

Ranchers on wolf ruling: 'We're hung out to dry'

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Capital Press

SALEM — A federal judge's decision to renew endangered species protections for some gray wolves in the Lower 48 states is drawing criticism from Oregon ranchers who say they feel defenseless to protect their livestock from chronic attacks.

Environmental groups sued the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and former Interior Secretary David Bernhardt after the Trump administration removed wolves from the endangered species list in 2020, arguing the delisting was premature.

U.S. District Judge Jeffrey White ruled in favor of the plaintiffs on Feb. 10.

"Restoring federal protections means that these vitally important animals will receive the necessary support to recover and thrive in the years ahead," said Jamie Rappaport Clark, president and CEO at Defenders of Wildlife, one of six groups that filed the lawsuit.

Oregon's minimum wolf population was 173 at the end of 2020. An updated estimate from the state Department of Fish and Wildlife is expected later this spring.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association, which represents ranchers statewide, released a statement blasting the ruling.

OCA President Todd Nash said while environmental groups such as Defenders of Wildlife and the Center for Biological Diversity have seats at the table for develop-



An Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife trail camera captured this undated image of wolves. Oregon ranchers now say they feel defenseless to protect their livestock from chronic attacks after a federal judge renewed endangered species protections for some gray wolves in the Lower 48 states.

ing Oregon's Wolf Conservation and Management Plan, "they are never satisfied with the brokered compromises."

Gray wolves were reintroduced in Central Idaho and Yellowstone National Park in the mid-1990s, and since then the species has expanded both in population and geographical area beyond expectations, Nash said.

"This decision to re-list beyond that experimental area builds mistrust in our legal system and

compromises the integrity of the Endangered Species Act," Nash said.

The ruling does not cover wolves in Eastern Oregon, where the majority of packs are. State wildlife officials will continue to manage wolves east of highways 395, 78 and 95.

Wolves in the western two-thirds of Oregon, however, will be returned to the federal ESA — including the Rogue pack, which was responsible for more

than half of all confirmed wolf attacks on livestock in 2020.

Veril Nelson, a cattle rancher in Oakland and co-chair of the OCA Wolf Committee, said producers are frustrated by the about-face in wolf management.

"The bottom line is, we're hung out to dry," Nelson said. "Our options are very few."

Upon delisting, wolves in Western Oregon were placed under Phase I of the state wolf plan, which allows for killing wolves

in defense of livestock in limited circumstances.

Wolves could be killed if caught in the act of chasing or biting livestock, or if a pack incurred four "qualifying" depredations in a six-month period. To qualify, ranchers must be using some kind of non-lethal deterrents — such as range riders — and remove all carcasses or bone piles that might attract wolves.

With federal protections back in place, those options are now off the table, Nelson said, adding that non-lethal tools are not 100% effective and costly to maintain.

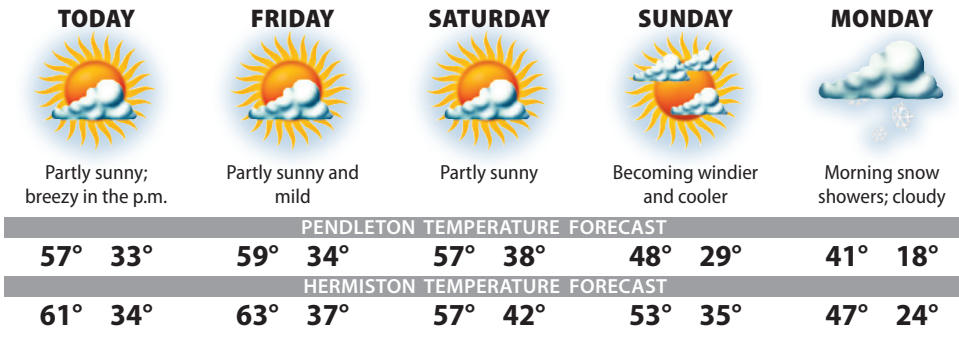
"How many range riders do you need to cover 40,000 acres? It's not doable," he said. "You can be out there and do the best you can, but all of those things cost money."

OCA is supporting House Bill 4127 in the Legislature that would provide an additional \$1 million for the state's wolf compensation fund to reimburse ranchers for dead and missing livestock, as well as non-lethal prevention. A public hearing for the bill was held Feb. 9.

Jonathan Sandau, a special assistant to the director at the Oregon Department of Agriculture, said the wolf compensation fund has annually received on average \$425,000 in requests from ranchers, while paying out just \$185,000.

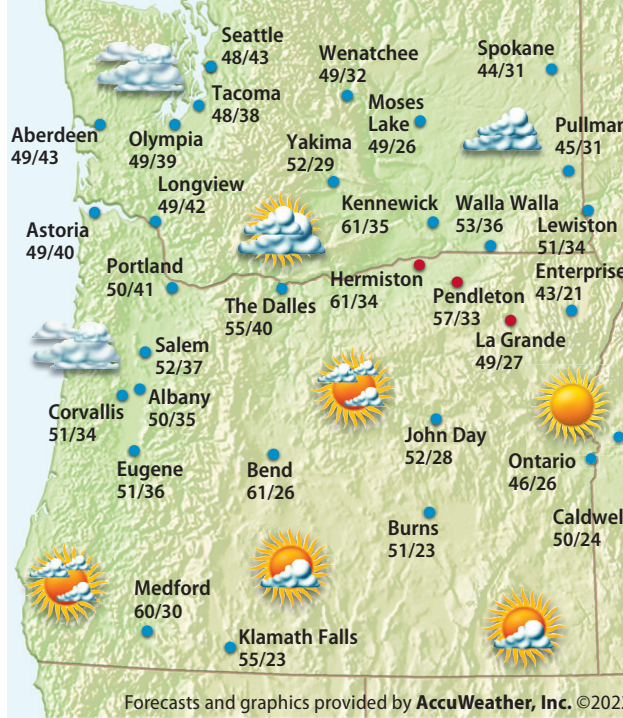
Critics argued the wolf compensation fund is prone to misuse, and increasing funding may encourage ranchers not to look for missing animals but instead default to blaming wolves.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



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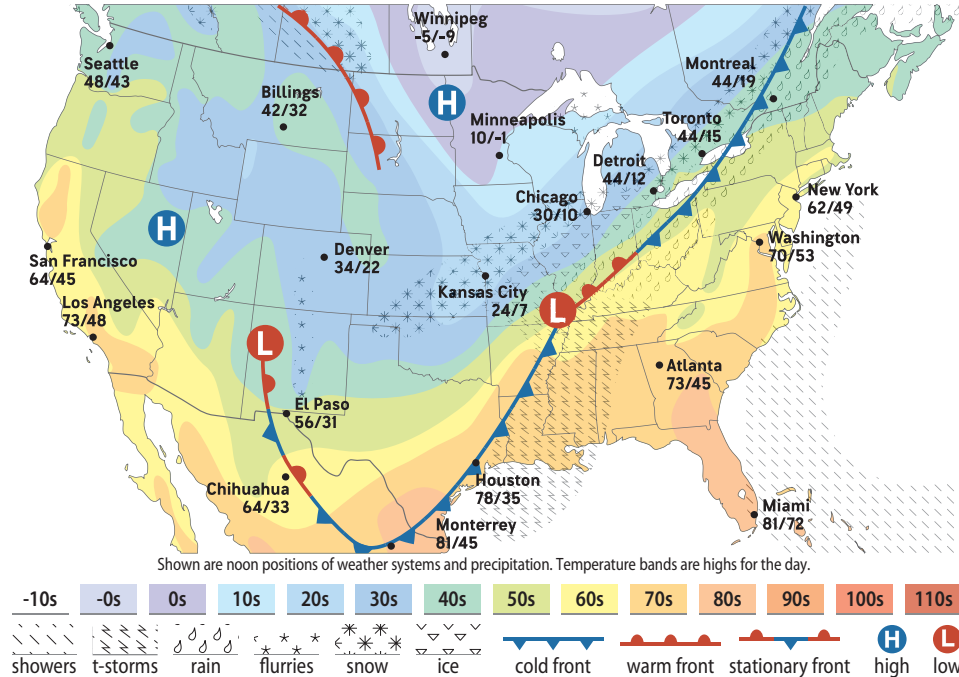
Table with weather statistics for Pendleton and Hermiston, including temperature, precipitation, and wind data.

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 91° in Zapata, Texas Low -24° in Estcourt Station, Maine

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Lawmakers revise proposal for \$600 payments to low-income workers

By **JAIMIE GOLDBERG**
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon Democrats are considering legislation that would provide a one-time payment of \$600 to low-income Oregon workers.

Workers who in 2020 received the earned income tax credit, a tax break for low- and moderate-income workers and families, would automatically receive the stimulus payments.

The proposal would send smaller checks to a larger number of workers than previous stimulus payment proposals floated by the Legislature. Lawmakers in 2021 had proposed sending as much as \$2,000 payments to workers who stayed on the job during the pandemic, and they revived that idea again at the start of the current legislative session.

Rep. Andrea Valderrama, D-Portland, who is co-sponsoring the new bill, said that about 260,000 workers would be eligible. Lawmakers also plan to set aside up to \$15 million to

provide similar payments for undocumented workers who weren't allowed to claim the earned income tax credit because of their immigration status.

A public hearing on the bill is scheduled for Thursday, Feb. 17. The total cost of House Bill 4157 is expected to be about \$180 million.

"We're focusing on our lowest-income communities who are really disproportionately impacted by a skyrocketing cost of living right now," Valderrama said.

The new bill will replace a separate proposal introduced earlier this session that would have directed payments of up to \$1,000 to workers in medium- to very high-risk occupations.

Valderrama said lawmakers ditched the original bill because requiring workers to apply for the money could lead to payments being delayed until 2023 or 2024.

In contrast, the new proposal would direct the Department of Revenue to automatically issue payments to eligible workers. Checks would be deliv-

ered by the end of July at the latest.

"The previous iteration wouldn't allow for checks to be received until 2023 or 2024 and it really wasn't acceptable," Valderrama said. "This new vehicle provides for a cleaner, direct approach to getting the resources out in a more timely manner."

The proposal is a pared-down version of a bill that Democratic lawmakers floated in the spring that would have set aside federal stimulus money to pay essential workers up to \$2,000 in stimulus payments and provided a \$1,200 payment to unemployed Oregonians who returned to work in front-line jobs by last fall.

At \$600, Valderrama said the payments in the current proposal would not be subject to state and federal income taxes.

"I'm very confident that a version of this, if not this iteration, will pass this session," Valderrama said. "We continue to have strong support in both chambers."

IN BRIEF

Police seek alleged accomplice in slaying of Bend man

BEND — Police are looking for a woman they believe was an accomplice in an execution-style killing in Gresham in September.

An arrest warrant for Cassandra Kitchens, 26, of Gresham, alleges that she helped lure Andrew Sherrell, 35, from his home in Bend before he was shot on Sept. 24.

Sherrell was found laying face down, with his hands bound, suffering from a single gunshot to the head, police said.

Investigators with the East County Major Crimes Team believe that Sherrell was involved in drug dealing and the split time between Central Oregon and the Portland metro area.

"The investigation found he was the target of a kidnapping and execution-style murder because of a drug debt, with multiple suspects conspiring to commit the felonious acts," Gresham police said in a statement.

Kitchens was indicted by a Multnomah County grand jury in December and faces charges of second-degree murder, first-degree kidnapping and third-degree assault, along with first-degree criminal conspiracy to commit kidnapping, third-degree criminal conspiracy to commit assault and criminal conspiracy to commit the unlawful delivery of oxycodone.

Kitchens is the only alleged suspect in the murder case who is not in custody, police said.

— *The Oregonian*

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