

Voles becoming major pain for Idaho farmers

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

TERRETON, Idaho — Many farm fields were so cratered with vole holes last fall, agricultural pilot Leif Isaacson said they resembled a moonscape from the air.

In the midst of one of the mildest winters in memory, Isaacson, owner of the Desert Air Ag crop dusting service, fears already abundant vole populations are only proliferating. He said the stubby-tailed rodents could pose major headaches this season for alfalfa growers in pockets throughout Eastern Idaho, including Mud Lake and Terretton.

"A lot of times these mice populations die off over the winter," Isaacson said. "This winter, there's no shortage of them. They're able to dig anywhere they want right now."

Isaacson's hangar has an omnipresent, garlic odor — added to zinc phosphide vole pellets as an attractant.

The pellets must be applied in dry weather, or else they gasify and waste the active ingredient. He applied the pellets on thousands of acres last fall, and he's heard from several growers this winter who lament that they didn't have him treat more land.

He believes voles found both food and cover in hay windrows that growers left in fields last fall while waiting for a break in wet weather.

Idaho Falls farmer Matt Gellings had vole bait aerially applied in alfalfa during



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Patrick Darrow, manager of the USDA-APHIS Supply Depot in Pocatello, where zinc phosphide rodent bait is manufactured for agricultural use, holds a 5-pound bag of the rodenticide. Darrow said demand for the product has been up sharply among Idaho and Utah alfalfa growers early in 2015.



Submitted by Matt Gellings

Vole holes riddle one of Matt Gellings' farm fields in Idaho Falls. Gellings said vole pressure is up due to a mild winter, and he sprayed for the rodents in December.

late December, at a cost of about \$20 per acre.

"There's definitely some vole damage out there," Gellings said. "Last spring, I didn't think I had that much of a problem, but last fall, they were terrible. Talking with other hay guys around me, they're just terrible right now."

University of Idaho Ex-

tension forage specialist Glenn Shewmaker has seen more vole activity than normal this winter in the Kimberly area.

"I thought maybe we had hit a down cycle, but they appear to be doing well," Shewmaker said.

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Supply Depot in

Pocatello manufactures agricultural zinc phosphide to order and has noticed heightened demand since November, said facility manager Patrick Darrow.

Darrow said the demand was initially from alfalfa growers in Utah's Cache Valley, but he's fielded several orders in Idaho since the start of the new year, especially from the American Falls, Aberdeen and Bancroft areas.

During the first two months of 2014, Darrow said growers bought 800 pounds of zinc phosphide. Already in 2015, he's sold about 5,000 pounds.

Will Ricks, president of the Idaho Hay and Forage Association, said voles have been known to damage up to 35 percent of an alfalfa crop. Though they haven't been especially bad in his growing area in Monteville, he's heard reports of high densities north of Idaho Falls.

Reports from UI Extension educators have been mixed.

Fremont County Extension educator Lance Ellis has fielded an average number of vole calls. John Hogge, Extension educator for Clark and Jefferson counties, said voles have been "absolutely terrible this year."

Reed Findlay, Extension educator for Bingham and Bannock counties, said he's had more vole calls from growers than normal, but he also suspects growers may be more aware of their vole problems because rodent holes are now exposed due to a lack of snow cover.

Idaho House rejects rule eliminating aquifer boundary

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A pending rule that would eliminate a fixed boundary of the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer and subject more farmland to possible curtailment during water delivery calls has been rejected by House lawmakers.

It still needs to be rejected by the Senate to be defeated.

The proposal would repeal "rule 50" of the section of state code dealing with the conjunctive management of surface and groundwater that identifies the area of the ESPA that has a common ground water supply.

A total of 1.8 million acres of farm land within the current boundary is subject to administration during water delivery calls. An additional half a million well-irrigated acres outside the boundary are not.

Repealing rule 50 would make those 500,000 acres subject to water calls. The rule change is proposed by the Idaho Department of Water Resources.

IDWR Director Gary Spackman told members of the House Resources and Conservation Committee Feb. 9 that the current boundary is based on a 1992 U.S. Geological Survey study, but current technical information and data show that those half a million acres outside the boundary are part of the ESPA's common ground water supply and contribute to the aquifer.

The proposed change resulted from a 2010 petition by Clear Springs Foods to revise rule 50 and the department determined the boundary did not reflect current technical information and data, Spackman said.

If the boundary is eliminated, groundwater rights subject to administration under a water

call would be determined by the IDWR director on a case-by-case basis, based on the information and data available to the department.

Several alternatives were proposed and the department in the end chose the least bad one, said Spackman, who said the current boundary is not defensible technically.

"None of them were very good in my opinion," he said, adding the department chose the alternative "we felt was the best of all the bad alternatives."

IDWR senior adviser Richard Rigby said "the science and evidence are quite clear" that those additional areas outside the current boundary contribute to the aquifer.

Idaho Ground Water Appropriators executive director Lynn Tominaga said his group, which has members inside and outside the current boundary, is split on the proposed change.

But IGA opposes the rule change because of the uncertainty it would cause and because many irrigators outside the boundary who could be impacted by the proposal aren't even aware of it, he said.

"There are people who don't even know this rule is going on that could be impacted and that's the concern I have," he said.

The committee rejected the proposed rule change on a voice vote.

The committee chairman, Rep. Dell Raybould, a Republican farmer from Rexburg, said he believes those additional areas outside the current boundary are going to have to be included in future water calls but that will happen over multiple years as the department gets the information it needs to justify including them in the boundary.

Idaho Legislature rejects proposed trader lot rule

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A proposed rule meant to ensure livestock trader lots and auction yards have the

same animal removal requirements has been rejected by Idaho lawmakers.

Idaho's livestock auction industry petitioned for the rule as a way to protect the health of

Idaho's cattle herds by ensuring trader lots and auction yards, also called sale yards, play by the same rules.

But several lawmakers said the rule would have placed an unfair burden on trader lots, which compete with livestock auctions.

"If this is truly about the health of the herd and there is a problem out there that needs to be solved, then let's take a closer look at it," said Rep. Gayle Batt, R-Wilder. "But if it's just about leveling the playing field of the market and trying to impact your competition through legislation, that's not the proper role of government."

Livestock auctions and trader lots both sell cattle, but trader lots are open six days a week and have less overhead because they skip the public auction process and sell directly to customers.

All cattle that leave a livestock auction have to be inspected by a veterinarian and issued a certificate of veterinary inspection before being released, unless they are going to slaughter or staying in-state.

The part of Idaho Code that includes those requirements doesn't equally apply to trader lots, Dan Schiffler, president of the Idaho Livestock Auction Association, told lawmakers.

For example, he said, a non-vaccinated heifer must be brucellosis vaccinated by a veterinarian before it can be

released from a livestock auction, but it can be moved from a trader lot without a veterinarian inspection.

Schiffler said sale yards just want to level the playing field and protect the health of Idaho's cow herds.

"It's only reasonable that trader lots should be held to similar standards," he said. "We feel they should be playing by the same rules as we do."

Several lawmakers pointed out the proposed rule would require all animals in trader lots to be inspected by a veterinarian and receive an inspection certificate.

"How is that fair?" asked House Agricultural Affairs Committee Chairman Ken Andrus, a Republican rancher from Lava Hot Springs. "How is that a level playing field?"

Idaho has six trader lots, said Joel Van Lith, who owns two of them and encouraged legislators to reject the rule.

"Don't try to legislate trader lots into doing something that a sale yard cannot live up to itself," he said. "In my eyes, that's not leveling the playing field."

Van Lith said his trader lots handled 100,000 cattle last year, mostly cull cows from dairies, and Idaho's six trader lots did \$180 million worth of business in 2014.

He said trader lots were not notified about the negotiated rulemaking process last year that led to the rule and he only recently became aware of it.



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Passers-by at the Colusa Farm Show look at a shuttle decorated in patriotic colors and displayed by Orchard Machinery Corp. of Yuba City, Calif. The design aims to show support for U.S. troops overseas.

Patriotic orchard shuttle honors U.S. troops, veterans

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

COLUSA, Calif. — For one company near here, making a social statement by decorating a piece of farm equipment is becoming an annual ritual.

The Yuba City, Calif.-based Orchard Machinery Corp., which last year wowed farm show visitors here with a tree shaker painted hot pink for breast cancer awareness, this year decided to honor military veterans and troops overseas.

With the help of a local artist, they adorned an orchard shuttle

Online

Orchard Machinery Corp.:
<http://www.shakermaker.com>

with American flags and patriotic designs, including signs that read "Don't tread on me," "Made in the USA" and "Honor those who serve."

The front of the machine also incorporates grainy-looking, black-and-white photos of scenes from World War II.

"Every year we just try to do something different," said Joseph Martinez, a marketing representative for the company. "This year we thought it would be cool to do something for the military."

Last year OMC's pink shaker was a hit at the Colusa Farm Show and the World Ag Expo in Tulare, Calif. The shaker, used for harvesting almonds and walnuts, had a bright pink base and was adorned with various designs, including a depiction of the Sutter Buttes and a pink breast cancer ribbon painted on the door.

The shaker was customized for an Arbuckle, Calif.-based harvesting operation and showed the names of two local women who recently died of breast cancer.

While that piece of equipment was decorated with a customer in mind, the shuttle — which follows the harvester through the orchard and carries nuts or plums to be dumped into a truck on the road — is for sale. It can be had for about \$90,000, said Greg Kriss, OMC's vice president.

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