildlife reported last year.

Skagit County Farm Bureau President Bill Schmidt said filing for com- pensation was a “pain” and that some landowners,

including himself, object to opening their land to hunters they don’t know.

“I don’t see why we have to do it to get something off our land that’s creating dam- age,” he said.

The department should allow landowners to shoot more elk and to increase hunting, with landowner per- mission, Schmidt said.

Efforts to obtain comment Wednesday from the Depart- ment of Fish and Wildlife were unsuccessful.

The department issues “kill permits” allowing land- owners to shoot an elk to curb damage. Among the hundreds of elk in the valleys, 16 were shot by landowners with the permits in 2018, according to a state report.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife has tried haz- ing elk. With a dairy farmer’s permission, the department recently set up a motion-ac- tivated propane cannon to chase elk from a hay field. After a week, a nearby prop- erty owner complained because the cannon went off several times at night.

Brown backs tighter limits on drunken driving in Oregon

By **JEFF MAPES**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday endorsed legis- lation to lower the state’s drunken-driving limit, say- ing that she thinks soci- ety is moving toward dis- couraging driving after any amount of drinking.

The governor said in a telephone press con- ference with reporters that she would help state Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, in passing leg-

islation that would lower the current 0.08 percent blood-alcohol limit to 0.05 percent.

Utah this week became the first state in the nation to impose that lower limit.

“I think it makes sense for Oregon to take a lead- ership role on this issue,” said Brown, adding, “we have really seen a culture change” in society becom- ing increasingly intolerant of drunken driving.

“My experience is somewhat limited in this arena,” Brown said, “but

the dinner party I was at New Year’s Eve, every- body who was driving was a designated driver and not drinking.”

People absorb alcohol differently, but the lower limit would generally cut by one drink the amount a person could consume compared to existing law.

Under the new limit, an average 160-pound man could have no more than two drinks in an hour while a 120-pound woman could have no more than one drink in that period.

Inslee offers pardons for pot convictions

An estimated 3,500 people eligible

By **JIM BRUNNER**
Seattle Times

Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee will offer pardons to thousands of people with misdemeanor marijuana convictions, in an effort to help them move on from minor criminal records that can hinder housing and job prospects.

Under the plan, Inslee will pardon anyone who has an otherwise clean criminal record but with a sole con- viction as an adult for mis- demeanor possession of marijuana in Washington state.



AP Photo/Ted S. Warren

Washington state Gov. Jay Inslee will offer pardons to thousands of people with misdemeanor marijuana convictions.

Such a conviction must have occurred under state law, not a local ordinance, between Jan. 1, 1998, and Dec. 5, 2012, the effective date of Washington’s vot-

er-approved Initiative 502, which legalized marijuana possession for users age 21 and older. The governor’s office estimates 3,500 peo- ple will be eligible for the pardons under its criteria.

Inslee announced his plan, called the Marijuana Justice Initiative, this morn- ing in SeaTac at the Wash- ington State Cannabis Sum- mit, an annual conference sponsored by the legal mari- juana industry.

“We shouldn’t be pun- ishing people for some- thing that is no longer ille- gal behavior in the state of Washington,” Inslee said at the event. He said he believes there is broad pub- lic support for the expedited pardon process.

Oregon trapping ban considered for imperiled Humboldt marten

By **DAVID STEVES**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The Humboldt marten is in line to get new protections in Oregon.

State fish and wildlife officials signed a court set- tlement Wednesday that calls for new rule-making to ban trapping of this imperiled, mink-like mammal.

The Humboldt marten’s numbers have plummeted and it was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in the 1990s.

Pesticides, trapping, log- ging and the effects of cli- mate change have all been blamed. Four isolated popu- lations remain in coastal for- ests of southern Oregon and Northern California.

The Oregon trapping ban would be in place by Sep- tember. It follows a similar ban adopted by California last year. In August, the Ore- gon Fish and Wildlife Com- mission had ordered rules to curtail trapping Humboldt martens. But Cascadia Wild and the Center for Biological Diversity sued Oregon last month because the rules had not yet been adopted.



The Humboldt marten.

“It’s a shame that it takes a court order for Oregon’s fish and wildlife agency to take any action that bene- fits imperiled wildlife, even actions supported by the Fish and Wildlife Commission,” said Nick Cady, legal direc-

tor at Cascadia Wildlands.

Reached late in the day Thursday, Michelle Den- nehy, a spokeswoman for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, said she was not able to comment on the settlement, pending consul- tation with the department’s lawyers at the state Depart- ment of Justice.

Conservation groups also have taken legal action at the federal level to increase pro- tections for the Humboldt marten. They sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2015 for protections under the Endangered Species Act. The service initially denied the listing, but a judge last year ordered it to reconsider that decision.

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