

Large dairy heifer feedlot proposed at Burns

EO Media Group

The Oregon Department of Agriculture through Dec. 21 will take comment on Silver Sage Farms LLC's plan to build and operate a 2,000-head dairy heifer feedlot in Burns.

Chris Eggert of Tualatin is proposing Silver Sage Heifer Ranch at 28870 Weaver Springs Road, in Burns. The department said in a public-participation notice that it proposes to issue a Confined Animal Feeding Operation registration under a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System general permit that regulates manure, litter and process waste to protect water quality.

Eggert said it would be a new facility. He would not elaborate.

A nutrient management plan included in application materials says Silver Sage would dehydrate manure and use it as bedding in pens, or apply it to crops when heifers are on pasture.

Plans also call for a storm-runoff lagoon, feedlot-adjacent ditches not connected to surface water, and berms and grass strips around pens. The 6,092-acre site includes 4,027 acres of cropland.

A hearing is scheduled from 2 to 4 p.m. Dec. 16 at Harney Education Service District, 25 Fairview Heights, Burns.

Comments can be submitted by mail to William Matthews of the state Agriculture Department's CAFO program, 635 Capitol St. N.E., Salem, Ore., 97301, by email at wmatthews@oda.state.or.us or by fax at 503-986-4730.

Ranchers, wildlife managers grapple with NE Oregon elk

By KATY NESBITT
For the Capital Press

ENTERPRISE — Wallowa County's elk herds have long attracted hunters, bringing economic stimulus to the region each fall, but the treasured big game species also compete for forage with cattle, the county's main agricultural commodity.

In the past few decades, wildlife managers and ranchers have worked together to reduce the loss of valuable livestock feed to elk by hazing and extending hunting seasons on private land.

Pat Matthews, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Enterprise district biologist, said over the past 20 to 30 years the elk numbers have stayed the same in Wallowa County but the distribution has changed, putting more pressure on crops, haystacks and rangeland.

To complicate matters, a few of the large properties, like a ranch in the Wallowa River canyon, are managed to encourage wildlife use, thus providing a corridor from the high mountain meadows to winter livestock pastures.

"They own that ranch for elk and they spill over to the neighbors," Matthews said. "It's been an issue."

In the county's northern Chesnimnus wildlife unit, the redistribution of elk from the forest to private land on the Zumwalt Prairie is the most noticeable.

In 2008, when the elk numbers were in the thousands, rancher Tom Birkmaier said he turned to OSU extension agent John Williams to help him organize a coalition of landowners and Fish and Wildlife biologists to find ways to



ODFW File/Capital Press

Large numbers of elk are causing damage on private property in portions of Wallowa County in the northeastern corner of Oregon.

reduce the number of elk.

"When we do good range management we use a deferred or rest rotation system, but when 4,000 head of elk are grazing in the same place most of the year there is no rotation system," Williams said.

For a few years state Department of Fish and Wildlife managers pushed the elk back onto public forestland and into Hells Canyon using an Access and Habitat grant. Matthews said hazers on ATVs moved the herd toward the canyons five days a week for several winter months, but the elk kept returning to the prairie.

Chad Dotson was one of ODFW's hazers and now works for The Nature Conservancy managing Zumwalt Prairie Preserves hunting program. He said hazing became a "babysitting" job.

"Elk will respond to pressure, but that doesn't mean they are going to change their home range," Dotson said. "From an elk's perspective it is a generational thing — a calf born to

a mother who doesn't migrate won't migrate. All it knows is the prairie and that becomes its fish bowl."

Outside organized hazing on the Zumwalt Prairie, Matthews said the state issues hazing permits allowing landowners to scare elk away with shotguns or propane cannons or chase them with ATVs.

Ultimately, increased hunting provided the most relief. Williams said today hunters are harvesting about 450 cow elk a year out of 700 issued tags.

"I do believe hunting stopped the increase of the Zumwalt herd, but we need to wait and see if over time we are reducing them," Williams said.

And that, he said, could take another 10 if not 20 years.

Most of the hunting tags issued for the Zumwalt are through the state's scheduled control hunts. Depredation tags are issued to landowners by a state district biologist and used to reduce deer and elk numbers on private property. In extreme situations, Matthews

said emergency hunts are allowable when several property owners are experiencing crop or hay loss.

The state has a list of hunters at the ready, alleviating landowner from having to organize hunts.

Kill permits can be issued to a landowner or adjacent landowners who want to work together, Matthews said. Landowners and any affiliated agents listed on the permit are allowed to shoot a specified number of elk, determined by the district biologist.

Mike Hale, who works on The Nature Conservancy's Zumwalt Prairie Preserve, said the years of hunting pressure from mid-August to early January has helped reduce numbers, but moving the elk off the prairie could be merely moving the problem onto someone else.

"Now there are more elk on the toe slopes of Imnaha Canyon, but some are pushing west into private land to the west near Elk Mountain and Swamp Creek," Hale said.

Oregon's population is growing, but not as fast as before

By Meerah Powell
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — Oregon's population increased by more than 40,000 people over the last year — or 1%, according to an estimate from Portland State University's Population Research Center.

Since 2010, the state has added more than 400,000 residents.

Still, this year has seen slower growth than in the recent past. Last year, Oregon's population increased by 54,200 people. The year before that, the population grew by 64,750.

PSU's research center said this slight slowdown in growth mirrors "the slowdown in employment growth."

Morrow County had the largest percentage of growth with 6.7%. Boardman's population went from 3,690 in 2018 to 4,490.

The growth in Umatilla County was marginal. The county finished 2018 with 80,765 residents and preliminary 2019 figures show the county with 81,160, a rate of 0.4%.

Growth in the county's two largest cities was also on the upswing. Preliminary estimates show Pendle-

ton with 16,985 residents, up from 16,810 in 2018. Hermiston's preliminary numbers show it with 18,370, up from 18,200 residents in 2018.

The state's aging population and a declining birth rate has also contributed to the slowdown. In its report, PSU said Oregon's births outnumbered deaths in the past year by less than 6,000.

A continuing trend is that the state's growth relies more on people moving to Oregon, rather than new residents being born here.

In this past year, the number of people moving to the state has been

the main factor of population growth, accounting for 86% of new residents.

The Portland metro area accounted for nearly half of the state's growth from 2018 to 2019. Multnomah and Washington counties each added more than 7,000 new residents, PSU said, and Clackamas County added almost 4,000.

Other counties with a large number of new residents included Deschutes, with more than 4,000, and Lane and Marion, both with about 3,700 new residents.

Crook County also saw a large growth rate with 3.2%.

REPORTER

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The Eagle is located in John Day, where seeing deer in front yards is normal and traffic is unheard of, just three hours from Bend and Pendleton. Surrounded by scenic forests and dissected by mountain streams, the location offers year-round recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, backpacking, camping, snowmobiling and horseback riding.

Despite the picturesque environment, the community is at the center of an evolving natural resource restoration economy, which gains statewide and even national attention.

Despite the small-town charm, the residents are engaged and politically active in local and national debates, and hard-hitting stories are never hard to find. Ongoing topics include state and federal policies, forest health, logging, public lands grazing, water supply, wildlife habitat improvements and wildfire resilience, in addition to coverage of small-town life and local government. The position offers a wealth of breaking news and enterprise opportunities.

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