

# Oregon News

## Farm Bill would boost forest projects, legalize hemp farming

■ Senate passed major legislation on Tuesday; House will vote on it this month

**By Stephen Hamway**  
WesCom News Service

A massive federal farming and agriculture bill that's nearing final approval could provide additional funding for thinning efforts in Central Oregon's most famous forest, while providing a boost to the region's burgeoning hemp industry.

On Tuesday, the U.S. Senate voted 87-13 to approve a sweeping 800-page, \$867 billion farm bill that addresses issues ranging from food stamps to subsidies for farmers. The U.S. House of Representatives will vote on the omnibus bill later in December.

For Central Oregon, one of the most important provisions of the bill is a section that extends and doubles the funding for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.

Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., who led a bipartisan group of senators alongside Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, to introduce the provision, said the extension could allow the Central Oregon-based Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project to continue its forest restoration work beyond 2020.

"All that collaboration that's being built up ... can

keep going forward," Merkley said.

The federal landscape restoration program, first approved as part of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, helped establish cooperative forest management projects that aid in restoring sensitive and fire-prone forests.

The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project was selected in the first group of projects and includes a dozen individual efforts designed to improve and restore forest ecology across a 270,000 acres, according to Pete Caligiuri, a forest ecologist with The Nature Conservancy who provides scientific and technical support for the project.

Much of the project's most visible work revolves around forest thinning and controlled burns, which are designed to reduce fuels that carry massive wildfires in sensitive areas of the forest, including a 26,000-acre section west of Bend. Merkley said the federal portion of the Central Oregon project was slated to conclude in 2020. However, the additional federal funding doubles the program's budget to \$80 million and extends it through 2023. The Central

Oregon program could be a target for future funding.

Caligiuri said the federal funding goes toward implementation and monitoring efforts by the U.S. Forest Service rather than the collaborative project itself, but added that the federal agency is a key partner in the forest restoration effort.

"The work wouldn't happen without the partnership with the Forest Service," Caligiuri said.

Separately, Merkley and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., pushed to include a section of the Farm Bill that legalizes the production of hemp at the federal level. Industry advocates suggest the change will remove roadblocks like banking and interstate commerce for Deschutes County's hemp industry.

"I expect it to be a predominant crop in Central Oregon," said Matt Cyrus, president of the Deschutes County Farm Bureau.

The bill would remove hemp, the non-psychoactive version of marijuana, from the list of Schedule-I illegal drugs and allow growers to transport the crop across state lines. In states like Oregon, which established a framework for legal hemp

in 2016, this allows growers to expand into new, out-of-state markets.

Cyrus added that legalizing the crop at the federal level also brings it out of the shadows, giving growers more access to loans and other financial resources.

"A lot of banks are still nervous," Cyrus said. "All that goes away once this (bill) passes."

While the crop can be used in everything from clothing to cooking oil, the most active current market is for cannabidiol, a non-intoxicating compound the plant produces that advocates believe has certain curative properties.

Merkley's office, citing numbers from the Hemp Business Journal, noted that sales for the U.S. hemp industry in 2017 totaled \$820 million, and are expected to rise to \$1.9 billion by 2022. Cyrus added that Central Oregon's dry climate is a good fit for growing hemp, and added that the industry's move toward the mainstream could bring more growers to the region.

"In five to 10 years, you will see (cannabidiol) in a lot of food products just like you see Vitamin C," Cyrus predicted.

### STATE BRIEFING

**Congress approves bill making it easier to kill salmon-eating sea lions**

PORTLAND (AP) — Congress has agreed to make it easier to kill sea lions threatening fragile runs of salmon in the Northwest.

Oregon Public Broadcasting reports that a bill approved by the House Tuesday changes the Marine Mammal Protection Act to lift some of the restrictions on killing sea lions to protect salmon and steelhead in the Columbia River and its tributaries. The measure had previously passed the Senate.

Wildlife managers say sea lion populations have grown so large that they no longer need all the protections that were put in place for them in 1972.

The measure would usher in a more streamlined process for Washington, Idaho, Oregon and several Pacific Northwest tribes to capture and euthanize sea lions. Sea lions deemed to be a problem are captured and euthanized.

Supporters, including the governors of Oregon, Washington and Idaho, fishing groups and tribes, have said the bill will give wildlife managers greater flexibility in controlling California sea lions that dramatically increased from about 30,000 in the 1960s to about 300,000 following enactment of the 1972 Marine Mammal Protection Act.

Jaime Pinkham, executive director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, said in a statement that he was "grateful Congress worked in a bipartisan manner to give us the local flexibility to protect the tribal treaty resources we share with others in the Columbia and Willamette rivers."

Critics called the move by Congress ill-conceived and say it will not solve the problem of declining salmon, which also face other problems such as habitat loss and dams.

**Reservoirs in Eugene-Springfield area holding much less water than usual**

EUGENE (AP) — Officials say reservoirs upstream of the Eugene-Springfield area are unusually low.

The Eugene Register-Guard reports Lookout Point Lake on the Middle Fork of the Willamette River illustrates that fact. Little water remains in the reservoir, revealing even more stumps and creating larger mud flats.

A dry fall has left Lookout Point and other reservoirs so low that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are warning people who might be curious about venturing out onto the exposed lake bottom.

The safety concern is loose soil and sticky mud that could be a hazard.

Dustin Bengtson, deputy operations project manager for the Corps in Eugene, says the low levels are creating challenges, including keeping enough water flowing out of the reservoirs to maintain healthy rivers for fish.

## Legislature will consider statewide tax on plastic bags, banning plastic straws

SALEM (AP) — The Oregon Legislature will consider a statewide tax on plastic bags and a ban on plastic straws.

The Statesman Journal reports a Senate committee voted to introduce both legislative concepts, or preliminary bills, during an informational hearing Wednesday.

Both bills would help reduce plastic waste that ends up in landfills and the environment.

"From our perspective, nothing we use for 10 minutes should pollute the environment for hundreds of years," said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director of Environment Oregon.

One would impose a 5 cent per bag tax on single-use plastic bags used by retail stores selling food or alcohol, and require the establishments to provide paper checkout bags.

The tax wouldn't apply to meat and vegetable bags, or other non-checkout bags. And customers who use vouchers and state benefit cards would be exempt.

Money collected would go to the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, for a new Plastic Clean-Up and Recycling Fund.

Fourteen Oregon cities have banned single-use plastic bags.

The Legislature previously

considered banning plastic bags, in 2010, 2011 and 2012. All three bills died in committee.

This is the first time a tax, rather than a ban, has been proposed. Because the bill would raise revenue, it would require a three-fifths majority approval.

Another measure would prohibit restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws to customers unless they request a straw.

The proposal specifically exempts straws made from sugar cane, pasta and some other natural ingredients.

Violators could be fined up to \$25 per day, with a cap of \$300 per year.




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**Merrie Hensley**




At Baker Valley Physical Therapy, we find value in perseverance, an optimistic attitude, strength of character, and persistence. We celebrate these values in our patients and have created a "Spirit of Determination" award to grant to those individuals that we feel embody these ideals.

Merrie Hensley has demonstrated an abundance of all these qualities over the past three months of her rehabilitation, following an orthopedic surgery on her knee. Merrie always came into the clinic with a positive attitude toward her physical therapy (and physical therapists!) as well as a work ethic that many others in our gym observed and admired.

Thank you Merrie for bringing your best effort and positive energy to Baker Valley Physical Therapy!

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