

Drought puts burden on ranchers

By Greg Stilse
Mail Tribune

EAGLE POINT — Livestock producers are feeling the effects of drought at an intensifying rate.

On the heels of two sparse rain years, pastures are drying up and herds might follow suit if the trend continues into next year.

Fourth-generation Eagle Point rancher Ron Anderson figures plenty of his fellow ranchers are in a world of hurt.

"We had no snowpack to speak of in comparison to what we used to," Anderson said. "So when the snow's gone, you know the runoff slows down. If you're in the right place, you still get some runoff. There are places in Oregon where once that snow is gone, they don't get (anything). If we don't get a wet winter, or a lot of snow this year, then we're really in for it. That could be a disaster."

Anderson said it is reminiscent of the climate shift in the late 1970s.

"If you're not in the right place, you can't irrigate," Anderson said. "You might only get one or two irrigations, well that (doesn't) grow any feed, so that makes it difficult. You take a dry year on dry-land farming, you might get nothing."

While herd sizes have remained stable over the past decade, they're much smaller than they were 40 years ago, Anderson said. At the same time, there are fewer acres devoted to hay and feed production.

With pastures drying up this summer, farmers and ranchers resort to buying hay, more than likely from outside of the Rogue Valley.

"People will have to buy some hay to survive this drought," Anderson said. "The price is pretty high right now compared to last

year ... good alfalfa will be \$200 a ton."

The Klamath Basin has long been an option, but that's not a given this year.

"There was quite a little rain damage there on the first cutting," he said.

Anderson is among the cattlemen whose herds graze locally, then are moved across the state line in the winter.

"There's worse drought in California than there is here," Anderson said.

Last week, Jackson County livestock producers gained eligibility to apply for 2018 Livestock Forage Disaster Program benefits for small grain, native pasture and improved pasture.

The program provides compensation for producers who suffer grazing losses for covered livestock due to drought on privately owned or leased land, or fire on federally managed land.

"We're so far behind on water that we won't catch up," said Phillip Morton, local executive director for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Farm Service Agency, which administers the disaster relief program. "But if we don't have a good fall, winter and spring going into next year and the rain stops in February like it did this year, it's going to be much worse."

The lack of ready forage and high cost of hay could hit hard, Morton said.

"Local herds disappear," he said. "Producers can't afford to feed them, and it becomes cost-prohibitive to feed your herds, so folks start selling off cattle. We'll see less livestock in the county, and producers will get a setback in their herd development. Of course, if a lot of cattle start showing up on market, the natural thing is for prices to come down."

Until the most recent farm bill was passed, the

Farm Service Agency awaited a presidential declaration. Now, the agency follows the U.S. Drought Monitor. Adjacent counties were previously included, so if Klamath County had a dry year, Jackson County was eligible.

While the drought assistance is welcome to livestock owners, it's not a sure thing.

"They're usually pretty good at helping you fill out the paperwork. Then you've got to wait and see if there are funds available, passed by Congress, where it goes and how much," Anderson said.

Often it turns into a waiting game.

"The biggest complaint I hear is these guys meticulously fill out the forms and they never hear anything," said Applegate Valley farmer Warren Merz.

"When you figure all the farmers trying to raise dryland hay crops, or dryland grain," Anderson said, "you've got the irrigated crops, so they're not quite so bad, as long as you don't run out of irrigation water in these districts."

While this isn't the worst summer in his recollection, John Dimick of Eagle Point said the string of dry summers is taking a toll, and wildfire smoke is creating additional woes.

"The smoke is heavy enough that the second-cutting hay crop is not growing," Dimick said. "Those guys that have actually cut some hay have had a real hard time getting it dry, because of the lack of direct sunlight. Pastures are not growing like they should be, so if you are a dryland pasture guy, you're in big trouble. There are some people who are really hurting for feed because it's so dry. There's just not a lot of green grass growing out there."

OREGON IN BRIEF

From wire reports

Man eludes police by running into cornfield

HERMISTON — A man fleeing from police after a high-speed car chase ran into a 150-acre cornfield and managed to escape after eluding authorities for five hours.

The Oregon State Police said Thursday that officers from several agencies formed a perimeter around the field near Hermiston and spotted the man several times in the corn.

They did not capture him despite using a drone and a police tracking dog.

The chase began when an OSP trooper clocked him driving 93 mph eastbound on Interstate 84.

The man then accelerated to 105 mph, merged onto Interstate 82 and crashed into a guardrail.

The 2006 Silver Toyota pickup truck had been stolen earlier Wednesday in Pendleton.

Body of missing Navy veteran found in river

ALBANY — The body of a U.S. Navy veteran was found in the Willamette River near Albany nearly three weeks after his family reported him missing.

The Corvallis Gazette Times reported Thursday that 46-year-old Justin Sitton had a traumatic brain injury.

He was reported missing on Aug. 6 and found Tuesday night at Eads Park.

No foul play is suspected in his death.

Authorities will do an autopsy to determine if Sitton drowned or if something happened to him before he fell into the river.

Oregon fines seafood company for Yaquina Bay pollution

SALEM — Oregon has issued \$43,200 in fines to a Seattle-based seafood company after environmental regulators found wastewater violations at its surimi factory in Newport.

The Statesman Journal reports the recent fine is the third time since 2015 the state Department of Environmental Quality has fined Trident Seafoods for polluting Yaquina Bay.

The factory, which processes fish into imitation crab meat, is allowed to discharge a certain amount of treated fish-processing wastewater into the bay.

According to the department's penalty order, the company exceeded the limits of various pollutant amounts dozens of times between July and October 2017.

Plant manager Bill Olivera did not respond to the newspaper's request for comment.

Department spokeswoman Katherine Benenati says the agency doesn't anticipate finding additional violations because the facility is under new ownership.

Foster parent gets 94-year sentence in sex abuse case

EUGENE — An Oregon man convicted of sexually abusing a foster child in his care was sentenced to nearly 94 years in prison.

The Register-Guard reports 45-year-old Joe Albert Raygosa was sentenced Wednesday in Lane County Circuit Court after he was found guilty of 12 sex crimes against a child.

The 10-year-old girl reported the abuse that occurred between July 2016 and July 2017 after she was placed with a new foster family.

Raygosa was arrested in Lawton, Oklahoma, in March after fleeing Junction City with his family when authorities sought to question him about the abuse.

Defense attorney John Kolego told the court that Raygosa continues to assert his innocence and intends to appeal his conviction.

New wildfire prompts mandatory evacuations

MEDFORD — Authorities say a new wildfire in Southwest Oregon has prompted mandatory evacuations and an emergency conflagration declaration.

The Mail Tribune reports a fire erupted Wednesday afternoon north of Medford near Gold Hill.

The Ramsey Canyon Fire is burning around Hull Mountain south of the Garner Fire, which has been 85 percent contained after burning through about 14 square miles.

Governor Kate Brown on Wednesday night approved an emergency conflagration declaration for the fire.

At the time of the declaration, the governor's office said up to 200 homes were threatened, with some of those residents under mandatory evacuation orders.

The Governor's declaration authorizes the Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal to mobilize additional help for local crews battling the fire.

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