

Jesse Bounds runs a straw-compressing facility in Junction City that state regulators claim was rebuilt on a wetland after a fire.

Bills propose to dispel wetland uncertainties

Lawmakers consider exemptions to state fill-removal laws

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon landowners don't have a simple, reliable method to find out whether their property is considered a wetland.

That's potentially a big problem if a structure is built on a parcel that state authorities later determine is a wetland, thus making the landowner liable for costly mitigation measures.

Jesse Bounds, a hay exporter near Junction City, Ore., learned that lesson the hard way.

Upon trying to rebuild two barns that had burned down last summer, Bounds was told by Oregon's Department of State Lands the construction was unlawful because he hadn't obtained a fill-removal permit. The permit is required when disturbing wetlands.

Bounds was shocked by the notification, since his 12-acre parcel wasn't identified as a wetland under the State Wetland Inventory and he'd obtained all necessary building permits without a

Oregon lawmakers are now contemplating two bills that would resolve the problem.

One is aimed specifically at Bounds' situation, while the other seeks to dispel the broader confusion over which properties fall under OSL's wetland jurisdiction.

House Bill 2785 takes the narrow approach, by exempting the replacement of a farm building "destroyed by fire or other act of God" from state fill-removal laws.

House Bill 2786 is more expansive, creating an exemption for any property that's not designated as a wetland under the State Wetland Inventory.

Much of the discussion during a Feb. 21 hearing before the House Agriculture Committee focused on the latter bill.

Proponents argue that landowners may believe their property isn't subject to fill-removal laws based on the State Wetland Inventory — without realizing that DSL can nonetheless arrive at a different conclusion.

"They have no idea the map is not right," said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Landowners such as Bounds, who think they've followed all the applicable laws, may never hear from DSL unless a neighbor makes a complaint, said Dave Hunnicutt, executive director of the Oregonians in Action property rights "Unfortunately,

the way that DSL exercises its jurisdiction," Hunnicutt

While a housing developer may be able to afford wetland mitigation credits, that option is often too costly for farmers, he said.

Such credits, which effectively pay for the creation of wetlands elsewhere, cost about \$77,000 to \$81,000 per acre, according to DSL.

"Someone in Bounds' position, it puts him out of business," said Hunnicutt.

Opponents 2786 claim the bill would jeopardize wetlands across Oregon because many aren't included in the State Wetland Inventory.

The State Wetland Inventory only includes a "small subset" of wetlands that are under both state and federal jurisdiction, said Tom Wolf, executive director of the Oregon Council of Trout Unlimited, a group that advocates for fish habitat.

"It's too broad a bill,"

The League of Women Voters of Oregon believes the wetland designation process should be clearer but worries HB 2786 sets a definition that's too limited, said Peggy Lynch, the group's natural resouces coordinator.

"We need to have something more than the State Wetland Inventory to consider," she said.

Several members of Agriculture the House Committee said they sympathized with Bounds' predicament and the need to clarify wetland designations, including Rep. Brian Clem, D-Salem, the committee's chair.

Clem said he favored a simpler alternative to the current system of identifying wetlands, under which parcels are evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

"That to me sounds horribly tiresome painful," he said.

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HAST () REGONIAN

Idaho irrigators back bills fighting Oregon fish plan

Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho irrigators are backing four bills in the state Legislature challenging the state of Oregon's attempt to reintroduce endangered fish into the Snake River watershed upstream of the

Hells Canyon Complex of dams. For decades, the Brownlee, Oxbow and Hells Canyon dams — which provide about 30 percent of Idaho Power Co.'s total energy — have blocked the migration of anadromous salmon and steelhead trout, which once spawned in the upstream channel and tributaries.

The original federal license to operate the complex expired in 2005. As part of the ongoing relicensing process, Oregon issued a draft Clean Water Act certification re-establishing the historic migration, in conflict with Idaho's draft certification

In late December, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission dismissed Idaho Power's petition requesting that it step in and settle the dispute between

Four bills, drafted by the Idaho Water Users Association, were introduced Feb. 14 in the House Resources and

Conservation Committee concerning Oregon's plan. House Joint Memorial 002 would formally express the Legislature's opposition to re-introduction due to the "drastic impacts on irrigated agriculture, industry, water supply and electric generation." The joint memorial concludes Oregon's plan would impair Idaho's sovereignty over its water resources, thereby violating the State Water Plan.

"(HJM 002) will support the longstanding position of the Legislature, as well as the governor, that there will be no endangered fish above Hells Canyon. Not only no, but heck no," said Rep. Marc Gibbs, R-Grace, a farmer who heads the House committee. "It's an issue that Oregon wants and Idaho pays

On the same day, the committee also printed three bills clarifying Idaho code on forced reintroduction of an endangered species by another state. HB 169 would broaden a state law requiring the Idaho Legislature's blessing before the federal government or another state can forcibly introduce a species.

HB 170 clarifies that Idaho has primacy over its state waters and prohibits any species introduction that could threaten that primacy, without

state consent.

HB 171 grants the Hells Canyon Complex a special exemption to an Idaho law requiring infrastructure for fish passage past dams and other water obstructions.

Marilyn Fonseca, hydropower program coordinator with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, said her state has extended a public comment period on the draft Clean Water Act certification until Feb. 28. Oregon would like to introduce salmon and steelhead into Pine Creek — a tributary that originates in Oregon and connects with the main-stem Snake upstream of the dams — and expand to other tributaries based on the level of success. The plan would require Idaho Power to trap and transport trout to assist them on their migration back to the Pacific Ocean.

Fonseca explained her state considers fish passage to be integral in meeting its own EPA-approved water-quality standards.

"We're certainly aware that (Idaho) is not happy with the inclusion of fish passage, but we are continuing with that process," Fonseca said.

Thursday Morning **February 23, 2017** 6 AM 6:30 10:30 | 11 AM | 11:30

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♥ ★★★ The Blues Brothers John Belushi.

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After Spring

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