

Environmental groups oppose \$1M wolf compensation bill

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Environmental groups oppose providing Oregon ranchers with an additional \$1 million in compensation for wolf problems, arguing the bill sends a bad message about the predators.

Supporters of House Bill 4127 counter that as wolves spread across the state, it's necessary to devote more money to pay ranchers for lost livestock and for preventive measures.

"We need to ensure this fund doesn't go dry," said Rep. Bobby Levy, R-Echo, referring to the Wolf Management Compensation and Proactive Trust Fund created in 2011.

"We have over twice as many confirmed depredations as we saw in 2020," Levy said, noting wolves killed 41 cows, 23 sheep, 9 goats and a guard dog last year.

Based on previous levels of compensation, that means ranchers would need more than \$750,000 in compensation for last year's confirmed losses, she said.



Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife/Contributed Photo, File

A remote camera on private property in northern Umatilla County in February 2019 captures the breeding male of the Walla Walla Pack. Environmental nonprofits oppose a bill to provide ranchers with an additional \$1 million in compensation for wolf problems.

For the biennium, Oregon has \$400,000 per year in federal and state money authorized for wolf compensation, said Jonathan Sandau, special assistant to the director at the Oregon Department of Agriculture.

On average over the past three years, the wolf compensation fund has annually received \$425,000 in requests and paid out \$185,000, Sandau said.

At least 30% of the funds must be dedicated to prevention, but usually that proportion is much higher, hovering at about 70% per year, he said.

Coalitions of environmental nonprofit groups have come out against HB 4127, saying it will provide funds for missing livestock not necessarily killed by wolves.

The Oregon Conservation Network, a coalition of

30 organizations, opposes "throwing more money at missing livestock," partly because it will conflate wayward animals with wolf depredations, said Julie McGraw, the network's representative at a recent House Agriculture, Land Use and Water Committee hearing.

"The more it appears that wolves are killing livestock, the worse it is going to

be in terms of the quality of the relationship with people trying to raise livestock," she said.

The number of livestock that have allegedly gone missing due to wolves far surpasses the number of confirmed depredations, said Julie Moser, wildlife program coordinator for the Oregon Wild nonprofit.

Meanwhile, livestock going missing for any number of reasons, so those claims for compensation aren't verifiable, Moser said.

"Blaming wolves for any unaccounted livestock not only superficially inflates wolf-livestock conflict but it perpetuates a problematic stigma about wolves," she said.

Critics of the bill also argued the wolf compensation fund is prone to misuse and should be reformed, while adding more money to it will create a "moral hazard" by encouraging ranchers not to look for missing animals.

"Making the fund easier to abuse is not a solution," said Bethany Cotton, conservation director for the Cascadia Wildlands nonprofit.

The bill's supporters pointed out that despite the critics' focus on missing livestock, the added funding would go to the wolf compensation program as a whole.

"There's a lot of con-

jecture on this, but there are really no facts," said Rep. David Brock-Smith, R-Port Orford.

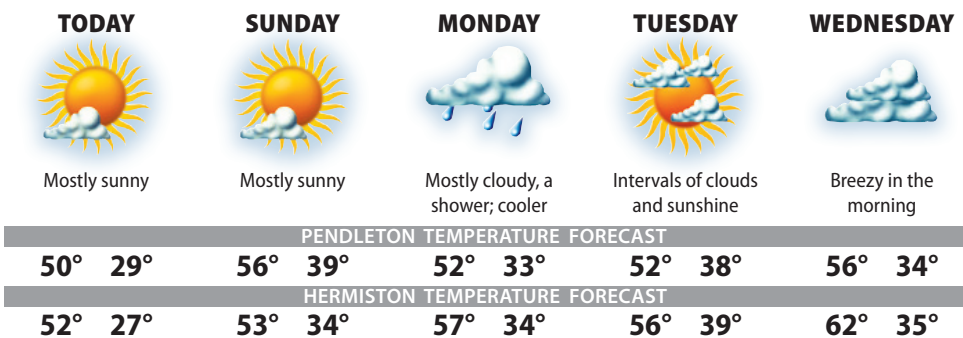
With wolf depredations reaching a record level in 2021, it's worth adequately funding the wolf compensation program to encourage acceptance of state policies for the species, said Rep. Mark Owens, R-Crane.

"It's a trend that's starting to possibly erode the social tolerance we started to develop with the wolf management plan," Owens said of rising depredations. "Nothing in this bill changes the wolf management plan. Nothing in this bill harms wolves. In fact, this bill is there to support that social tolerance of wolf interactions with our public."

Wolves cause problems for the livestock industry that go beyond depredations, such as lower conception rates and weight loss, said Todd Nash, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and a Walla Walla County commissioner.

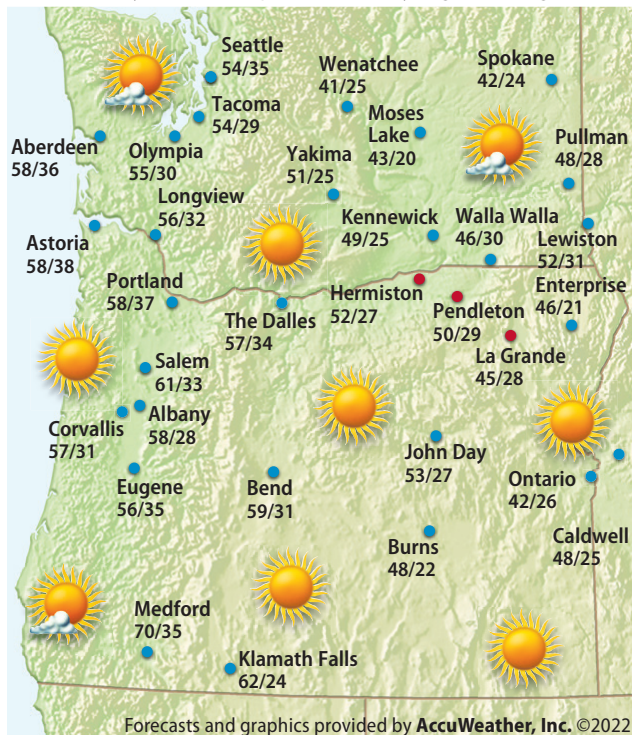
"If we paid for the missing livestock and the confirmed depredations, it wouldn't come close to capturing the cost incurred by ranchers," Nash said. "If there's going to be fraud in the system, the fraud is that we have a compensation system and there are not funds available."

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



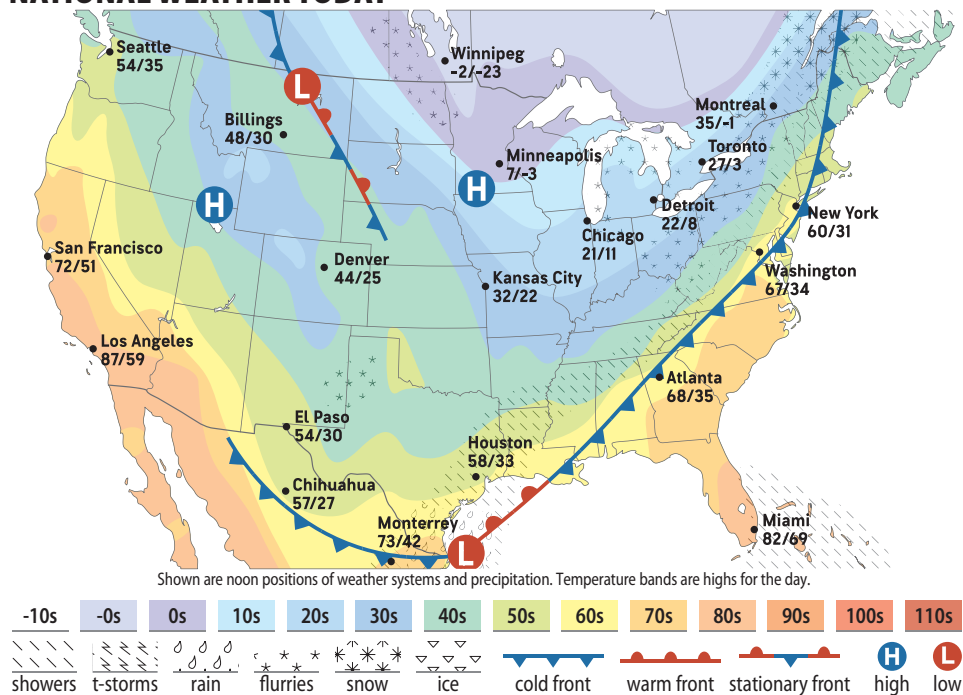
ALMANAC

| PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest. | | |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| TEMP. | HIGH | LOW |
| Yesterday | 52° | 30° |
| Normals | 46° | 30° |
| Records | 66° (1924) | -8° (1929) |
| PRECIPITATION | | |
| 24 hours ending 3 p.m. | 0.00" | |
| Month to date | 0.04" | |
| Normal month to date | 0.47" | |
| Year to date | 1.57" | |
| Last year to date | 1.32" | |
| Normal year to date | 2.01" | |
| HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest. | | |
| TEMP. | HIGH | LOW |
| Yesterday | 55° | 29° |
| Normals | 48° | 29° |
| Records | 68° (1977) | -16° (1929) |
| PRECIPITATION | | |
| 24 hours ending 3 p.m. | 0.00" | |
| Month to date | Trace | |
| Normal month to date | 0.37" | |
| Year to date | 0.93" | |
| Last year to date | 0.71" | |
| Normal year to date | 1.51" | |
| WINDS (in mph) | | |
| Today | Sun. | |
| Boardman | NE 4-8 | NE 3-6 |
| Pendleton | NNW 4-8 | N 4-8 |
| SUN AND MOON | | |
| Sunrise today | 7:02 a.m. | |
| Sunset tonight | 5:17 p.m. | |
| Moonrise today | 1:10 p.m. | |
| Moonset today | 4:57 a.m. | |
| Full | Last | New |
| Feb 16 | Feb 23 | Mar 2 |
| | | Mar 10 |

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 92° in Thermal, Calif. Low -11° in Cavalier, N.D.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Joseph-to-Elgin trail gets \$18,000

Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — The nonprofit working to establish a 63-mile trail-with-rail between Elgin and Joseph in Northeastern Oregon received an \$18,000 grant from Cycle Oregon.

The Joseph Branch Trail Consortium announced the award in a press release Tuesday, Feb. 8. The funds will help cover the cost of the construction of a covered gazebo as well as landscaping at the trail's soon-to-be-built western trailhead in downtown Elgin.

The grant follows two other grants to the nonprofit group that total more than \$272,000: an Oregon State Parks grant to fund construction of the first Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant trail section and the trailhead (that also will serve as a pocket park in Elgin) and a grant from the Oregon Department of Transportation that will fund development of a detailed plan for the next 15-mile segment between

Elgin and Lookingglass.

The trail has been in the planning stages for about 10 years and eventually will offer a nonmotorized alternative transportation route to Highway 82 in the form of a trail next to existing railroad tracks in the railroad right-of-way the Wallowa Union Railroad Authority owns. With one end in Elgin, the other will terminate 63 miles later in Joseph.

City officials at each end of the proposed trail are eager to see it accomplished, anticipating economic and health benefits. Elgin, with a population around 1,700 people, has no accessible trails from downtown, according to a press release announcing the grants. Joseph, with roughly 1,000 people, also will benefit from the trail, as will Wallowa, Lostine and Enterprise.

Brock Eckstein, who is city administrator of Elgin and interim city administrator for Joseph, said in November there is a "time cap" of December 2024 to get the Elgin trailhead/pocket park

and the first short section of trail out of town constructed, as well as the planning for the next first 13 miles refined.

"We're just taking it piece by piece until we get the whole thing done," he said.

Gregg Kleiner, the project coordinator for the consortium, said in the Feb. 8 release the new grant from Cycle Oregon is part of "impressive momentum" building up for this project.

"The trail will be open to bicycles, and the trailhead will feature a bike maintenance station and an e-bike charging station, so it's a perfect fit for Cycle Oregon, and we're very grateful for their enthusiastic support," he said.

The Cycle Oregon grant and previous small grants from the Schwemm Family Foundation and the Roundhouse Foundation also are supporting development of the trailhead/pocket park.

More information about the consortium and membership can be found online at www.josephbranchtrail.org/membership.

IN BRIEF

Man arrested in Bend gets 8-plus years for sex trafficking

PORTLAND — A Gresham man is going to federal prison for taking a woman from California to Oregon to sell her for sex.

The U.S. Department of Justice announced Monday, Feb. 7, that a federal judge sentenced Eddie Lewis West III, 37, to eight years, eight months in prison and a three years supervised release.

In 2019, Bend Police officer Jeffrey Perkins saw an ad showing the victim advertising a service called the "girlfriend experience" on a website Skip the Games, which police say is used solely for prostitution, according to court records. Perkins called the listed number and set up a "car date" with a woman for April 14, 2019, and agreed to pay \$220.

The meeting was meant to occur at 5 a.m. at Cascade West Grub and Alehouse on Southwest Century Drive. Police reported seeing a

Nissan Altima slowly drive by the parking lot off Century Drive twice before they stopped the car and arrested West and a woman appearing to match the picture in the ad.

West's attorney later sought to throw out the case, arguing the government stopped West's vehicle without reasonable suspicion he had committed a crime.

The case was dismissed, but West was arrested in September 2020 for allegedly assaulting the victim in Washington County. Afterward, she felt safe enough to come forward and speak with authorities about West's alleged crimes, according to police.

On Oct. 20, 2020, a federal grand jury in Portland returned a two-count indictment charging West with sex trafficking and transportation of a person across state lines with the intent of having the person engage in prostitution. West on Aug. 3, 2021, pleaded guilty to the latter charge.

— EO Media Group

CORRECTIONS: The East Oregonian works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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