

Committee OKs Oregon wolf delisting

Environmental groups fear bill will hamstring recent lawsuit

By Mateusz Perkowski
Capital Press

SALEM — The removal of wolves from Oregon's list of endangered species has been approved by a key legislative committee, potentially jeopardizing a lawsuit that challenges the delisting.

Last year, Oregon wildlife regulators found that wolves had sufficiently recovered to delist them under the state's version of the Endangered Species Act.

Because wolves remain protected by the federal Endangered Species Act across much of Western Oregon, the state delisting only has effect in the eastern portion of the state.

Several environmental groups, which worry that delisting will eventually lead to wolf hunting, filed a legal



OR-3, a three-year-old male wolf from the Imnaha pack, is shown in this image captured from video taken by an ODFW employee on May 10, 2011, in Wallowa County, Ore. The Oregon House will vote on a bill ratifying the removal of wolves from the state's endangered species list.

Courtesy of ODFW

complaint accusing the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission of ignoring the best available science.

That lawsuit prompted two lawmakers from Eastern Oregon to propose House Bill 4040, which would ratify the commission's delisting deci-

sion as having properly followed the state's endangered species law.

On Feb. 9, that bill passed the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources 8-1 and is now heading for a vote on the House floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

Chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, noted that H.B. 4040 was amended from its original version to eliminate language that would require wolf populations to decline substantially before the species could be re-listed as endangered.

Rep. Sal Esquivel, R-Med-

ford, said that worries the delisting will lead to "automatic slaughter" of wolves are unfounded.

"This does not mean we're going to hunt wolves to extinction again," he said.

Rep. Chris Gorsek, D-Troutdale, was the committee's only member to vote against the bill.

While he doesn't have a problem with the delisting, Gorsek said he was concerned about the precedent set by the legislature inserting itself into the process.

Environmental groups that are fighting the delisting in court — Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands and the Center for Biological Diversity — fear that a ratification by the legislature will hamstring their lawsuit.

Sean Stevens, executive director of Oregon Wild, recently argued that if the commission's decision was scientifically sound, there is no reason to pass H.B. 4040.

While the plaintiffs groups seek judicial review to determine if the commission acted correctly, they have not asked

for an injunction and so the delisting will remain effective while the litigation is pending, he said.

Laurel Hines, a member of Oregon Wild, said that wolf management in Oregon has emphasized the protection of the livestock industry, so conservationists should be allowed to proceed with the lawsuit to protect their interests.

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association disagrees with the claim that H.B. 4040 will preclude environmental groups from obtaining judicial review, said Rocky Dallum, the group's political advocate.

H.B. 4040 would not prevent the plaintiff from filing a lawsuit, and since their complaint has already been filed, its merits will still be decided in state court, Dallum said.

A judge may find the commission acted properly regardless of the legislature's action, or may decide that the question about the delisting's legality was answered by H.B. 4040, if it passes, he said.

"It's up to a judge to decide whether the case is moot," Dallum said.

Get those cycling dollars into local coffers



Kathleen Ellyn



Last year several dozen people from Union, Baker and Wallowa counties attended a series of workshops investigating how to further develop bicycle tourism in Northeast Oregon. Among those folks were Joseph Mayor Dennis Sands, Penny Arentsen of Winding Waters River Expeditions, Terry Edvalsen of Joseph Branch Trail Consortium, Joella Arment of the Willows Farm and Farm House, Heather Tyreman, Jerry Hustafa, representatives from the Forest Service, representatives from the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, Wallowa Chamber of Commerce Director Vicki Searles and Executive Director of Eastern Oregon Visitors Association Alice Trindle.

Bicycle enthusiasts already love our area, have a number of biking options here and have money to spend. In fact, studies have been done that show bicyclists spend more money per person than the average tourist.

What Wallowa County needs to know is how to get more and more of these folks out here.

Work groups were developed during that last round of workshops to look at what each county needed to best develop bike tourism.

One of the key needs identified by the counties was both online and printed maps for gravel roads, paved roads and trails.

Another area of focus was how to advertise the counties and what they have to offer to lure bicyclists to the area.

A lot of work has already been done on the advertising front and the 7 Bikes 7 Wonders program last summer was part of that work. We came that close to having the Cycle Oregon come through again before wildfires forced a last-minute detour.

The Wallowa Lake Triathlon brought in cyclists from across the nation.

An advertising focus also has been created with the Ride Oregon Ride site (<http://rideoregonride.com>). From that page bikers can branch out and read about the Oregon Scenic Bikeways Program, the only one of its kind in the nation.

Let me pause a moment and repeat that: The Oregon Scenic Bikeways Program is the only one of its kind in the nation.

Wallowa County is represented on the Oregon Scenic Bikeways "gravel riding" pages with the 128-mile Joseph Canyon ride, the 95.8-mile Joseph Loop ride, the 43.7-mile Imnaha North Star ride and the 24.9-mile West Union Elementary Loop (Imnaha) ride. These rides are mostly paved with some gravel.

That's great. But let's not stop working with the Forest Service to develop a Wallowa County Scenic Bikeway that makes the Oregon Scenic Bikeways list.

Port Orford and Ashland just made the list in 2015.

We actually do have a scenic bikeway — it's just not on that great advertising page, yet. Our own contribution to riding heaven is in hell — Hells Canyon Scenic Byway, that is. Find out more about that 208-mile loop at hellscanyonbyway.com.

Side note: on that site you'll also read that Grind TV gave winter in the Wallows a good report.

But back on the Ride Oregon Ride site, you can read about a brand new event this year — the "Oregon Triple Crown Series." It's a total of 300 miles and 25,000 feet of climbing made from parts of three routes from some of Oregon's best races: Oregon Gran Fondo (Cottage Grove), Willamette Gran Fondo (Bellfountain) and the Oregon Coast Gravel Epic (Waldport).

No reason we can't have a length of gravel right through the county included in some future series, is there?

The benefits of developing our online presence with the Travel Oregon and Ride Oregon Ride sites get pretty business specific, too. As part of this marketing of riding opportunities, a list of "bicycle friendly" businesses is being developed for publication.

It's all coming together. And you can learn how help make it happen.

A second series of workshops is scheduled and the original work groups who have been working on the triple development of agritourism, bicycle tourism and arts/culture/heritage tourism will be continuing the work to put Wallowa County on the tourism map in a big way.

Members of the public are being encouraged to sign up for those workshops by Feb. 26. Visit <http://tinyurl.com/jxofx5m> to sign up.

Please send your Biz Buzz news tips to Kathleen Ellyn at kellyn@wallowa.com.

Remaining occupiers release defiant videos mocking FBI

By Terrence Petty
Associated Press

PORTLAND — The last four occupiers of an Oregon wildlife refuge have posted a series of defiant videos in which one of them calls FBI agents losers, shows a defensive perimeter they have built and takes a joyride in a government vehicle.

The videos were posted Sunday on a YouTube channel called Defend Your Base, which the armed group has been using to give live updates. The holdouts are among 16 people charged with con-

spiracy to interfere with federal workers in the armed stand-off over federal land policy that has surpassed five weeks.

In one of the new videos, occupier David Fry says the FBI told him he faces additional charges because of defensive barricades the four have built.

"We just got done talking with the FBI," said the 27-year-old Blanchester, Ohio, resident. "They consider fortifying a crime."

Fry said he, Jeff Banta of Nevada, and husband and wife Sean and Sandy Anderson of Idaho have "every right" to

defend themselves from the "oncoming onslaught of people with fully automatic rifles (and) armored vehicles."

"I'm tired of you guys telling us what we can and can't do," he says.

Then Fry shows government vehicles they have been using without permission. He walks up to a white truck and says, "I think I'm going to take it on a little joyride."

"Now you've got another charge on me FBI. I'm driving your vehicle."

FBI spokeswoman Beth Anne Steele said the agency had no comment on the videos.

The four have refused to leave the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in eastern Oregon since the compound nearly emptied out after the Jan. 26 arrests of group leader Ammon Bundy and other main figures. The group seized the property on Jan. 2, demanding federal lands be turned over to locals.

The traffic stop on a remote road outside the refuge also led police to shoot and kill Robert "LaVoy" Finicum. The FBI says the Arizona rancher was reaching for a pistol in his pocket, but Finicum's family and Bundy's followers dispute

that and say his death was not justified.

Authorities surrounded the refuge after the arrests. The FBI has been negotiating, but the holdouts have said they won't go home without assurances they won't be arrested.

In another video posted Sunday, Sean and Sandy Anderson are sitting together and the husband says they feel like hostages because they can't leave without being arrested.

"What are they to do with us?" Sean Anderson says. "They either let us go, drop all charges because we're good people, or they come in

and kill us. How's that going to set with America?"

Meanwhile, Ammon Bundy's attorneys on Monday released an audio recording in which the jailed occupation leader called on elected officials in eight states to visit arrested occupiers from those states and show support for their rights to free speech, assembly and civil disobedience.

While federal authorities say the refuge occupation is illegal and Bundy's followers had threatened violence and intimidated federal employees, Bundy contends the takeover was a peaceful protest.

Vault Grand Opening Feb. 13

The Vault Health and Fitness will be hosting its grand opening Feb. 13.

The new gym is located in the old Sterling Bank building at 106 1st St. in Enterprise.

Owners Noelle and Franz Hovarth had hoped to open in November, but the details of operation took more time than expected to finish.

The new gym is the larg-

est in Wallowa County and features equipment for everything from cardio to heavy weights to cross-fit workouts.

Yoga and Zumba classes also will be offered.

The old bank vault itself is being transformed into a bouldering room for climbers. In addition to offering 24-hour fitness equipment, supplements, classes and personal

trainers, the Hovarths hope to attract outdoor enthusiasts and help develop events they enjoy.

Fliers on Dragon Boat racing on Wallowa Lake also will be available at the Grand Opening.

For more information, check the Vault's Facebook page or visit vaulthealthandfitness.com.

Public Meetings

Thursday, Feb. 11

• Wallowa County Compensation Committee: 3 p.m. at the Thornton Conference Room of the Wallowa County Courthouse.

Tuesday, Feb. 16

• Wallowa County Commissioners: 9 a.m. at Thornton Room at the courthouse. <http://tinyurl.com/jo8bcya>

• Wallowa City Council, 7 p.m. at council room in City Hall.



Wednesday, March 2

• Lostine City Council, 7:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Thursday, March 3

• Joseph City Council: 7 p.m.

at City Library, City Hall or Community Center. www.josephoregon.org

Monday, March 7

• Enterprise School Board: 7 p.m. in the Home-Ec room at the high school.

Monday, March 14

• Joseph School Board, 5:30 p.m. at the school library. www.joseph.k12.or.us
• Wallowa School Board, 7 p.m. at the high school library.

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