

USDA undercuts Washington state's hemp testing policy

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed hemp rules would toss aside a testing policy that advocates hoped would finally make Washington a top hemp-producing state.

The USDA says the testing protocol it recently outlined would best measure the level of the intoxicating chemical THC in harvested hemp plants. The procedures, however, differ from ones Washington planned to implement next year to keep hemp from testing "hot."

Exceeding the USDA's limit of 0.3% THC would cause a hemp crop to be considered marijuana, which remains illegal under federal law and would then have to be destroyed under the new USDA regulations.

The Washington Department of Agriculture will adapt to whatever the USDA settles on, said Jessica Allenton, assistant director for the Commodity Inspection Division. "We're working on a plan that conforms with the USDA's requirements," she said.

Testing procedures are among the details that must be worked out as hemp moves into mainstream agriculture. When and how hemp is tested will influence whether the plants exceed the THC threshold and must be destroyed.

Washington lawmakers this year approved testing procedures favorable to low THC results. The USDA protocol would lead to more plants failing, said Bonny Jo Peterson, executive director of the Industrial Hemp Association of Washington.

"That'll put farmers in jeopardy. I think it will cause a lot of farmers to not grow," she said.

Key differences include what part of the plant would be tested. Washington planned to measure the THC as a percentage of the whole plant. USDA proposes to test just the flowering part.

The USDA also has proposed laboratory procedures that can result in higher THC levels. Different methods and laboratories can come up with dif-

ferent results. One hemp sample that tested hot in Spokane was re-tested by the state agriculture department in Yakima and passed, Allenton said.

Another key difference would be when plants are tested. The USDA proposes testing plants within 15 days of harvest. Washington planned to test plants sometime after they're harvested.

The USDA says it wants plants to be tested as close to harvest as possible. The longer the plants grow, the higher the THC level. A 15-day window will allow for delays caused by weather and equipment breakdowns, according to the USDA.

That could cause a backlog as many farmers seek to harvest at roughly the same time. Operating under interim rules, three Washington inspectors this year collected samples within 30 days of harvest and submitted them to a private laboratory in Spokane.

With less time for testing, the state may need more hemp inspectors and may need to contract with more laboratories, Allenton said.

The USDA will take public comments on the hemp rules until Dec. 30. Snohomish, Washington, farmer Julian Sibley was among the early commentators.

Sibley said in an interview that his farm hopes to plant hemp for the first time next year. He said the USDA's testing proposal was too strict, especially in a state with legal marijuana.

"If people want THC, they're not going to buy hemp," he said.

This year was Washington's first sizable hemp crop. More than 100 farmers registered to grow about 6,000 acres of hemp. The state will not require farmers to report how much they actually grew.

Washington lags far behind Oregon in hemp production. Peterson said she had expected Washington to close the gap next year because Oregon has opted for stricter testing procedures.

"Next year would have been at least a 10-fold increase," she said.



David Zalubowski/AP Photo

Male greater sage grouse perform mating rituals.

Sage grouse court order trims energy lease auction in Nevada

By **SCOTT SONNER**
Associated Press

RENO, Nev. — Federal land managers have withdrawn more than 500 square miles of public land from a swath of eastern Nevada where oil and gas drilling leases go to auction this week after a judge blocked the Trump administration's attempt to ease protection of sage grouse habitat.

The acreage pulled from Tuesday's scheduled sale — more than half of what the Bureau of Land Management originally planned for auction — roughly corresponds to priority habitat designated in a 2015 federal sage-grouse plan completed under President Barack Obama for Nevada and northeastern California.

The move won the agency rare praise from conservationists who secured the federal court order in Idaho last month.

"Taking sensitive sage-grouse habitats off the auction block is the right thing for the BLM to do, because public lands that aren't leased for fossil fuel extraction don't suffer from future industrial impacts," said Erik Molvar, a wildlife biologist and executive director of the Western Watersheds Project.

The Trump land-use plans finalized in March had removed the most protective sage grouse habitat designa-

tions across millions of acres. Administration officials also dropped requirements to prioritize leasing for oil and gas outside sage grouse habitat and allowed more waivers for drilling.

But last month, U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill in Boise, Idaho, granted a temporary injunction sought by the Western Watersheds and others to block those plans after concluding such activities left unchecked were likely to harm the struggling bird species in seven Western states. His Oct. 16 order required the administration to revert to the more stringent rules adopted under Obama.

The Bureau of Land Management posted formal notice Sept. 13 for the Tuesday auction of leases in Nevada covering 263 parcels across about 850 square miles.

Kemba Anderson, chief of the agency's branch of mineral resources, formally removed more than half of the proposed lease area from the auction "for further analysis" on Oct. 28 in order to comply with the judge's order.

Leases for the remaining 380 square miles still are scheduled to be auctioned Tuesday. Developers must possess leases before seeking permits for energy exploration on federal land.

The conservation groups said in a statement last week that despite minimal industry interest in drilling, the Trump administration has fueled a speculative frenzy by leasing hundreds of thousands of acres of sensitive public land in Nevada critical to grouse.

Many areas taken off the auction block, at least for now, are within the traditional homeland of the Sho-

shone and Paiute tribes, including the head of the Ruby Valley and the neighboring Maverick Mountains, the Egan Range and neighboring Steptoe Valley, in the headwaters of Spring Valley and in Jakes Valley.

"The BLM's partial reprieve for this beautiful, imperiled bird is a good first step," said Patrick Donnelly, the Center for Biological Diversity's Nevada state director. "But this leasing frenzy needs to stop. Leasing Nevada's public lands out for oil and gas threatens the survival of greater sage-grouse, as well as our scarce groundwater and our chance at a livable climate."

The Trump rules affected public land in Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California and Oregon. Sage grouse territory in Montana, Washington and the Dakotas was not affected.

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COLUMBIAFORUM

Tuesday, November 19, 2019

Tom Hallman, Jr. award winning writer, The Oregonian

Tom Hallman Jr., a senior reporter at The Oregonian, is considered one of the nation's premier narrative writers. During his career, he has won every major feature-writing award, including a Pulitzer Prize. The author of four books, he also contributes to Readers Digest and the Saturday Evening Post magazines.

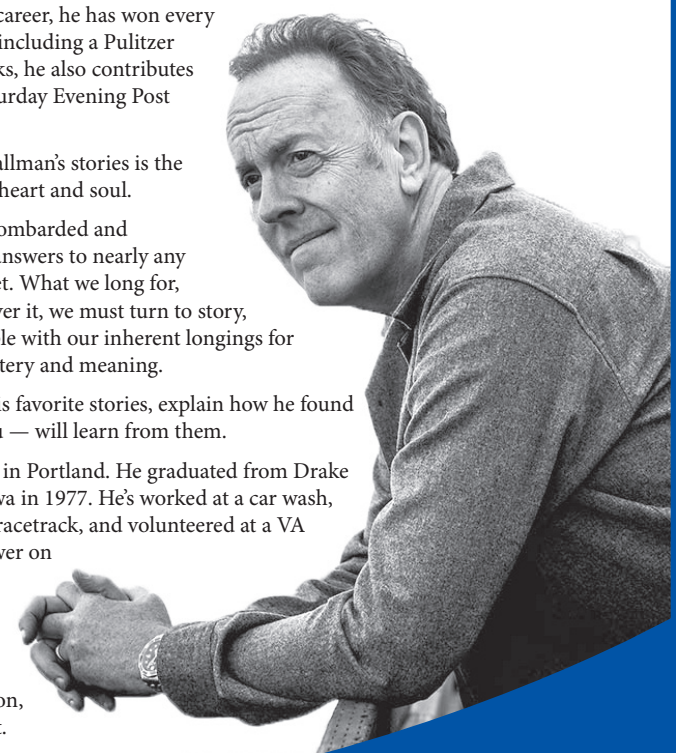
A common thread in all of Hallman's stories is the exploration of the character's heart and soul.

He believes that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts, the answers to nearly any question found on the internet. What we long for, though, is meaning. To discover it, we must turn to story, which allows readers to grapple with our inherent longings for community, authenticity, mystery and meaning.

Hallman will share some of his favorite stories, explain how he found them, and what he — and you — will learn from them.

Hallman was born and raised in Portland. He graduated from Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa in 1977. He's worked at a car wash, a grocery store, a greyhound racetrack, and volunteered at a VA hospital. He was once an answer on "Jeopardy," the television quiz show.

His book, "Dispatches from 1320" — a collection of his work — is available on Amazon, and it will for sale at the event.



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