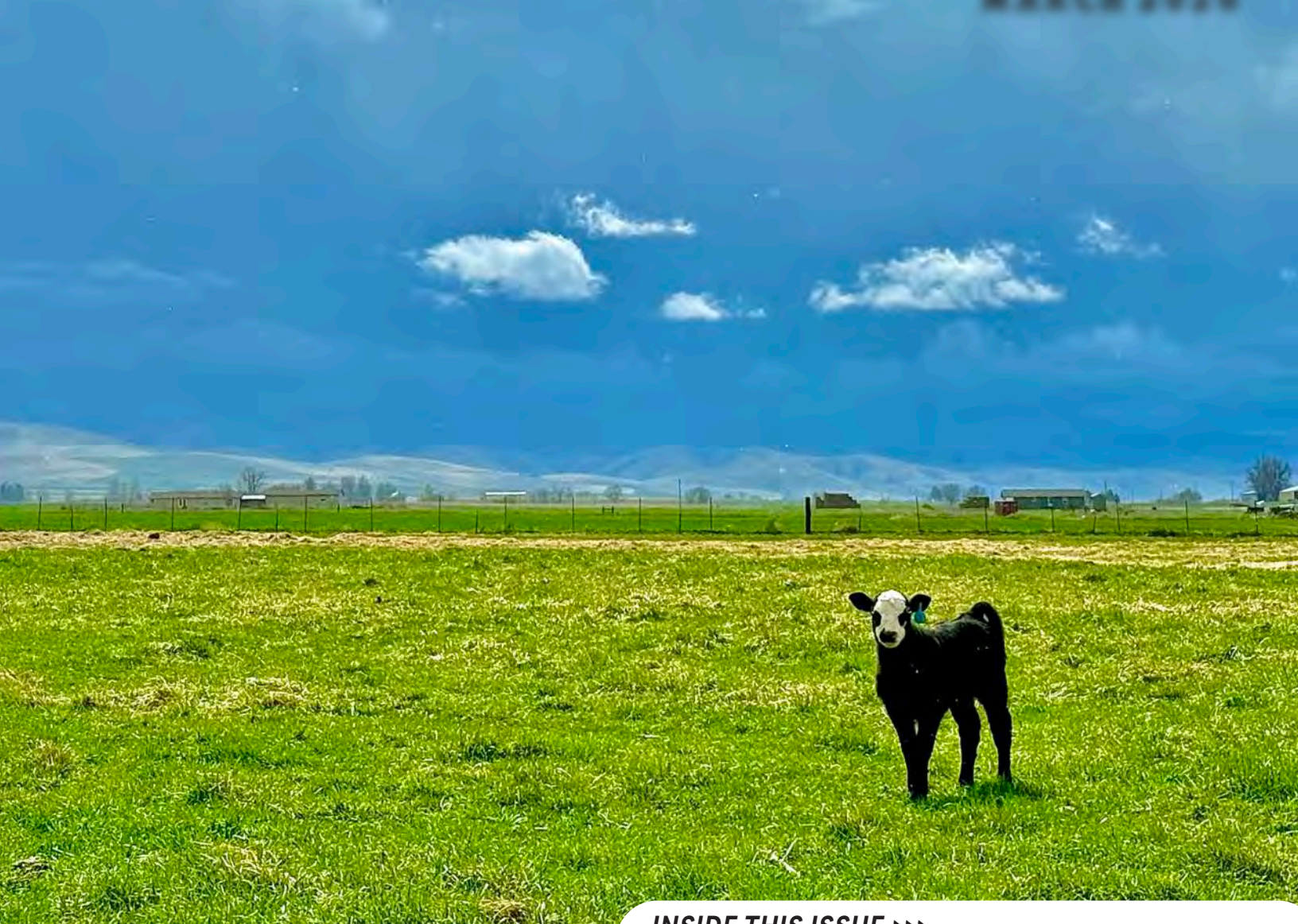


# OREGON CATTLEMAN

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE OREGON CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION

MARCH 2026



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## **HARNEY BASIN WATER**

Solutions or Shockwaves?

## **RAISE CATTLE. BUILD FUTURES.**

Beef Northwest's Prime Start Program

## **NATURAL RESOURCE DEDUCTION**

What Oregon ranchers should know.

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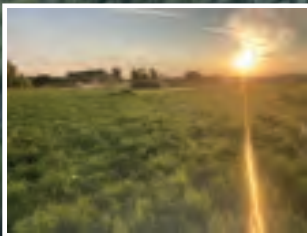


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MARCH 2026

Volume 10 | Issue 3 | ISSN 2574-8785

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**Save the Date**  
**Mid-Year Membership Meeting**  
 June 26 | Madras  
 See Page 19

**2026 Oregon Cattlemen's**  
**Scholarship Application now**  
**open! See page 22**

**In May the next magazine will**  
**arrive in mailboxes for the**  
**combined April/May issue**

## ON THE COVER

A spring day on the McLaughlin Ranch, designated a century ranch by the Morrow County Historical Society and the State of Oregon in 2000. Photographed by Ryan McLaughlin



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# Reflections of Spring Quarterly and Politics

**Diana Wirth** | 541-891-2295  
OCA President

By the time this issue reaches your mailbox, both the OCA Spring Quarterly meeting and Oregon's Legislative Short Session will be behind us. We'll know which of our priority bills moved forward and which ones stalled; bills addressing permanent wolf compensation funding, wildfire gap funding, preg check, rural zoning, and meat labeling.

Regardless of the outcomes, I remain grateful for the legislators who recognize the value of food security and the essential role ranching and agriculture play in our state's economy and in feeding the world. Without the professionals and dedicated individuals who advocate on our behalf, the journey would be far more difficult. In my opinion, issues of food security should never be partisan.

I'll admit something: I am painfully naïve/ignorant when it comes to the legislative process. The statutes, the rules, the gamesmanship—there's plenty of it, and much of it baffles me. I look at ranching as inherently valuable, a necessity to humankind, and I struggle to understand why others don't see it the same way. There's no way around it. Legislative advocacy and engagement are a must.

This short session has made me acutely aware of how vital those who stand in the gap for us in Salem are. It takes hours of engagement, conversation, and persistence to advance or defend against the issues that affect our livelihoods, both positively and negatively.

This session was also an opportunity for me to reflect on Oregon's cattle industry. It's not just a way of life; it is a cornerstone of the state's economy and conservation landscape.

## Did You Know?

- Oregon is home to roughly 1.23 million head of cattle and calves, including more than 500,000 beef cows.
- The industry consistently generates \$1-1.2 billion in cash receipts, ranking as one of Oregon's top two agricultural commodities.
- Approximately 84% of Oregon farms and ranches are owned by individuals or families.
- Ranching contributes an estimated \$254.4 million annually in ecosystem services—from forage and habitat to the critical modalities and landscape management that support wildlife populations.
- The average age of an Oregon rancher is 58.6, with more than a quarter of producers between 65 and 74.

These statistics tell a story: ranching is not just an economic engine but also a cultural and ecological pillar, and it should be protected, not politicized.

At its core, ranching is a livelihood rooted in land stewardship, animal husbandry, and sustainable management—not partisan ideology. Keeping ranching apolitical ensures practical, sustainable outcomes for ranchers, rural communities, and the landscapes we care for.

## Thoughts on politics and ranching:

### 1. Stewardship Above Politics

Ranchers depend on, create and maintain healthy soils, stable water, and balanced ecosystems. Conservation practices like rotational grazing and watershed management are grounded in science, not politics. When ranching remains apolitical, collaboration with agencies, scientists, and conservation groups becomes more effective.

### 2. Respect for Complex Knowledge

Ranchers hold generations of localized ecological knowledge. When policy becomes politicized, that nuance is often lost. Apolitical approaches help ensure that regulations support—not undermine—effective land and livestock management.

### 3. Strengthening Community Cohesion

Ranching communities thrive on shared labor, interdependence, and cultural continuity. Politicizing the work risks fracturing that cohesion. Neutral ground keeps the focus on sustaining rural values and essential skills.

### 4. Supporting Economic Stability

Ranching operates on tight margins. Sudden regulatory swings or misinformation campaigns (such as IP 28) can destabilize operations. Apolitical governance provides predictability, allowing ranchers to plan, invest, and steward their land responsibly.

### 5. Reducing Polarization and Misrepresentation

Ranchers are often mischaracterized—either as environmental antagonists or political actors. Remaining apolitical helps protect the profession from stereotypes and encourages evidence-based dialogue on land use, wildlife, and conservation.

In short: ranching thrives when it is grounded in science, stewardship, and community—not politics. Keeping it that way ensures the long-term health of our rangelands and the resilience of the families who care for them. Ranching should never be about politics. At its heart, it should be about stewardship—of land, livestock, water, wildlife, and community. It's about passing on to the next generation, a way of life that's rooted in responsibility and respect.

When ranching becomes a political football, we lose sight of the practical, science-based work that keeps our rangelands healthy and our operations viable. Staying focused on collaboration—not partisanship—helps protect our livelihoods, our landscapes, and generations of stewards to come.

## A Final Word of Thanks

Thank you to our staff and volunteers who worked tirelessly to create a successful Legislative Days event, and to our legislators who took time out of their demanding schedules to join us for breakfast and answer questions from our members. I also want to extend my sincere appreciation to our board members and all who attended our meeting and participated in our activities at the Capitol—including the Oregon CattleWomen's "Beef Days Lunch" in the Capitol."

The Oregon CattleWomen once again demonstrated their unwavering support for our industry and their unmatched ability to host a luncheon for a crowd. Feeding that many people is no small task, and no one does it better. DW •




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# From the desk of your Executive Director

**Tammy Dennee, CMP, CAE** | 541-980-6887  
OCA Executive Director

As I draft this message to you, we have completed the second week of the short legislative session. We have maintained a short list of priorities and are awaiting the final work sessions in the first chamber. Of course, the remainder of the Session will run through March 8. A full report of the Session will be provided in the April/May magazine and in the weekly newsletter mid-March. Stay tuned. I hope you were involved in the process and made your voice heard. The opportunities for engagement in the legislative process are abundant.

Following the legislative session, we shift attention to the ballot initiative known as IP-28. The signature gatherers have gained ground, and it is believed we will be forced to mount a campaign to defeat the initiative. If you wish to make a donation to assist with this effort, please send your donation to the OCA PAC to the office, or you can go to the website [www.orcattle.com](http://www.orcattle.com) to make your PAC donation there. Your financial support will be greatly appreciated. In the meantime, we are developing educational materials to inform the voting public about the potential impacts of IP 28 if it passes. Please share the information with your friends, family, and community members.

The Primary Election cycle will follow the short legislative session, and the Oregon Cattlemen’s Association will await the results of the Primary before beginning to interview candidates and making decisions regarding the distribution of PAC funds. Thank you to those who made voluntary PAC donations with your membership renewals. We will host our final PAC Fundraiser in Powell Butte in September. Your ongoing contributions to the PAC fund will be welcome.

The 2026 membership renewal season will wrap up on March 31. If you haven’t renewed your membership, please be sure to take action prior to March 31. Of course, we will accept your membership renewal throughout the year. However, if your account is not renewed by March 31, we will discontinue our communication with you to limit our financial expenses. You are important to us, and we hope you will choose to continue your membership.

Following this issue of your magazine, there will be a gap, as the next issue is a combined April-May issue. You can expect to receive your next issue early in May.

It is scholarship season, and with this issue, we are announcing that scholarship applications will be received until May 1. A total of \$9,000 will be awarded. If you know a community college or university student, encourage them to review the application and consider submitting a completed application.

Wishing you and yours many blessings this spring, Tammy L. Dennee, CMP, CAE – OCA Executive Director •



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# Major session storylines hold to early expectations

**Rocky Dallum**  
Political Advocate

The major themes of the 2026 Legislative Session unfolded pretty much as expected, with the major storylines holding true to the early expectations: transportation tax referendum, disconnection from the federal tax code, and a looming dismal budget picture (although slightly rosier at the start of the month). For OCA, our members stayed active throughout the session and kicked off a fast-paced month with plenty of priorities to weigh in on.

The session began with the introduction of approximately 300 bills, with just 35 days to get through them. This meant accelerated deadlines, packed committee agendas, and lots of testimony from Oregonians. As expected, Democrats introduced a proposal to move the gas and transit tax referendum from the November election to the May ballot. SB 1599 emerged late in the first week and was referred to a special committee designed to fast-track the bill. After several hearings with overwhelming opposition, the bill passed out of committee on party lines. As of publication, it was awaiting a vote on the Senate floor, and several members speculated that the bill itself could be challenged in court.

On the tax front, leaders of the respective tax committees, Senate Finance & Revenue and House Revenue, unveiled a plan to disallow several federal tax deductions on Oregon taxes. They coupled the tax increases with a \$ 1,000 credit for companies that create more than 10 jobs. For farms, ranches, and other small businesses, the tax credit would likely be unattainable, but the ability to accelerate depreciation on new equipment purchases could be a strong benefit and improve cash flow. While the session will have ended by the time Oregon Cattleman hits mailboxes, the bill's fate was uncertain by the mid-point of the session. Some of the pressure to raise revenue subsided when the State Economist delivered a slightly better-than-expected revenue forecast, which would reduce the

budget by about \$60 million.

OCA had its own priorities to address, including several livestock issues. OCA leadership made the difficult decision to support a new tax on hotel lodging in order to generate stable revenue for the wolf depredation and compensation management program. Such a vote requires supermajorities and, in this case, Republican support. Several Republicans with deep connections to wolf conflict publicly supported the effort in the initial hearing, including Senator Todd Nash, and Representatives Bobby Levy and Mark Owens. Still, given publication deadlines, we're unable to report on the final outcome and any votes on chamber floors. OCA also continued to work behind the scenes to shore up wildfire funding for this biennium.

We also had members testify on issues related to preg checking, the controversial topic of crossing public land "corner-to-corner" into private land. We joined the opposition coalition to the disconnect bill. We supported water bills that would have given management flexibility unique to both the Harney and Mid-Columbia basins.

Even in light of all the policy and advocacy work, the highlight of the session was undoubtedly Beef Day in the Capitol. It's been years since OCA could facilitate this event, due to construction in the Capitol. Sharing Oregon beef with the Capitol community was the main event, preceded by a legislative reception the night before, where OCA members and friends mingled with Legislators. The two events left our elected officials with heightened awareness of our issues and the real-life and economic impacts of the beef industry in Oregon.

Thank you again for rancher engagement through trips to Salem, testimony in committees, and letters and emails. Our work in Salem is possible due to your passion and commitment! •

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# Recap from NCBA's CattleCon

## Clint Sexson

OCA Marketing/Beef Cattle Improvement Committee Chair

We just returned from a full week at NCBA CattleCon. It was the largest gathering of our industry to date and certainly filled our time with many opportunities for learning and collaboration. The tradeshow was alive with the latest and greatest in equipment, technology, and informative interaction with industry experts.

I wanted to highlight some of our favorite moments in the week. First, our hats were off to Syke Krebs and his family for their support as he moved forward as vice president of NCBA. Second, a couple of great presenters, Dale Earnhardt Jr., opened the first session with a very insightful conversation, and on the final afternoon, RFK Jr commented on the recent developments in the food pyramid. Three takeaways from him were... protein, real food, and more beef. Of course, the entertainment (Vince Gill at the Grand Ole Opry) and engaging conversation lasted all week.

On the genetic front, Zoetis presented at the Cattlemen's College. They demonstrated their

commercial genomic test in a practical heifer selection exercise. It was well executed, and many participants followed along and engaged in the classroom setting as they presented commercial cow-calf EPDs based on genomic DNA test results. They released a suite of new animal health traits that may help mitigate disease risk and prepare cattle to move through the supply chain from cow-calf production through all stages of development to harvest. Your local Zoetis team will be able to help you answer questions if you see interest in these products.

The second cattlemen's college conversation centered around carcass weight and animal welfare. Three panelists discussed different perspectives. What's best for the animal? Many times, we think about the weak or injured as major losses. However, these large, heavy cattle need consideration as well. It was presented that the mobility of fat cattle at slaughter has decreased by about six percent in the last five years. The cattle that struggle to navigate a single-file approach to slaughter were discussed. The packer representative outlined that pens were designed for loads of fat cattle from yesterday, but larger cattle require infrastructure changes to fit the same number of cattle in smaller pens. The amount of bruising has increased. The conversation centered around the welfare of transport. The trailers we transport cattle in require consideration of deck height, square footage of deck space,

CONTINUED PAGE 15...



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and the ramp length and slope. They showed bruising on high-priced loin cuts due to the low height of entryways and gates. The packing facility needs to be updated to accommodate the length of the carcass. Was their solution a smaller carcass? No, but more awareness of animal welfare and the process of humanely harvesting cattle. We need more pounds to meet production requirements. It will look different going forward. Every section of the industry will innovate to facilitate the growth and development of feeding the population.

Markets and numbers were discussed and presented all week. Many of the same trends were presented at the CattleFax update. Cow numbers remained the lowest on record; heifer retention was flat to slightly up; and beef production was lagging slightly behind but keeping up with demand through continued gains in carcass weight. The discussion around the New World Screwworm focused on when the southern border may open. The comments were as early as late spring to summer opening. The market is predicted to swing accordingly. And speaking of the market, they were cautious but definitely optimistic. They discussed mitigating risk and aggressive marketing strategies. We

have seen, and will continue to see, significant swings in cattle values day in and day out. The fundamentals were discussed in the same light of supply and demand. However, the structure of the price's ability to move up and down showed a widening gap in dollars per head returned to the ranch. Packer's leverage was discussed at length. We need to monitor where this sits and how it affects market values in 2026. Packing capacity moved up and down very actively in 2025, and already, disruption has appeared in 2026. The removal of packer capacity has caused disruption, uncertainty, and price swings. These were just a few of the takeaway points that stuck with me. We enjoyed our time and look forward to a great 2026!

*Clint Sexson is the large herd specialist for Select Sires. He draws his interest from being raised on the large commercial cow calf operation and managing a few larger operations in Oregon. He lives in Stanfield with his family raising 2 boys, growing their Red Angus seedstock herd and focusing on his employment to promote genetic through Artificial Insemination. •*

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# National and local updates impacting permittees

**Kelly Birkmaier & Mary Schadler**  
OCA Public Lands Council Committee Co-Chairs



The month of January has flown by, and now here we are, almost to the middle of February. The weather has been beautiful, but a little too nice for this time of year. Although I hate to be a worrywart, I am already considering alternative water sources and pasture management plans to address imminent water concerns if the beautiful, dry winter weather conditions continue.

Both Mary and I have been involved in several PLC-related issues since we met in December. Here is a recap, both nationally and locally, that could impact our permittees:

During CattleCon, at the beginning of February, the Public Lands Council and the BLM announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to promote cooperative monitoring of grazing allotments on BLM lands. The MOU will help public-lands ranchers and local BLM officials collaborate to collect and analyze data on rangeland health to ensure higher-quality management of federal rangeland. Back in the November issue of the Oregon Cattlemen's magazine, we highlighted a ranch that is already moving forward with plans to complete cooperative monitoring on Forest Service lands. We are hopeful that the momentum will continue, and some of our Oregon permittees start monitoring programs on their allotments.

The national push to align the USFS and BLM through the USDA-USDI Interdepartmental MOU has taken another step forward. This effort is being completed to streamline processes, including grazing opportunities. This effort includes discussions on the potential for re-stocking vacant allotments. While attending CattleCon, Mary and other Oregon permittees participated in a PLC-hosted Round Table with agency partners to talk about opportunities and challenges facing ranchers who operate on public lands. This roundtable underscored the importance of collaboration to support the long-term viability of ranching in the region. This roundtable is the first of many that will be hosted across the west. We will share dates and locations as they become available.

In past years, forestry and recreation have been the top priorities on Forest Service Lands. This is changing: the USFS Chief recently announced a push to implement active management targets, including for rangelands. Hopefully, this will have a trickle-down effect, with additional funding and resources for rangeland programs.

On a more local note, medusahead rye is a very competitive invasive annual grass. According to Mark Porter, ODA Invasive Annual Grass Specialist, 1.2 million acres of the Great Basin alone are lost to this species annually. I have been behind a push on the Wallowa-Whitman NF to have the ability to use Indaziflam (Rejuvra) on Forest lands. Indaziflam is currently one of the best herbicides for treating this species. Several Forests in Oregon, as well as the BLM, already have the use of this chemical. I am excited to announce that the Forest Service is now working on this NEPA!

Another push is to use aerial application of chemicals such as Indaziflam, as on-the-ground efforts to control this species are very limited and ineffective. Although securing NEPA for aerial application on Forest Service lands is still several years out, a group of us, from local Forest Service staff to ODA to the Regional Forester are starting to have discussions about how to make this happen. Stay tuned for more on this subject!

In January, I attended a Forest Service Stewardship meeting. It was a great meeting where I learned about some of the opportunities to help bolster the needs of Forest Service-managed rangelands. I also had the opportunity to meet Ellen Shultzberger, the deputy chief of the FS. She seems awesome, and I look forward to future opportunities to work with her.

On a final note, both Mary and I would like to extend our congratulations to Skye Krebs, who has served for decades on the Oregon PLC, and is now the Vice President of NCBA! •

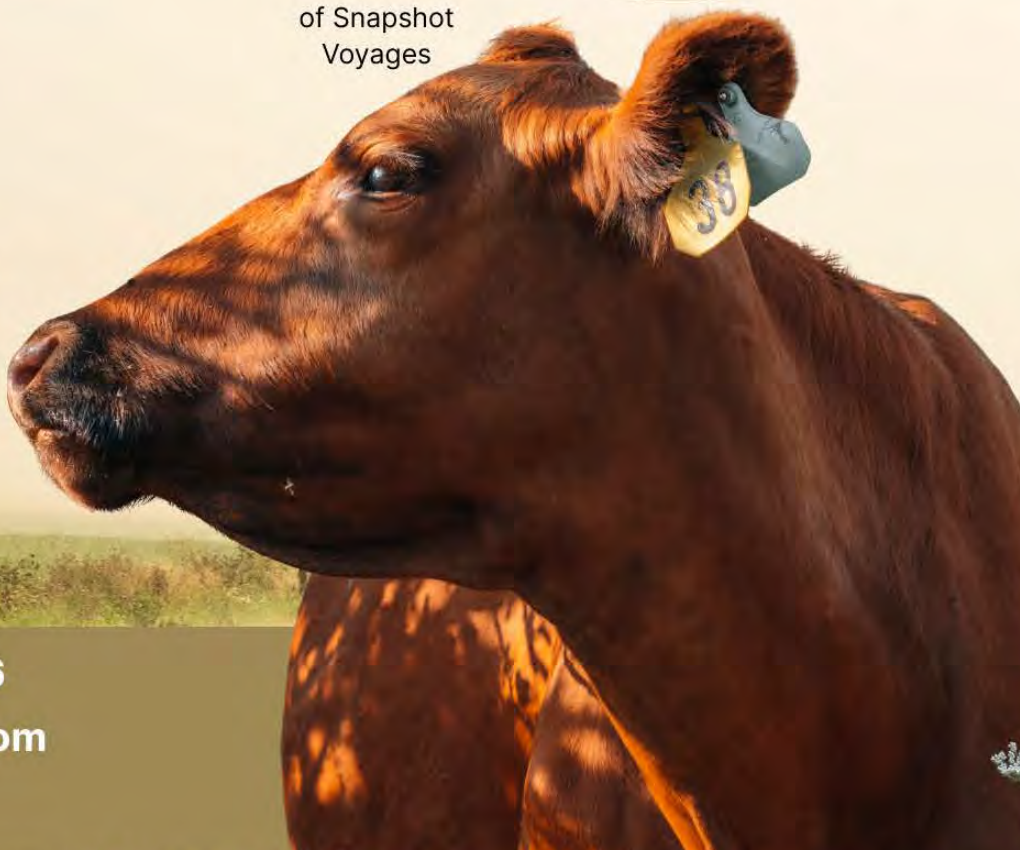
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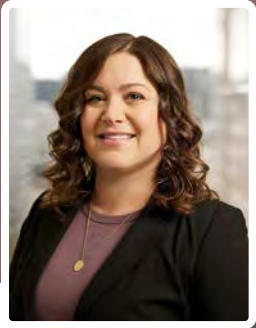
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# Harney Basin Deserves Solutions, Not Shockwaves

**Sarah Liljefelt**

Ag Law Attorney, Dunn Carney LLP | OCA Water Resources Committee Chair

On December 11, 2025, the Oregon Water Resources Commission adopted sweeping updates to Division 512 of the administrative rules governing groundwater use in the Harney Basin. The rules, developed by the Oregon Water Resources Department (OWRD), officially took effect on January 14, 2026, creating a Critical Ground Water Area in a portion of the Basin.

No one disputes that groundwater levels in the Harney Basin have declined. For years, scientific studies and data have documented a troubling imbalance between recharge and pumping. The Basin was designated a Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA) in 2017, and since then, irrigators, municipalities, tribal leaders, and conservation advocates have acknowledged that action is necessary to stabilize aquifer levels.

But necessity does not excuse government overreach.

Across the basin—from family farms outside Burns and Hines to local businesses that depend on agriculture—many water users argue the new rules go too far, too fast, and stray from the collaborative, science-based path that was promised when the process began. After years of technical work groups, groundwater modeling, and stakeholder meetings, producers hoped for a balanced regulatory framework that reflected both hydrologic reality and economic survival. Instead, many comments on the rules say that the final rules impose reductions that are more rigid and less flexible than science demands.

The Harney Basin is not just a hydrologic system. It is a working landscape. Agriculture is the region's economic backbone, supporting equipment dealers, truckers, processors, schools, and hospitals. Suddenly, inflexible groundwater curtailments ripple outward, affecting not only irrigators but the entire community. Critics argue that OWRD's approach

relies heavily on precaution and discounts adaptive management tools that could stabilize groundwater levels without destabilizing the local economy.

That tension was evident last fall when Representative Mark Owens filed a petition for alternative rulemaking in September, 2025. The proposal was not a narrow agricultural wish list. It was supported by Harney County, the City of Burns, the City of Hines, the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, the Burns Paiute Tribe, irrigators across the Basin, and numerous local businesses. The coalition behind the petition reflected something important: this is not agriculture versus conservation, nor rural Oregon versus state regulators. It is a community seeking flexibility rather than one-size-fits-all mandates.

The alternative proposal emphasized voluntary agreements, market-based incentives, and locally driven solutions designed to reach “reasonably stable” groundwater conditions over time. Supporters argued that the scientific record—spanning years of modeling and monitoring—did not compel the level of immediate, across-the-board reductions ultimately adopted. Instead, they contended, adaptive management could achieve similar hydrologic outcomes with less economic dislocation.

When the Commission finalized the rules in December, it incorporated some adjustments related to municipal and tribal concerns. But the majority of the alternative petition was left on the cutting room floor. The outcome appeared less like collaboration and more like preordained regulation.

Yet even as the new rules take effect, the story is not finished. Water users who challenge the reductions embedded in the regulations retain the right to contested case hearings, which are legal challenges similar to filing a lawsuit. Those proceedings could become the next chapter in a

dispute many hoped to avoid. Legal battles are costly and time-consuming for both regulators and residents—resources that might otherwise be invested in water conservation, aquifer recharge research, or infrastructure improvements.

Recognizing that risk, Representative Owens and other legislators sponsored House Bill 4049 during the 2026 short legislative session. The bill aims to increase flexibility and prioritize voluntary agreements as a primary pathway to groundwater stabilization. Its supporters argue that negotiated reductions, water banking, and incentive-based conservation can reduce litigation while still moving the basin toward sustainable levels.

By the time this article reaches readers, the fate of HB 4049, at least during the 2026 short session, will be known. If enacted, it could provide a framework for collaborative management that tempers the rigidity of the newly adopted rules. However, even as Harney Basin residents hope for an alternative to current regulatory enforcement, some worry that changes made by neighbors under voluntary agreements may have unintentional negative impacts on their own operations. Solutions are not clear, and the future remains uncertain.

The Harney Basin deserves groundwater

management that is firm but fair, protective but practical. Solutions must stabilize the aquifer, yes—but they must also sustain the communities that depend on it. A basin-wide problem calls for basin-wide commitment, not a regulatory shockwave that leaves neighbors feeling sidelined. As the rules take hold and legislative efforts conclude, the path forward should recognize that water is not an abstract policy question in rural Oregon. It is the lifeblood of families, farms, and an entire way of life. Enacted regulations should not prioritize overly burdensome policies over community health.

*Sarah Liljefelt is a natural resources and agricultural law attorney at Dunn Carney LLP in Portland, Oregon. She focuses her practice in the areas of real property, water rights, water utilities, special districts and municipal entities, environmental compliance, public lands authorizations, and both administrative and civil litigation. Sarah is licensed in Oregon, California, and Utah. •*

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# What comes next: A sustainable water future for the Harney Basin

**Ivan Gall**

Director, Oregon Water Resources Dept.



In December, the Water Resources Commission and OWRD reached a major milestone toward addressing excessive groundwater level decline in the Malheur Lake Administrative Basin, commonly referred to as the Harney Basin. The Commission adopted Department-proposed rules that reflect a decade of community engagement, scientific and economic study, and the need to balance today’s realities with the needs of future generations.

Working within the bounds of our legal authorities, we aimed to be equitable and reasonable as we engaged over several years with a variety of local water users, domestic well owners, and experts in the field. The Burns-Paiute Tribe, agricultural irrigators and related businesses, domestic well users, local governments, and environmental organizations all provided valuable input to the adopted rules, which help establish a framework to make meaningful progress toward stabilizing groundwater in the basin.

I’ll detail what those are, and how folks in the Basin who will have new requirements or regulations of their water use can learn more and prepare.

## What the rules do

The rules establish a Serious Water Management Problem Area (SWMPA) in the Harney Basin, with water use measurement and reporting requirements on permitted wells in the Basin. Many water rights already have this condition, but any well that’s included on a groundwater right must have installed a measurement device by March 1, 2028, and report use each year beginning with the 2028 irrigation season.

A portion of that SWMPA was designated a Critical Groundwater Area, with seven subareas. If your wells are in the CGWA, you can determine the subarea via a map on the OWRD website at [owrd.info/harneybasinmap](http://owrd.info/harneybasinmap).

In addition to the SWMPA’s measurement and reporting requirements, the rules establish a process to move towards water use reductions. We hope groundwater users will voluntarily begin reductions as soon as possible, as early reductions in use can lead to a positive early response in groundwater levels. The rules lay out a mandatory reduction schedule that will need to go through a contested case hearing in front of an administrative law judge. The mandatory groundwater reduction schedule will work towards beginning in 2028 as part of a 24-year, partial curtailment of allowed groundwater use in the Basin. Curtailment levels will differ based on which subarea the well is located in.

These steps are intended to help stabilize groundwater levels by 2058, and provide a generation-long span for groundwater users to analyze, conserve and adapt. The department will check progress every six years, and curtailment could be reduced if stabilization trends are ahead of schedule.

## How Harney Basin water users can prepare

First, find out if the rules apply to you: If your groundwater use is exempt from needing a water right, you won’t have new requirements. Cities and quasi-municipalities are exempt from use reductions, and federally recognized Tribes are exempt from both use reductions and reporting requirements.

If your use requires a water right and the property is in Harney County, confirm whether it is within the SWMPA or CGWA. At [owrd.info/harneybasinmap](http://owrd.info/harneybasinmap) you can find an interactive map to help you determine this, and the local watermaster office can help provide information as well.

We recommend getting ahead of the deadline for installing measurement devices. The agency has limited funds to provide cost assistance to purchase and install the devices.



For those in the CGWA, here are some steps to consider:

- Work with neighbors in your subarea to develop voluntary agreements (VAs). Delayed implementation of the regulation provides time and space for developing VAs. We are encouraged by early discussions with some landowners about VAs that can meet the same stabilization goals laid out in the rules. VAs must be approved by the Water Resources Commission, and participants in an approved, successful agreement aren't subject to regulation under the new basin rules.
- Upgrade irrigation equipment to use water more efficiently. OWRD has limited statewide funding to help cover costs for efficiency projects. Visit [owrd.info/fundingopportunities](http://owrd.info/fundingopportunities) to learn more. You can also consult with your local OWRD watermaster or the OSU Extension Service for ideas. Other potential resources are watershed councils, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, or the Farm Service Agency.
- Consider participating in the Harney Basin groundwater Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, a voluntary program that provides a financial incentive for up to 15 years in exchange for permanent cancellation of a groundwater right. This reduces overall water use and has other ecological benefits, and provides landowners with compensation to participate. Contact Graham Thomas at [Graham.K.Thomas@water.oregon.gov](mailto:Graham.K.Thomas@water.oregon.gov) or (971)-283-5085 for more information.
- As those who took part in a decade of community engagement and study in the basin can attest, meeting competing needs for a limited resource is a difficult challenge for everyone involved. We are committed to engaging with communities, showing our work, using the best science available and seeking reasonable solutions. Everyone deserves to feel heard and have opportunities to meaningfully engage, even when they may not agree with the outcome.

## Taking action moving forward

We didn't get here overnight: Groundwater levels have been declining for decades, in part due to the department's prior overallocation of water rights in the Basin.

Likewise, these rules and potential voluntary agreements won't be in effect for a couple more years, and will take time to reach target groundwater levels.

In the meantime, OWRD has taken steps to prevent worsening the specific situation in the Harney Basin, such as halting the issuance of new water rights and pursuing the cancellation of water rights subject to forfeiture.

Voluntary actions can help bridge the gap between usage and availability, ensuring adequate water supplies for current and future needs. Your watermaster can talk through potential options with you.

Looking forward, the agency's groundwater allocation rules adopted in 2024 require establishing that groundwater levels are reasonably stable, that pumping will not adversely affect over-appropriated surface water sources, and that the aquifer can produce the full amount requested. This will mean that moving forward, fewer new water rights will be approved statewide.

Even with a handful of good precipitation seasons, the long-term, cumulative trend is clear: Water shortages will continue to be a challenge, and the choices we make today are the legacy we leave for future generations.

Our mission as an agency is to manage water as a shared public resource to meet current and future needs, with a focus on equity and transparency in decision-making. A great way to keep up with department activities is signing up for agency emails at [owrd.info/email-signup](http://owrd.info/email-signup) for the latest on rulemaking, legislative, and budget updates, and more. •

# The 2026 OREGON CATTLEMEN'S SCHOLARSHIP *Application* IS NOW OPEN!

The Oregon Cattlemen's Association is now accepting applications for college students enrolling full time at a community college or university as **sophomores, juniors, seniors, or graduate students for the 2026-27 academic year. Scholarship funds can be applied to tuition.**

Application deadline is **May 1, 2026**. Scholarships totaling **up to \$9,000.00** will be awarded. Scholarship recipients will be announced during the annual Mid-Year meeting June 26, 2026, Madras, Oregon.

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# Snapshots of County Association Meetings



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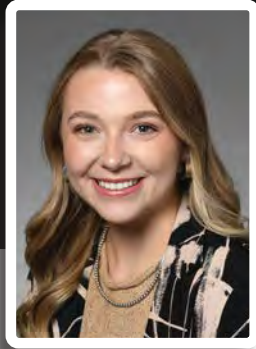


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# Raise Cattle. Build Futures. Beef Northwest launches program for the next generation

**Kylie Temple**

Prime Start Program Coordinator, Beef Northwest

“Raise Cattle. Build Futures.” That’s the motto of Beef Northwest Feeder’s newly launched Prime Start program, an initiative to equip the next generation of agricultural leaders through a real-world cattle production experience.

A commitment to community is one of Beef Northwest’s core values, making the decision to invest in high school students a natural extension of who Beef Northwest is as a company. Prime Start was designed with the vision of a future in which determined young people, regardless of background, have the tools to succeed in agriculture. Prime Start aims to develop skilled, confident, and connected individuals who will contribute to the strengthening of their communities.

The Prime Start Program provides Umatilla County students with access to steers, feed, veterinary care, and pen space at no cost. By removing financial barriers, the program allows students to focus on learning and skill development. Participants operate as a “mini-feedyard”, replicating standard best

practices. Wes Killion, Chief Operating Officer of Beef Northwest, explains that the program was adopted because it offers “young people real, hands-on experience in the world of cattle feeding,” going beyond theory to practical application.

In early December, more than 15 candidates from across Umatilla County were interviewed for the inaugural Prime Start class. After careful deliberation, Prime Start is ecstatic to share that the following six students were selected: Gracie Hughes, Gabrielle Mendoza, Carlos Garcia, Slater McAndrew, Tristan Grenier, and Kari Bazan (pictured left to right)

The Prime Start program officially launched with a two-day intensive onboarding. During this experience, students learned about Beef Northwest’s history and culture, established expectations for the program, and identified the values they would carry throughout their participation. They completed a Feedyard Fundamentals course covering the basics of feedyard operations, earned their Beef Quality Assurance certification, selected the cattle to enroll in the program, and performed proper health management procedures to ensure their steers were cared for from day one.

Kari Bazan, a Prime Start participant and Junior at Hermiston High School, reflected on the experience, saying, “I think one of the biggest things I learned is that there is so much more that goes into raising cattle than I thought.”

When asked what she is most proud of, Bazan shared with excitement that she felt prepared “to be able to actually do it.” Prime Start educates students on the complexities of cattle production while showing them that, despite the





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learning curve, there is a place for each of them to succeed in the industry.

Since Onboarding, students in Prime Start have been immersed in all aspects of cattle production. They take responsibility for feeding, health monitoring, data collection, and record-keeping. Beef Northwest employees actively mentor Prime Start participants, providing guidance rooted in decades of industry experience. From feed management to animal health protocols, students have direct access to professionals who model best practices and ethical decision-making. This mentorship component provides insight into career pathways while reinforcing the importance of teamwork, accountability, and continuous learning.

Participants also take part in industry visits, connecting with professionals across the supply chain. Through these tours, students are exposed to cow-calf operations, processing facilities, and other businesses that support the beef industry.

“Prime Start has helped me expand my knowledge in ag,” says Gracie Hughes, Sophomore at Echo High School, “it has helped me understand how to work cattle, what it takes

to have a successful business, and what Beef Northwest embodies as a company, something that I will always cherish.”

The students at Prime Start are eager to learn, serious about their work, and ready to step up to any challenge, making these industry connections even more powerful.

Prime Start has partnered with Blue Mountain Community College’s Meat Science Lab to harvest the program cattle. BMCC is an effective training facility that addresses labor shortages in the meat processing sector. In the spring, Prime Start students will sell quarter shares of their market cattle and, in tandem with BMCC instruction, learn the steps of meat processing and fabrication.

Prime Start will host an Open Feedlot event on March 14 at the Prime Start lot in Hermiston, Oregon. During the event, students will demonstrate their knowledge to potential buyers, presenting performance data and sharing personal reflections on their growth throughout the program. Carlos Garcia, a sophomore at Hermiston High School, reports that his experience with Prime Start has taught him to analyze cattle behavior and adjust his care accordingly. CONTINUED PAGE 26...

Though only about two months into the program, Garcia noted that, “reading cattle has taught him to look closer into situations off the feedyard too,” explaining that he has started paying more attention to what he is doing and how he is doing it in all areas of his life.

As agriculture faces growing workforce shortages and increasing public scrutiny, programs like Prime Start play a critical role in developing informed, skilled leaders. By immersing students in cattle management and market decision-making, Prime Start addresses both workforce development and agricultural literacy. This approach prepares students not only for careers in agriculture but also to serve as knowledgeable ambassadors for the industry. The Open Feedlot event also provides an educational opportunity for the broader community, strengthening trust between producers and consumers through transparency and engagement.

“It all boils down to transparency,” said Kylie Temple, the Prime Start Program Coordinator.

“Unlike the county fair experience, where students may walk away earning a generous yet unrealistic price compared to the industry, Prime Start students are working within current cattle markets to determine their selling price.” Through this process, students learn

to explain cattle futures, input costs, and the management practices required to efficiently raise high-quality steers.

Prime Start is more than a student program; it is a testament to the importance of investing in the future of agriculture.

“Our community is a key part of the Prime Start program,” states Tristan Grenier, Sophomore at Hermiston High School, “it enables kids with passion for agriculture to get involved without financial or property barriers” By supporting these students, attending events, or learning more about the program, community members play an important role as the catalyst for the next generation of industry leaders. To get involved or follow the journey of Prime Start students, visit [beefnw.com](http://beefnw.com).

*Kylie graduated from Hermiston High School and served as the 2023-2024 Oregon FFA State Vice President. Following her year of service, she began pursuing a B.S. in Agricultural Economics at Kansas State University. Last summer, she returned to Eastern Oregon to work with Beef Northwest as a Research Assistant, where she had the opportunity to design the Prime Start program as my primary summer project. She now serves as the Prime Start Coordinator, focusing on developing young leaders within the cattle industry.* •



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### ILCC PROFIT CHECK 5024

CHECKMATE X PROFITMAKER REG. 5137629



	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	21	-4.9	82	127	26	17	1.01	0.24	126	80	46

### ILCC DIPLOMAT N103

HOLLYWOOD X FINAL ANSWER REG. 5183461



	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	15	-1.9	92	155	30	11	0.85	0.15	126	29	96

### ILCC PROMINENT N164

IDENTITY X SENECA REG. 5183439



	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	11	-1.2	98	157	25	15	0.64	0.42	155	77	78

### ILCC NEXT LEVEL 5023

CHECKMATE X TAKEBACK 75% RA | 25% SM REG. 5137689



	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	15	-4.2	86	133	33	11	0.65	1.0	125	47	78

**+50 ELITE COMMERCIAL BRED COWS**

# 18 MONTH OLD BULLS



**ILCC  
CAPTAIN  
M13**

REG. 5147393

*CAPTAIN X  
ORACLE*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	18	-5.5	59	96	31	15	0.54	0.25	112	57	55



**ILCC  
CAPTAIN  
M55**

REG. 5121535

*CAPTAIN X  
SENSATIONAL COMMIT*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	10	-1.8	69	109	35	14	0.55	0.3	99	48	51

## POWER BULLS



**ILCC  
EXPRESSION  
5995**

REG. 5114951

*EPIPHANY X  
LIBERTY*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	13	-3.6	75	121	28	17	0.61	-0.09	88	44	45



**ILCC  
BRAUN  
5014**

REG. 5137693

*CAPTAIN BLACK X  
HOME RUN*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	7	2.3	104	168	27	11	0.64	0.47	103	36	67

## CALVING EASE BULLS



**ILCC  
HEADLINE  
N172**

REG. 5183441

*HOLLYWOOD X  
SENECA*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	17	-2.9	88	133	27	14	0.63	0.41	122	51	71



**ILCC  
DARNOLD  
N220**

REG. 5183453

*QUARTERBACK X  
5L MTN SIGN*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	MILK	STAY	MARB	REA	PRO S	HB	GM
EPD	16	-5	69	120	33	14	0.67	0.17	118	43	75

## BLACK BULLS



**ILCC  
STEP UP 5017**

REG. 5137641

62% RA | 19% GV | 19% SM

*STEP UP X  
LORENZEN ASSET*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	STAY	MARB	REA
EPD	8	0.1	103	162	10	0.63	0.62



**ILCC  
HOLLYWOOD  
N233**

REG. 5184973

*HOLLYWOOD X  
BEVERLY ROSE C556*

	CED	BW	WW	YW	STAY	MARB	REA
EPD	8	0.5	103	174	8	1.00	0.43



# DELISTING GRAY AND MEXICAN WOLVES

## NCBA LEADS WORK TO DELIST WOLVES IN THE LOWER 48 STATES

**For decades, NCBA has led efforts to secure durable federal rules to return wolves to state management. Through repeated extreme activist efforts to govern by judicial edict and failed bureaucratic processes that have delayed delisting, NCBA has remained committed to delisting wolves and restoring ranchers' ability to protect their livestock.**

### GRAY WOLF

Gray wolves have far surpassed recovery goals—now at more than 300% of target levels—after being listed under the Endangered Species Act in 1974. Republican and Democrat administrations alike have acted 5 times in the last 20 years to delist or downlist the wolf. Each time, activist-driven lawsuits have undermined the process and drawn-out litigation for years, ultimately relisting the species. The most recent delisting rule was overturned in 2022.

This court intervention has created uncertainty for stakeholders and allowed populations to grow unchecked while producers face increased livestock depredations. In the continental U.S., gray wolves have 4 different legal statuses that create discrepancies in management abilities.

### Gray Wolf Protection Snapshot

- **Federally Endangered:** CA (also endangered on state list), WI, MI, most of WA (also endangered on state list), most of OR (rest of OR under state management), most of UT
- **Federally Threatened:** MN
- **Delisted:** MT, ID, WY, eastern WA, eastern OR, northcentral UT
- **10(j) Experimental:** CO (nonessential experimental population), also endangered on state list.

### NCBA ACTIONS – GRAY WOLF

**Delisting: NCBA's delisting strategy activates all three branches of government to achieve the fastest delisting that will withstand judicial scrutiny.**

- **Regulation:** NCBA has called on the Trump administration to finalize a new delisting rule that can survive court scrutiny. USFWS has made clear they believe wolves warrant delisting, but have not yet published a rule. Any rule needs to be able to succeed in court when challenged.

- **Legislation:** Two NCBA witnesses have testified in the House in support of federal delisting in 2025 alone – their testimony bolsters calls to delist wolves nationwide, especially when state management restrictions may vary.

### Key Bills:

- **Pet and Livestock Protection Act (H.R. 845)** – Delists the gray wolf from the Endangered Species List – PASSED HOUSE, now awaiting Senate consideration.  
**Sponsors:** Reps. Lauren Boebert (CO) & Tom Tiffany (WI)
- **S.1306**, a bill to require delisting of gray wolves in the lower 48 – *Introduced in Senate*  
**Sponsors:** Sens. Ron Johnson (WI), John Barrasso (WY), Mike Lee (UT), Cynthia Lummis (WY)

### Key Testimony:

- NCBA Member Robbie LeValley – PLC Secretary, Colorado rancher
- NCBA Member Kent Clark – WA rancher

**Producer relief:** NCBA secured changes to the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP) in the One Big Beautiful Bill, which was signed into law. Indemnity payments will now be 100% of market value for losses, including unborn livestock, due to federally protected predators.

**NCBA secured language in the One Big Beautiful Bull to increase the payments to producers experiencing depredation from federally protected species.**

**Confirmed kills will now be compensated at 100% of the market value of the animal.** While funding is still limited, ranchers should not have to bear the burden of the government's inability to delist the wolves.

- **Litigation:** NCBA leads a coalition lawsuit in the 9th Circuit to delist gray wolves in the lower 48. The lawsuit was in abeyance while USFWS sought to develop a new, durable delisting rule. When the Biden administration failed to finalize a delisting, the litigation became active and is in active briefing status. NCBA will continue this litigation until the Trump administration finalizes a delisting rule that survives activists' legal challenges.

## MEXICAN WOLF

The Mexican wolf has been listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act since 1976. Managed under a 10(j) “experimental nonessential” status, the listing has been weaponized by activists to control land use, often in defiance of sound science. As wolf numbers climb, producers face mounting cattle losses and limited management options, while rural communities contend with growing public safety risks from wolves encroaching near homes.

### Mexican wolf

- **Endangered (Nationwide):** Listed since 1976
- **10(j) Nonessential Experimental Population:** Arizona & New Mexico; Some management flexibility allowed due to 10(j)

### NCBA ACTIONS - MEXICAN WOLF

**Delisting:** Because of the construction of the ESA rule, USFWS is unable to delist the wolf under current requirements, so Congress must act.

- **Legislation:** NCBA has elevated the awareness of the issue across the House Natural Resource Committee and Western Caucus, resulting in introduction and Committee passage of H.R.4255.

### Key Bills:

- **Enhancing Safety for Animals Act of 2025 (H.R. 4255)** – Decouples the U.S. and Mexico populations of wolves and delists the wolves in the U.S. – *PASSED HOUSE COMMITTEE, imminent House vote*  
**Sponsor:** Rep. Paul Gosar (AZ) and 12 cosponsors

### Key Testimony:

- NCBA Member Tom Paterson, NMCGA President

**Producer relief: NCBA secured \$1.5 million in funds in the FY2026 appropriations bill specifically set aside for Mexican wolf depredation payments in AZ and NM.**

While this funding does not cover all losses, additional funds to support payments ensure more ranchers receive compensation until wolves are delisted.

### IN THE MEDIA

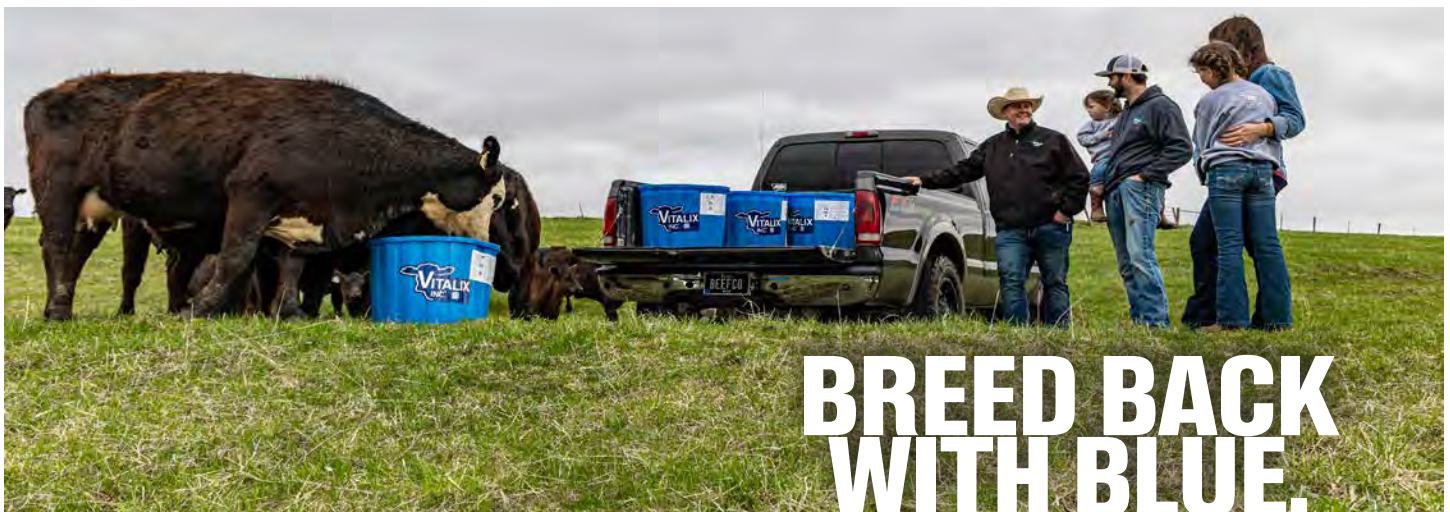
#### NCBA Message Reach in the last 60 days:

- 229 million people with 4.41 million daily views.
- Mentions: NCBA was featured in over 60 news articles.
- NCBA/PLC staff conducted numerous radio, print, and TV interviews, generating more media mentions about this bill than any other organization.

### CONTACT

**Garrett Edmonds**

Senior Director, PLC & Government Affairs  
202.347.0228 • [gedmonds@beef.org](mailto:gedmonds@beef.org)



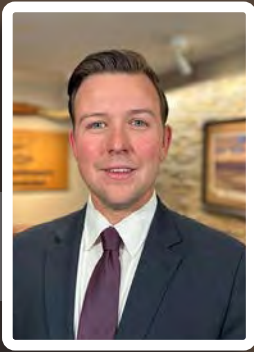
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# Public Lands Council Update

## Garrett Edmonds

Senior Director, Public Lands Council



Washington, D.C. opened the new year with real movement on several long standing challenges tied to the Endangered Species Act. After years of slow progress, Congress is finally showing a willingness to confront the realities facing rural communities, and PLC is continuing to find partners and work with industry allies to advance critical legislation to delist the gray wolf in the Senate. In December, the House of Representatives passed H.R. 845, the Pet and Livestock Protection Act, with bipartisan support. That vote reflects a growing recognition that unmanaged wolf populations are creating daily hardships for ranchers across the West. The bill now moves to the Senate, where conversations are well underway to build support and identify a path forward. PLC continues meeting with lawmakers to underscore the urgency of restoring balance and management authority.

Momentum has carried into broader ESA reform efforts as well. The House Natural Resources Committee advanced two additional bills that signal Congress is taking species management challenges seriously. One of those bills, the Enhancing Safety for Animals Act (H.R.4255), would remove federal ESA protections for the Mexican wolf. While narrower in scope, it demonstrates that lawmakers are increasingly willing to revisit outdated listings and consider the real world impacts on rural communities.

The committee also advanced the ESA Amendments Act of 2025, which proposes improvements to transparency, prioritization, and the overall implementation of the ESA. Both bills earned bipartisan votes and now await consideration on the House floor. Taken together, these developments show that this Congress is engaged and receptive to our call for action. Lawmakers from both parties recognize that the current system is not working for rural communities or for the species the law was intended to protect. PLC is using this moment to bring members together around policies that are essential to the future of the livestock industry. Restoring management flexibility and updating a well-intentioned law that has too often been used against producers is long overdue, and recent congressional action reflects that reality.

While Congress has been active, the Administration has also taken significant steps that will shape species management across the West. The Bureau of Land Management released its updated greater sage grouse management plans, amending 77 separate land-use plans across the region. PLC has been engaged at every phase of this process, submitting comments in 2015, 2019, and again in 2024.

Throughout each round of revisions, PLC emphasized the value of livestock grazing as a proven tool for improving sagebrush health and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires that destroy habitat and kill countless birds each year. The amended plans reflect many of those recommendations and demonstrate the impact of sustained, science based engagement.

As part of this broader federal focus on land and species management, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service have also opened a call for nominations to fill six positions on the Wild Horse and Burro Advisory Board. This board plays an important role in advising both agencies on the management of wild horses and burros under the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The agencies are seeking applicants with experience in veterinary science, wildlife management, humane advocacy, livestock management, and public-interest fields related to natural resources. Members typically serve three year terms and meet several times each year to provide input on program direction, on the ground management needs, and long term planning. This nomination period will address current vacancies as well as seats that will open later in 2026, and individuals with relevant expertise are encouraged to consider applying.

As 2026 gets underway, PLC remains focused on securing practical, durable solutions that strengthen the future of public lands ranching. The progress we have seen in recent weeks shows that policymakers are finally taking these challenges seriously, and we intend to keep that momentum moving in the right direction. Our work will continue until producers have the management tools, regulatory clarity, and policy stability they need to operate and pass their operations on to the next generation. •

# SHORT ON WATER ?

## Two Alfalfas in One

**Plant On Dryland**

**Plant If Your Pivot Only Pumps 400gal/**

**On the Market since 1979**  
(and still unbeatable)

**Organic approval seed available**

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**Non GMO Alfalfa**

**Never a Report of Winter Kill**

**We are a non-GMO seed house! Never a positive hit for GMO**

This Alfalfa has been called a tetraploid anomaly by alfalfa breeders. On the market since 1979, and being improved twice, It remains the highest yielding, low water alfalfa on the market!

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"Ten years ago we planted 5lbs/per acre of 360-D mixed with some grasses. The pivot was so short on water, we had to plug some nozzles in order to water parts of the pivot. Over the years the grasses died out due to lack of water, but the 360-D kept increasing. Today, 10 years later, the pivot is solid 360-D and producing well, and still very short on water."

Cade Davis Spring Valley Ranch - 30 miles east of Ely, NV

"We have 10 pivots of alfalfa in the Railroad Valley of Nevada. Tough ground with a high PH. 10 years ago we planted 30lbs/acre of 360-D. Today that pivot is the No. 1 pivot on our hay ranch, and testing well for dairy."

Kennon Forester - 106 miles Southwest of Ely, NV

"First year, after seeding year, we harvested 3.4 ton on 1<sup>st</sup> cut and 1.7 ton on second with very little rain in the growing season. Over 5 ton on 2 cuts so far!" (Dryland)

Mosekian Farms - Cambridge, ID

"Our area has been in drought for several years. Everyone in the panhandle is short on water. We only pump 400 gallons on 120 acres. That's why we plant 360-D. Under that short water we still yield near normal and the quality is excellent because we plant 35 lbs/per acre. We planted 8500 pounds this year!"

Dan Sawyer - Clarendon, TX

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**Alan Greenway**  
Seedsman



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- ✓ Plant on dryland/ guaranteed to out yield Ranger or Ladak
- ★ ✓ Plant under pivots that only pump 400 gal/
- ✓ Plant on fields that have only early season creek water
- ✓ Plant under end guns on pivots
- ✓ Plant in the late fall with your dormant seeded grasses

\*Plant in your pivot corners. Two ton bonus per acre per year.

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# Beef's Future Depends on Demand

**Wendy Bingham**

Co-Owner, Bingham Beef | Member of the Cattlemen's Beef Board

In the beef business, demand means everything, and I see why that's true, firsthand, every day.

My husband and I started selling beef directly to consumers after a surprising conversation at a class on how to grow our business. A neighbor said he'd lived in our valley for nearly 60 years and had never been able to buy half a beef from any ranchers he knew. I told him I'd sell him one that very day. That moment opened my eyes to an opportunity: helping people source local beef.

Since 2019, we've built Bingham Beef into a business that sells everything from shares to individual cuts. We serve a loyal local base in North Powder,

Oregon, and reach customers farther afield through our online store. What makes our operation unique isn't just the beef—it's the relationships. I enjoy talking with customers, answering their questions, and even sharing recipes.

I also represent Oregon as a producer on the Cattlemen's Beef Board and serve on the Beef Checkoff's Domestic Marketing committee, which oversees Checkoff-funded programs that promote beef here in the U.S. Serving on this committee has reinforced what I already know from my own experience—strong demand doesn't just happen. It's built through effort, investment, and consistency. And, contrary to what some producers may believe, demand and consumption aren't the same thing.

Consumption is simply how much beef people eat. Demand reflects how much they want to buy—even if prices climb. For example, U.S. per-person beef disappearance was estimated at about 59 pounds in 2024, and it's projected to hold steady in 2025. That's remarkable when prices are at record highs—ground beef alone topped \$6.12 per pound in the summer of 2025.

As ranchers, we're great at producing top-quality beef. But producing it isn't enough. If consumers don't know why they

should choose beef—or trust it—we could be left with freezers full of great meat no one wants.

That's where the Beef Checkoff is so important. The Checkoff's mission is simple—to drive demand for beef through promotion, research, education, and innovation—all funded by producers. Many producers prefer to focus on genetics and herd health rather than marketing, so Checkoff contractors are on the front lines creating demand for the nutrient-rich product we raise.

Campaigns like Beef. It's What's for Dinner. remind consumers why they love beef and bring it top of mind. But promotional campaigns can't do it all. Programs like Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) help producers improve practices—like injection-site technique—which boost per-head value while demonstrating how much ranchers truly care about quality and safety. That builds consumer trust, which also drives demand.

Because Bingham Beef sells directly to consumers, I don't just read about demand—I see its impact on my own operation. Customers are increasingly aware of different cuts of meat thanks to the Checkoff's efforts. At farmers' markets, customers tell me they want to know their producer, not just buy from a shelf. Even when food prices rise,

CONTINUED PAGE 38...

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I see customers staying loyal to beef. They may buy a little less at once, but they don't walk away from it. That's demand in action—and it's exactly what the Checkoff helps sustain. That's where the Checkoff's work connects directly to my business. When customers ask about beef's role in a healthy diet, I can point to Checkoff-funded research. When they wonder about sustainability, I can share the education materials developed through Checkoff efforts. The more consumers see beef positioned positively and confidently, the more likely they are to choose it—whether from me, their grocery store, or a restaurant.

Some producers say they don't see returns from their Checkoff investments in their bank accounts. I understand it can be difficult to see the connection between a national ad campaign or a nutritional research study and the check you get for your calves. But those investments are helping keep beef in the spotlight and earn trust and loyalty from consumers.

The numbers back this up. Even with tight cattle supplies and rising costs, U.S. consumers aren't backing off from beef. Per-capita consumption is higher today than in 2015, even as prices climb. Retail prices are at record highs, yet consumers keep buying. That resilience doesn't happen by accident—it's the result of steady Checkoff efforts to keep demand

strong across the board.

The proof is right in front of us: Americans are still choosing beef—and that's the Checkoff's impact at work. If you're one of the producers who say you don't see the Beef Checkoff's value, I challenge you to keep an open mind and learn more about what the Checkoff's doing to keep beef at the center of the plate, time and time again.

*Raised in southern Idaho, Wendy studied Agribusiness Management at Utah State University, where she met her husband (who was pursuing the same degree). The Bingham eventually moved to Oregon, where they raised up a successful cow/calf operation and five kids. In 2019, they expanded into direct-to-consumer beef sales. Wendy has been an active member of the industry, serving as President of Oregon CattleWomen and a member of American National CattleWomen, her local- and state-level cattlemen's associations, and NCBA.*

### About the Cattlemen's Beef Board

The Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, usually referred to as the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB), consists of 99 members, including domestic beef, dairy and veal producers, as well as importers of beef and beef products.

Each Beef Board member is appointed by the Secretary of

Agriculture from nominations submitted by certified nominating organizations. The nominating organizations represent beef and dairy producers in each state or region. Forty-two states have individual members serving on the Board. The remainder of states are divided into three regions. Importer appointments are drawn from nominations by importer associations.

The number of Board members is established according to the number of cattle in the state or region, 500,000 head for the first Board member and 1,000,000 head for each additional member. Importer numbers are established in the same manner.

As for CBB, all of our meetings are open to all producers and to become a member of the board you should work with a certified nominating organization in your state or region.

The Beef Board has as part of its responsibility, the certification of Qualified State Beef Councils (QSBCs), of which there currently are 44, and the implementation of the provisions of the Federal Order (7 CFR Part 1260, July 18, 1986).

The Beef Board oversees collection of \$1-per-head on all cattle sold in the U.S. and \$1-per-head equivalent on imported cattle, beef and beef products. The QSBC may retain up to 50 cents of the money collected in their state but at least 50 cents must be sent to the Beef Board. The entire \$1 is remitted to the Beef Board from assessments in non-QSBC states and from importers.

The Beef Board is responsible for approving the annual budget for its national checkoff-funded programs. •

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# Assembling Your Succession Team

## Tess Baker

Oregon Agricultural Trust Farm & Ranch Succession Advisor



One of the most important parts of succession planning is to assemble a competent team. Too often, as producers, we feel the need to “go it alone,” but that is not the case at all when it comes to succession planning. The estate and succession planning process is often mystifying to most people because they have little to no experience with it. Do yourself a favor and spend some time assembling a team of experienced professionals on the front end; you will thank yourself later!

When choosing these professionals, it is important that they check a few boxes. First of all, experience in agriculture and estate planning is imperative! There are a lot of nuances in both of these areas, and you want someone who understands that. Secondly, they need to be someone you are comfortable with. There may be a highly recommended professional that just doesn't click with you; don't hire them just because everyone says they are good. Keep looking until you find someone who fits you and your work style better. Succession planning is a very personal and vulnerable process; make sure you are comfortable sharing everything with the people you choose, and know you can ask even the “dumb” questions of them. Finally, they need to be team players. Succession planning is a team sport, and you don't need anyone on your team who is out for themselves and not willing to work with others. All the professionals that you bring on board should be happy to coordinate with other team members on your behalf (obviously with your permission!) to produce the best plan possible.

### Accountant

One of the most crucial members of your team is your accountant. Your accountant may be able to assist in tax strategy, financial planning and forecasting, business valuations, and overall assessments of your financial health.

They can also likely weigh in on different entity structuring options for your operation from their unique perspective. Not only should they have experience in agriculture, but also in estate planning. You may find that the accountant who prepares your taxes does not have the expertise needed to help with your estate planning, and that's okay!

### Attorney

An attorney is likely the first professional that comes to mind when you think of succession planning, and for good reason! Your attorney plays a pivotal role throughout the process and is ultimately responsible for legalizing your plan. Attorneys play a large part in both the overall planning process, assisting you in succession plan design and structuring, as well as implementing the necessary structures and documents to bring your plan to fruition. Similar to your accountant, the attorney who prepares contracts for your business may not be the best fit for your estate and succession planning needs. It is important that the attorney you choose for succession planning has experience in agriculture and natural resources, business, and estate law.

### Appraiser

In many succession scenarios, an asset appraisal is required. Most commonly, this is to value real estate for an ownership transaction, but you may find yourself needing an appraiser for other reasons. Conveying conservation easements or valuing other assets, like equipment, is another reason to work with appraisers that are unbiased and qualified in the valuation of the assets at hand. Often, your accountant, attorney, lender, or succession advisor can direct you towards qualified appraisers.

## Financial Advisor

If you do not already work with a financial advisor, succession planning is a great time to start. Not only can an advisor help you to hone your financial plan for retirement, but they can also help to provide for heirs that may not be inheriting large, operational assets. Many agricultural families struggle with succession because the majority of their assets are tied up in their businesses, and it is often not feasible (or recommended) to divide those assets up among all heirs. A skilled financial advisor can help diversify assets to enable a more desirable distribution among heirs.

## Insurance Agent

Often overlooked in the succession process, but hugely important is the relationship with your insurance agent. Most operations touch base with their insurance agent once a year for renewals and maybe a couple more times throughout the year. However, as you move into succession planning and begin work that may involve creating or restructuring entities and appointing new owners or managers, staying in close contact with your insurance agent is essential to ensure that you, your operation, and the new operators are protected throughout.

## Lender

If you do not already have a strong relationship with an agriculturally minded lender in your area, now might be the time to do so. Succession planning often involves taking on debt or even restructuring existing debt. Many succession plans hinge on acquiring a loan to implement the plan, and that process is made much easier when you have an established and trusted relationship with a lender who understands your business. Not only can a lender provide the capital to make your transition plan work, but like an accountant and financial advisor, they can also provide valuable insight into the financial health of your business and overall financial strategy.

## Mediator/Facilitator

One area that few operations consider asking for help with, but most could benefit from, is mediation and facilitation. A skilled mediator or facilitator can help to guide the succession conversation, ask questions, provide space for everyone to share, and ultimately help your family to reach better decisions around succession planning through increased honesty and clarity. A facilitator allows all members of

the operation to sit back and participate in the conversation, without feeling like they also need to lead the conversation. A mediator can help families and operations navigate tense and difficult discussions as smoothly as possible.

## Counselor

An often overlooked, but sometimes necessary part of the succession team is a counselor. Mediators and facilitators can help you sort through a multitude of issues, but you may reach a point where additional professional assistance is required. Issues like abuse, addiction, mental health struggles, personality disorders, and many other concerns can surface during family discussions or need to be addressed before productive family discussions can occur. It is absolutely prudent to engage a trained counselor to help individuals or the family as a whole sort through some of the more personal issues before bringing the discussion and planning to an operational level.

## Succession Advisor

If you are feeling like leading a team of professionals through your succession planning process sounds like a full-time job, it may be time to consider a succession advisor. Succession advisors can help guide you, your operation, and your team of professionals through the succession process. Outsourcing the coordination of the process so you can focus on the decisions at hand can be a major relief. If this sounds like something that could be helpful in your process, reach out to me!

If you are on the lookout for any of these professionals, please reach out to Oregon Agricultural Trust, and we would be happy to recommend folks in your area!

*Tess Baker is a Succession Advisor at Oregon Agricultural Trust who works with clients 1-on-1 to reach their succession and business goals. Tess was raised on her family's 4th-generation cattle ranch in Lake County and continues to run a haying operation with her husband's family. She brings her experience in production agriculture as well as financial analysis, customer portfolio management, and agriculture business operational support to this work. Contact her at [tess@oregonagtrust.org](mailto:tess@oregonagtrust.org) to learn more. •*



# Oregon ranchers and the Natural Resource Deduction

**Paul Neiffer, CPA**

“Farm CPA”

In the rugged landscape of Oregon’s ranch country, land is more than just soil and sagebrush; it is a family’s legacy. However, for decades, that legacy faced a silent predator: the Oregon estate tax. While the federal government currently provides a generous exemption (\$15 million in 2026, indexed), Oregon’s threshold has remained at a modest \$1 million since 2011. For a family ranch, where land values have skyrocketed, this often meant that heirs were “land rich but cash poor,” forced to sell part of the very ground they raised cattle on just to pay the state estate tax.

This changed with the passage of Senate Bill 498 (SB 498), which codified the Natural Resource Exclusion (ORS 118.145). Unlike a simple credit, this law allows a ranching estate to deduct up to \$15 million in qualifying agricultural assets directly from the taxable total.

## Here is how the exclusion works for Oregon ranches in 2026.

### What Qualifies as a “Natural Resource” Ranch?

To claim the exclusion, the property must be classified as “natural resource property” (NRP). For a rancher, this is broadly defined but strictly enforced. It includes:

- **Real Property:** Land used for grazing, hay production, or livestock management.
- **Improvements:** Fencing, barns, silos, and irrigation systems.
- **Tangible Personal Property:** The “tools of the trade,” including tractors, haying equipment, and—most importantly—the livestock themselves.

### The Qualification Checklist

The state doesn’t give away \$15 million in tax breaks without a few strings attached. To qualify, the estate must meet the following:

1. **Ownership:** The decedent (or a family member) must have owned the ranch for at least five years before the death.
2. **Material Participation:** The decedent or a family member must have been “materially involved” in the ranching operation for five of the eight years preceding the death. Under the current 2026 rules, this is often interpreted as active management for at least 75% of the working days in those years.
3. **Succession:** The ranch must pass to a “qualified family member” (spouse, children, siblings, etc.).
4. **The Look-Forward Rule:** The heirs must continue to own and operate the ranch for five years after their inheritance. If the ranch is sold to a non-family member or converted into a subdivision during this window, the tax savings are “clawed back” with interest.

**Example 1: The \$5 Million Small-Scale Ranch Scenario:** A rancher in Harney County passes away, leaving a ranch valued at \$4.5 million (including cattle and equipment) and \$500,000 in a personal bank account.

- Total Estate Value: \$5,000,000
- Natural Resource Property: \$4,500,000
- Other Assets: \$500,000

## Comparison of Ranch Estate Outcomes

Estate Category	\$5M Ranch	\$10M Ranch	\$20M Ranch
Ranch Value (NRP)	\$4,500,000	\$9,000,000	\$18,000,000
Applied NR Exclusion	(\$4,500,000)	(\$9,000,000)	(\$15,000,000)
Taxable Estate	\$500,000	\$1,000,000	\$5,000,000
Oregon Tax Due (2026)	\$0	\$0	\$425,000
Estimated Savings	\$425,000	\$1,102,500	\$2,277,500

### The Calculation:

In the old system, the heirs would have owed tax on \$4 million (the amount over the \$1M exemption). In 2026, that would be a tax bill of roughly \$425,000.

With the new exclusion, the math changes:

- Taxable Estate = Total Estate - NR Exclusion
- Taxable Estate = \$5,000,000 - \$4,500,000 = \$500,000

Since the remaining taxable estate is only \$500,000, it falls well below Oregon's \$1 million threshold.

- Oregon Estate Tax Owed: \$0

Result: The family retains the ranch and the \$500,000 in cash to fund operations, without paying a dime to the Department of Revenue.

**Example 2: The \$10 Million Mid-Sized Operation Scenario:** A legacy ranch in the Painted Hills is valued at \$9 million. The estate also includes \$1 million in life insurance and personal investments.

- Total Estate Value: \$10,000,000
- Natural Resource Property: \$9,000,000
- Other Assets: \$1,000,000

### The Calculation:

Without the exclusion, a \$10 million estate would face Oregon's top marginal tax rate of 16% for values over \$9.5 million. The total tax bill would be approximately \$1,102,500.

Applying the exclusion:

- Taxable Estate = 10,000,000 - \$9,000,000 = \$1,000,000

Because Oregon does not tax the first \$1 million of a taxable estate:

- Oregon Estate Tax Owed: \$0

Result: By utilizing the NR exclusion, the family saves over \$1.1 million. This is often the difference between the next generation continuing to ranch or being forced to log the timber or sell off parcels to pay the tax.

**Example 3: The \$20 Million Ranch Scenario:** A large-scale enterprise in Umatilla County consists of \$18 million in Oregon ranch land, prize bulls, and heavy machinery, plus \$2 million in non-ranch real estate and cash.

- Total Estate Value: \$20,000,000
- Natural Resource Property: \$18,000,000 (Note: \$15M cap applies)
- Other Assets: \$2,000,000

CONTINUED PAGE 44...

## The Calculation:

SB 498 caps the exclusion at \$15 million. Even though the ranch is worth \$18 million, the heirs can only deduct \$15 million.

- Step 1: \$20,000,000 – \$15,000,000 = \$5,000,000 (Taxable Estate)
- Step 2: The first \$1 million is exempt. We calculate tax on the remaining \$4,000,000.

Using Oregon's 2026 graduated tax brackets:

- Base tax on the first \$3.5 million (above the \$1M exemption): \$367,500
- Marginal tax on the remaining \$500,000 (at 11.5%): \$57,500
- Total Oregon Estate Tax: \$425,000

Result: Without this law, the tax on \$20 million would have been roughly \$2.7 million. The NR exclusion saved this family \$2,277,500. While a \$425,000 bill is still significant, it is likely coverable by the \$2 million in non-ranch assets, leaving the operation intact.

## Strategic Warnings for Ranchers

While the NR exclusion is a powerful tool, it is not an automatic “get out of tax free” card. Ranchers must navigate several pitfalls:

1. No Portability - Unlike federal law, Oregon

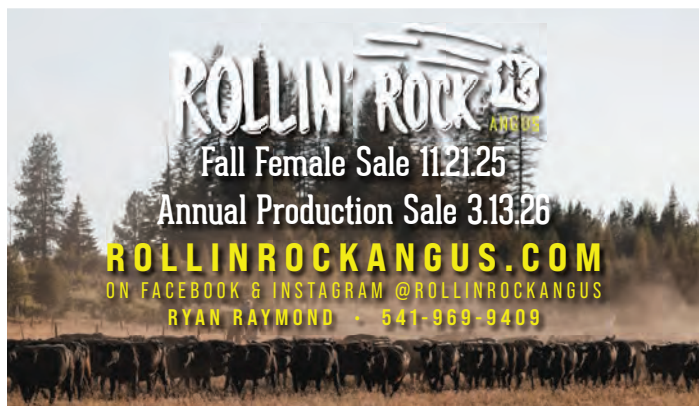
does not have “portability.” If a husband dies and leaves everything to his wife, his \$1 million exemption and \$15 million NR exclusion are “wasted” if not structured correctly. When the wife later dies, she only has her own \$16 million of total state protection. To protect a \$32 million ranch, families must use A-B Trusts or similar structures to ensure both spouses utilize their exclusions.

2. The 75% Participation Trap - The Department of Revenue is increasingly strict about what “active management” looks like. If the owner moved to a retirement home in Bend four years before passing and leased the land to a neighbor without remaining involved in daily decisions, the estate may lose the exclusion entirely.
3. The 5-Year “Clawback” - If the heirs decide to sell the ranch in year four to a developer, the state will demand the original tax savings immediately. This “look-forward” period requires the family to commit to the lifestyle of ranching, not just the value of the land.

## Conclusion

The Oregon Natural Resource Exclusion is the most significant piece of tax relief for ranchers in a generation. By transforming a complex credit into a direct \$15 million deduction, it provides a clear path for succession. However, because the rules regarding “material participation” and “family succession” are so rigid, documentation is your best defense.

*Paul Neiffer, CPA is a thought leader on income and estate tax planning services and FSA planning related to farmers and their families. Paul is past president of the Farm Financial Standards Council and past chairperson of the AICPA Ag Conference. He writes the “FarmCPA” column for Top Producer magazine along with their Top Producer Podcast and is also the primary author of the “FarmCPAReport.com” blog. Paul is a nationally recognized speaker on many subjects related to farmers and processors including (1) tax planning, (2) estate tax and succession planning, (3) farm management accounting, (4) farm bill, (5) farm economics and many other related topics.*



# Have you heard of IP 28?

IP 28 is a direct attack against ranchers and pet owners everywhere. If this passes there will be no more ranching in Oregon.



Part of OCA's advocacy work involves educating and fighting against ballot initiatives like IP 28

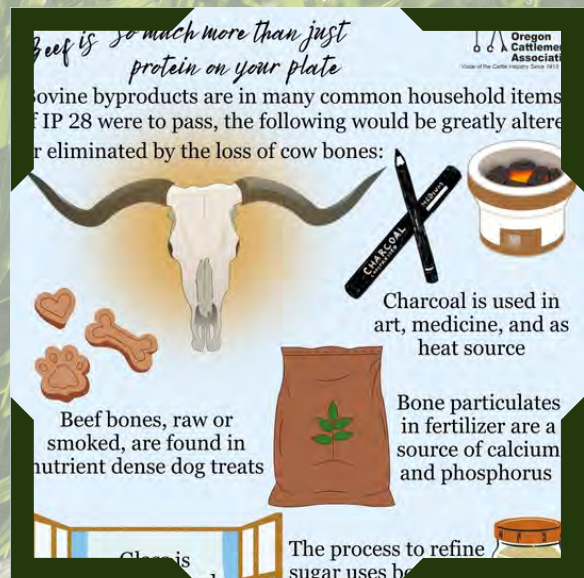
These graphics are available on OCA's social media pages and website for easy sharing



Scan to view OCA's webpage against IP 28 and view all sharable graphics

We need Your Support to build a war chest that will allow OCA to fight against IP 28 and other bills or initiatives that would be harmful to beef production and the agricultural industry.

**Donate to CattlePAC and help to continue beef production in Oregon**



# Two Important Committees

**Will Wise**  
CEO of the Oregon Beef Council



There were two important export-related meetings at the annual Cattle Con in Nashville in February. I went to both of them. While these two meetings differ, they are both overseen by producer-led committees and managed by excellent people, in my opinion. This brief description and comparison may be useful.

I am a member of the Foreign Marketing Committee. This committee was renamed after the recent update to the Long-Range Plan (LRP), which is done every five years. Formerly, this was the International Marketing Committee. There are two co-chairs, and the committee is primarily composed of beef producers from state beef councils who are members of the Federation of State Beef Councils (Federation). In addition, there are several state beef council executives who are Ex-Officio members of the Foreign Marketing Committee (these are official members who don't have a vote), and I am one of those.

The Foreign Marketing Committee meeting focuses on presentations by U.S. Meat Export Federation (USMEF) staff. The USMEF is a cooperator to the checkoff, and its exclusive focus is export market development. The USMEF leverages checkoff dollars with an even greater amount of USDA funding. They have made exports part of the bottom line for every beef producer. The return from exports increases the value of every beef animal that goes to market. There is a statistic tracking this value as the return per fed head from exports, and it is currently over \$400 per head. As beef producers, we should all be interested in expanding these markets for our products. Some of the exports we sell are variety meats, livers, tongues, tripe, and other items that are not in high demand in our domestic market here at home. Other markets pay a premium for prime that can't be beat. In all, these markets fill in under the demand curve, raising it and increasing demand and returns for beef producers in Oregon and across the country.

The Foreign Marketing Committee meeting this year talked about the need for diversification. The Chinese market that we worked on to open for many years is now closed. The reopening of that market is a key item on the agenda of the other committee I mentioned, the International Trade Committee, which addresses policy issues such as market access. More on that in a minute. Diversification is a solid goal for 2026 for the Foreign Marketing Committee, in my view. The biggest Asian markets for US beef are Japan and Korea. They account for nearly \$2 billion in US beef exports annually and have grown by up to 40% in a given year. We'll take that growth rate, won't we? But I see the need to expand into Southeast Asia and other markets worldwide.

There is a regional grouping called the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and together they represent a bright spot we can capitalize on. There are 10 ASEAN member states, and not all are significant US beef markets. Countries such as Cambodia and Laos are among them. But consider markets such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. In fact, at recent USMEF Board of Directors meetings, I met new U.S. Meat Export Federation staff based in Hoh Chi Minh City, Vietnam; Jakarta, Indonesia; and Manila, the Philippines.. These talented young marketing specialists were recently hired by the ASEAN Director, based in Singapore, to represent U.S. beef in Southeast Asian markets, which I expect will deliver excellent results in the coming years.

As noted, the other export-related committee meeting I attended was the International Trade Committee meeting. State-beef council board members and staff cannot serve on this committee, and it is not funded by the checkoff for policy purposes. However, this is an equally important committee in my opinion, and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA), and other staff involved do amazing international trade policy work. This involves significant time on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. There is an NCBA office on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington that is visible from both the U.S. Capitol and the White House. Now that's some real estate. Many Oregon beef industry leaders have been in the boardroom in this office over the years. I plan to take a group of Oregonians there again as representatives of the Oregon Food and Beverage Export Alliance that I serve on, and they are properly impressed. This year, we hope to meet with the Washington, D.C.-based executives from the National Potato Council, the Dairy Export Council, and the NCBA. These are among the top experts for these commodities for exports of some important Oregon agricultural products.

The International Trade Committee has its hands full. In 2026, I plan to closely monitor their work and support them in any way possible. Market access, tariffs, non-tariff barriers (such as those preventing our beef from entering China right now), and other technical trade issues will be at the top of their agenda.

While these two committees are distinct, they are both important. I can tell you that the producers, state beef council staff, USMEF, and NCBA staff working on these committees are extremely organized. I will report back later this year on the progress we plan to make in these important markets for Oregon and US beef. •

# Have you been affected by 2024 or 2025 wildfires?

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# When the Room Changes

**Morgan Kromm** | 805-801-9960  
OCW President | [orcattlewomen@gmail.com](mailto:orcattlewomen@gmail.com)



By the time this issue hits mailboxes, I'll be home again. Boots back on familiar Oregon ground, settling back into my routine on the ranch, calendars filling with the next thing. As I wrap up my final CattleCon as President of Oregon CattleWomen, I have found myself lingering in the in-between moments more than usual, thinking both about where I have been and also what comes next.

Large national events can easily turn into highlight reels: meetings attended, speakers heard, miles traveled. This year, what stayed with me was not a specific session or agenda item. It was the connections. The kind you don't plan for, can't replicate, and would not trade for anything.

There's something a little surreal about standing on a rooftop bar halfway across the country, talking about branding calves with someone you met hours earlier. Someone whose operation,

climate, and challenges may look different than yours, but who, by the end of the night, feels less like a stranger and more like a neighbor. That's one of the quiet gifts of this industry. No matter how far you travel, the language is the same. The problems are familiar. The values translate.

This year, those conversations carried a different weight for me, knowing it's my last time attending in this role. Leadership has a way of changing what rooms you're invited into and how you experience them. Over the last few years, I have been grateful for the access, the trust, and the opportunity to represent Oregon cattlemen in spaces I never would have imagined myself in. Being part of those rooms is not something I take lightly, and it's not something I ever assumed would be permanent.

I was also reminded how interconnected this industry really is. A few conversations began with references to my past articles or shared ideas, which quickly turned into meaningful discussions about challenges facing producers across the country. Those moments reinforced the idea that perspectives shared locally can resonate more broadly, and that communication plays a quiet but important role in keeping us connected. Writing has always been a way for me to process and communicate, but it's easy to forget that words

can travel further than we do. To be reminded that a perspective shared from Oregon can resonate elsewhere was both grounding and motivating.

One of the realities I keep returning to is how expansive and reliable this network has become. Through national-level meetings like this, I have been introduced to ranchers from nearly every corner of the country. I know that if I broke down, needed cattle moved, had a question about a regulation, or needed help finding the right person, I could make a couple of phone calls and find support in almost any state. That kind of connection is not accidental. It's built over time, conversation by conversation, through showing up and being willing to engage beyond your own fence lines. In an industry that often feels geographically isolated, that sense of community is both powerful and reassuring.

It also gave me a moment to pause and take stock of where I am in this season of leadership. Serving in this role has a way of sharpening your perspective, not just on the work itself, but on the responsibility that comes with it.

Serving in leadership, especially at the state and national levels, has a way of filling your time, your head, and your heart. There's always a call to return, a meeting to attend, a cause to advocate for, a next step to plan. While I'm proud of the work we've done and





Gabrielle Homer, OCW President-Elect sitting on a panel about women in leadership at CattleCon

grateful for the opportunities I've been given, I'd be lying if I said I haven't started thinking more intentionally about how that sense of purpose continues to evolve, both within this role and beyond it.

What I know for certain is this: the fire I have for this industry isn't going anywhere.

If anything, being here this year has reinforced how deeply connected I feel to the people who make it run, from ranch families and brand inspectors to policymakers, educators, and advocates - even if we have differing opinions. The cattle industry is complex, challenging, and often misunderstood, but it's also filled with individuals who care deeply about stewardship, integrity, and doing things the right way, even when it's hard. That's where involvement matters.

One of the biggest misconceptions I hear is that getting involved in industry

organizations or leadership roles requires having the right background, the right resume, or the right last name. In my experience, it's far less about what you know and far more about who you're willing to get to know. Showing up. Asking questions. Sitting at the table, even when you're not sure you belong there yet.

Every meaningful opportunity I have had in this industry can be traced back to a relationship. A conversation struck up over coffee. A meeting was attended on a whim. A yes was said before I felt fully ready. Those connections don't just open doors. They shape perspectives and create momentum that carries you further than you expect.

As I look ahead, I don't have a neatly packaged answer for what comes next, and that's okay. What I do have is a deep appreciation for the people who have taken the time to talk, listen, challenge, and encourage me. Also, for an

industry that, even amid change and challenge, continues to reward curiosity, commitment, and a willingness to step forward.

If there's one thing I hope readers take away from this, it's this: get involved. Not because you're asked. Not because you think you should. But because you never know where a single conversation might lead, or how it might change the rooms you're invited into and the connections built along the way.

Chapters don't always end cleanly. Sometimes they expand, overlap, and prepare us for what's next before we even realize it. The relationships built through shared work and shared values don't pause when the calendar turns. They continue to grow. And wherever the next opportunity to serve this industry shows up, I'm confident it will be grounded in the same connections, conversations, and commitment that make this community what it is. •

# Three Principles of Rangeland Soil Health



Rory O'Connor - PhD. Research Ecologist, USDA-Agricultural Research Service, Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center

Toby Maxwell - PhD. Assistant Professor, Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Science, Oregon State University - Cascades

Savannah Adkins - PhD. ORISE Fellow and Soil Scientist, Eastern Oregon Agricultural Research Center

In rangeland and cattle management, there is a saying that ranchers are really grass farmers, and to be fair, that is a true statement, but we would like to amend it to say that ranchers are grass farmers and soil builders. Because, as ranchers, you spend a lot of time thinking about your land and how to improve it, but how often do you really consider the soil beneath your boots and relate it to forage quality and availability? Even if you already think this way, do you have the tools to assess how your management is impacting the health of your soil? How do we build healthy soils in a dry environment like central and eastern Oregon? Great question, let's dig in (pun definitely intended).

Soil health for rangelands can be broken down into three general principles: soil stability, biotic integrity, and hydrologic function, all of which interact to influence the overall health of soils. The first principle, soil stability, describes how well a soil can resist physical disturbance, such as compaction from cattle trampling or erosion caused by spring runoff after a fire or a high-snow year. We want our soils to maintain their structure because this means they will also maintain their function as the medium from which life grows. Let us explain: Soils are made up of sand, silt, clay, and rocks,

along with organic material from decomposing plant, animal, and microbial remains. Sand, silt, clay, and rocks create pore spaces that allow water and air to move through the soil profile, while organic matter binds the mixture of unconsolidated minerals and acts as a reservoir of nutrients for plants. Together, mineral and organic matter form a physical structure that retains the air, water, and nutrients required by plants to grow. Plants, in turn, contribute organic material that further improves the stability of the soil, helps release micronutrients from soil particles, and fosters an active microbial community, which is needed for organic material to be processed into plant-available nutrients. In other words, greater soil stability provides a better environment for forage production, and better forage production creates more stable soil.

The second principle of rangeland soil health is the biotic integrity of the soils, which is a fancy but concise way of saying: do soils have active micro-fauna and microbial communities (bacteria, fungi, and archaea)? Soil microbes break down organic material to make nutrients (such as carbon, nitrogen, and phosphorus) more available, while also creating soil structure and stability through binding mineral soil particles together

with glomalin (a sticky protein substance that acts like glue). 'Biotic integrity' also includes macrofauna, such as earthworms, ants, termites, millipedes, mites, and centipedes, as well as microscopic water-borne creatures like nematodes, that provide the critical support system for decomposing organic materials and aerating soils. In our rangelands in Oregon, having a mix of perennial grasses and forbs in addition to some woody plants (depending on your location, of course) is necessary for creating the diversity of soil fauna and microbes required to support healthy, active processing of organic material in soils that support highly productive ecosystems. Each of these plant functional groups have roots that grow to different depths, and therefore, help stabilize the soil not just at the surface but sometimes down three to four feet or more. Having a variety of plant functional groups also allows deeper water infiltration into the soil, increasing the amount of water stored for plant growth during the hot, dry summer months.

The third and final principle associated with rangeland soil health is hydrologic function (also known as water connectivity), which describes how water moves into, through, and across soils. This movement of water

is important for plant nutrient acquisition because it is the way in which nutrients are transported to plants. As it rains, or when snow melts, healthy soils (with good structure) absorb water at the surface, and the water easily infiltrates deeper into the soil through air pores created by roots and macrofauna. A more stable soil has a greater quantity of pores and roots, and therefore, can move more water deeper into the soil, which provides critical water stores, allowing productivity to persist into the summer drought. A wide range of plant functional groups ensures deeper water penetration into the soil, given the diverse rooting depths across functional groups. For example, sagebrush act almost like a pump designed to facilitate water infiltration deep into the soil profile. Sagebrush helps capture snow, and as it melts out that water can recharge deeper into the soil where the perennial grass roots can access that water in July, August, and September for leaf growth. When soils lack organic matter or diversity of plant functional groups, they can become compacted, leading to reduced water recharge, increased erosion potential, and reduced pasture resilience to major disturbances.

The three principles of rangeland soil health mentioned in this article all have measurements associated with them that can be done by someone at your local NRCS office or by you with materials you likely have on your ranch. Keeping track of soil health is essential to understanding your grass production potential. We did not discuss the types of measurements needed to assess soil health in this article, as that is an article in and of itself. If you would like to learn more about soil health on rangelands and how to monitor soil health, please consider attending a workshop this fall on September 30th in Burns, OR. Information about the workshop will be located on the Sage Con Partnership website ([www.sageconpartnership.com](http://www.sageconpartnership.com)).

com) later this spring. After the workshop, all materials from the workshop, including the different soil sampling methods for each of these principles, will be posted on the Eastern Oregon Agriculture Research Center's webpage. •



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**Nutrient Management and Planning Tool (NMPT)** is now available to OCA members. If you are looking for a pasture/nutrient management spreadsheet, OCA has a new tool for you. Simply visit the OCA website at [www.orcattle.com](http://www.orcattle.com) and select the **NMPT Link in the top right corner of the home page**, then proceed create your password and begin logging your data. Your information will not be viewed by anyone but you.



**OCA members get 15% off legal services for the following Schwabe attorneys:**

Maria Schmidtkofer | Attorney | 503-540-4265 • Farm & Ranch Succession • Estate Planning & Administration Business & Tax Planning. Elizabeth Howard | Attorney | 503-796-2093 • Water rights & wetlands • Public lands Fish, wildlife, & listed species. Lindsay Thane | Attorney | 503-796-2059 • Water rights & wetlands • Public lands. Shonee Langford | Attorney | 503-796-4261 • Water rights & wetlands. Tim Nicholson | Attorney | 503-796-2889 • Agricultural business & real estate law. Patrick Cleary | Attorney | 503-796-2853 • Agricultural business & real estate law. Rosalyn DiLillo Knock | 206-407-1579 • Water rights & water pollution.



Highstreet Insurance & Financial Services proudly offer you a "Land As Your Legacy" transition plan analysis at no cost. The key elements of the plan include: succession planning, business planning, risk management, financial independence, and estate planning. **Contact Todd Tennant at 800-225-2521 or 541-969-9600 to arrange an initial consultation.**



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**Contact Michaeline Malott at the store: 541-548-5195**



**OCA members receive a 2 cent per gallon discount on all bulk fuel purchases at Ed Staub & Sons bulk plant locations.** All grades of fuel and propane are available. Members are encouraged to set up a Premium Rewards Account (PRA) with Ed Staub & Sons, this entitles customers to a 5 cent discount on all cardlock gallons purchased at ESS sites and paid within PRA terms. **For more details contact the Burns office at (541) 573-2622.**



OCA members will receive discount pricing with PetroCard. **Contact Sales Rep Patrick Meyers at 971-209-4524 or email [pmeyers@petrocard.com](mailto:pmeyers@petrocard.com)** for the members discount pricing.



**Discount off Used Equipment and Rentals from United Rentals**

United Rentals is the world's largest equipment rental company, specializing in industrial and construction equipment, renting and selling new and used equipment. Used Equipment discounts are offered, to obtain the discount or inquire about equipment for sale **contact Dan Klobes at [dklobes@ur.com](mailto:dklobes@ur.com) or 971-713-9272.** Please ensure you inform Dan that you are part of the OCA discount program. **United Rentals is also offering a 10% discount to OCA members off rental rates for most items.** To obtain this discount or inquiries, email [OCA@ur.com](mailto:OCA@ur.com).



**Cattle Theft Reward: OCA offers up to a \$5,000 reward for information and evidence resulting in a conviction for theft, damage, or driving away cattle or property belonging to a member.**

**Stewardship Fund: OCA provides educational scholarships, wildlife assistance & actively sponsors local fairs, 4-H & FFA chapters.**

**County Dues: OCA returns 10% of your membership dues to your county association.**



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Announcing the new vaccine from Hygieia Labs:  
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Contact Jenna Chandler at Hygieia Labs for additional information.

Jenna Chandler, EBA Product Manager  
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