

Winter tough on alfalfa but clears hay stocks

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

A harsh winter in the Pacific Northwest and Intermountain West has taken a toll on alfalfa, but it also forced livestock producers to feed more hay than usual.

It was a long, cold winter with a lot of snow, and a lot of feeder hay got cleared out, said Will Ricks, president of the Idaho Hay and Forage Association and a hay grower in the Mud Lake area.

That has him looking for higher prices, up at least \$30 a ton on feeder hay from last fall. He said he thinks prices for dairy hay will strengthen as well, just not as much.

Markets are still low, but that won't be sustained, given the amount of hay that beef and dairy producers burned through this winter, said Glenn Shewmaker, University of Idaho Extension dairy specialist in Twin Falls.

He suspects there isn't much old-crop hay left, and damage from flooding in the field and in stacks as a result of abundant precipitation this winter is bound to bring improvements in the market, he said.

Quite a bit of winter kill is showing up, with significant stand loss ranging from spots in fields to entire fields.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press File

Hay growers are dealing with winter kill from a harsh winter but are encouraged that cattle producers needed more hay than normal, which helped clear stocks.

He also expects to see disease problems ahead from saturated soils, he said.

Fewer acres could also boost prices, but that doesn't appear to be the case. USDA is forecasting a 2 percent increase in Idaho's harvested hay acreage this year.

That's a shock to Ricks, who said a lot of older stands were taken out last fall because prices were low.

Shewmaker, too, said it looked like a lot of stands were plowed out, some due to vole devastation. But growers could have replanted, he said.

Across the border in Oregon, USDA is expecting a 2 percent decline in harvested acres. Silver Lake grower and

hay hauler Scott Pierson thinks that's underestimated.

"Winter kill is really starting to show up in alfalfa that was under snow and under water too long," he said.

Varying levels of root rot are affecting stands in Central Oregon, where winter injury is going to take a toll, he said.

"I think stands got damaged pretty good this winter," he said.

Prices haven't been encouraging, softened by carryover stocks from 2015, and growers are pulling out stands. Alfalfa is going to be down both in acres and yield, he said.

On the flip side, the abundant moisture is good for dryland production and grass hay.

A lot of old-crop feeder hay has been coming to the market to empty out barns. Milk prices have come up a bit and should lift the market.

All in all, he expects hay prices this fall to be up \$10 to \$20 a ton from last fall, he said.

Hay crops in Washington are later than last year but starting to come on. Winter kill from ice and cold is sporadic in the Moses Lake area, where Brian Eddie — president of Washington State Hay Growers Association — farms.

"Overall, I think we're going to have a pretty decent year in crops and the hay market. I think markets are starting to improve, and there won't be a lot of leftover of old crop," he said.

Cattlemen ended up feeding more hay through the fall and winter than usual and longer into spring, he said.

USDA is forecasting a 2 percent increase in Washington's harvested acres this year. That's probably because of growers' unwillingness to tear out stands to plant other commodities that have lower or similar returns to hay, he said.

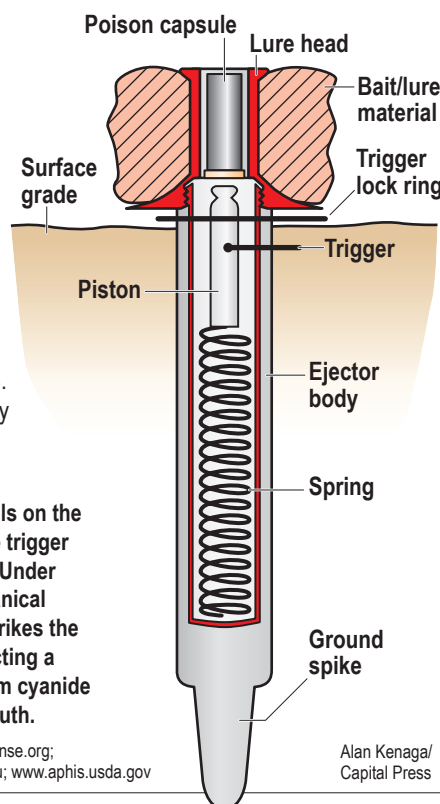
It's a matter of keeping it in the ground and seeing what they can get, he said, but some growers might plant hay ground to something else after the first cutting.

M-44 Cyanide Traps

M-44-style traps, also known as Canid pest ejectors, or CPEs, were first developed in the U.S. in the 1930s as a way to autonomously control pest species.

When the animal pulls on the baited lure head, the trigger releases the piston. Under pressure of a mechanical spring, the piston strikes the poison capsule, ejecting a lethal dose of sodium cyanide into the animal's mouth.

Sources: www.predatordefense.org; www.smithandgeorg.com.au; www.aphis.usda.gov



Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

Activists file suit against Wildlife Services use of cyanide 'bombs'

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Four activist groups have asked a federal judge to halt the use of M-44 cyanide "bombs" and poison-filled Compound 1080 livestock collars devices used by USDA Wildlife Services to kill predators.

A lawsuit filed April 4 calls the devices "dangerous and outdated tools" that threaten wildlife ranging from coyotes, usually the intended target, to wolves, bears and eagles.

The lawsuit follows a February incident in which a protected gray wolf was killed in Northeast Oregon's Wallowa County after it bit or tugged on an M-44 device set by USDA Wildlife Services to kill coyotes on private land. Soon after, a 14-year-old Poocatello, Idaho, boy was slightly injured and his dog killed when they came upon an M-44 device set near a housing development. Also, two dogs were reported killed in Wyoming, although Wildlife Services said it did not set a device in the area where it happened.

In the Oregon case, Wildlife Services agreed to remove M-44s from regions officially designated as Areas of Known Wolf Activity by Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Missoula, Mont., alleges the federal government never completed a review of the poison devices and asks that their use be halted until that is done. It demands that all sodium cyanide and Compound 1080 devices be removed within 30 days of a judge's order.

Ryan Zinke, the Trump administration's new secretary of the Interior, and Jim Kurth, acting director of U.S. Fish and Wildlife, are named as defendants, as is USFWS. The federal agencies have mixed roles: the EPA and USFWS consult on the use of the poisons, while USDA's Wildlife

Services is a registered user. The lawsuit alleges the government has not completed a review of the poisons that was begun in 2011.

The lawsuit was filed by the Center for Biological Diversity, WildEarth Guardians, The Humane Society of the United States and the Fund for Animals.

In a prepared statement, a spokeswoman for WildEarth Guardians said the recent poisonings "prove current restrictions are failing to ensure people, domestic animals and imperiled wildlife are not at risk" from the devices.

M-44s are spring-loaded devices that eject cyanide powder when an animal pulls on a scented tag. The powder interacts with saliva or other moisture to form a lethal hydrogen cyanide gas, killing the animal within one to five minutes, according to Wildlife Services. They typically are used to kill coyotes, the intended target in the Oregon case. Critics refer to M-44s as cyanide "bombs."

Compound 1080 is a liquid poison loaded into livestock protection collars placed on the necks of sheep and goats. An attacking coyote or other predator punctures the collar, releasing the poison and killing the attacking animal.

The activist groups maintain that non-lethal management tools can protect livestock and that the poisons pose "unacceptable threats" to non-targeted animals.

The lawsuit, referring to Wildlife Services' data, said M-44s killed 13,530 animals, mostly coyotes and foxes, in 2016. Of those, 321 were non-targeted animals, "including foxes, a black bear, opossums, raccoons, skunks, a fisher and family dogs."

Wildlife Services has not responded in detail to criticism, saying an internal review is underway. Spokesman Richard A. Bell said the agency is unable to comment on pending litigation.

Tiniest boy develops special relationship with big potato truck

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

EAGLE, Idaho — The annual arrival of the Idaho Potato Commission's Great Big Idaho Potato Truck has become one of the year's most eagerly anticipated moments for 7-year-old Jacob Walker, who is believed to be the world's smallest boy.

The truck, which hauls a 6-ton replica Russet Burbank, departed from Boise March 20 on its sixth U.S. tour. Though IPC receives more than 300 requests for the truck to make appearances at events throughout the country each year, the organization has prioritized a stop at Walker's Virginia home for a third consecutive year.

Once again, Walker, who has a rare form of dwarfism, will be riding with the Tater Team during the National Memorial Day Parade at Arlington National Cemetery.

"He and the team have built a wonderful friendship," said his mother, Ashley Walker. "The people of Idaho are represented well by everyone involved with the truck's tour and how they have made a child from so far away feel like he is part of the Idaho potato family."

After learning about the boy, the Tater Team visited Walker dressed as super heroes, and gave him his own cape. IPC also donated \$500



Courtesy of Idaho Potato Commission

Jacob Walker, of Virginia, poses in front of the Great Big Idaho Potato Truck in May of 2016. The IPC's truck is scheduled to visit Walker, who is believed to be the world's smallest boy, during its current national tour.

toward Walker's Make A Wish trip to Florida. The team returned the following year to pick him up for a road trip to the Memorial Day parade.

"The day was filled with fun, and Jacob enjoyed talking on the CB to other truckers," his mother said.

IPC President and CEO Frank Muir said the truck has logged more than 100,000 miles during its previous tours and is scheduled to drive 23,000 miles over the next six months.

IPC will map the truck's progress on its website, idahopotato.com. Some highlights of sixth trek will include a Houston children's festi-

val, the Kentucky Derby, a NASCAR race at Pocono Raceway in Pennsylvania, a Five Guys Burgers and Fries corporate meeting, a potato chip festival in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and Spud Days in Shelley, Idaho.

The current tour budget is about \$700,000, and covers the tour's charitable program, called A Big Helping, Muir said. The truck makes donations of up to \$500 per event, supporting a broad range of local charities. Muir said IPC intends to air one or two new truck-centered commercials this season. He said the truck continues to generate social media buzz and local news

coverage wherever it travels.

"It's getting bigger and bigger," Muir said. "I don't see any reason to stop it."

Laura Martin, who directs the truck tour with Foerstel Designs in Boise, said about 300 people from throughout the world applied to serve as new Tater Team members. IPC ultimately chose two recent Idaho college graduates, Boise State University graduate Kaylee Wells and University of Idaho graduate Jessica Coulthard. The women, who call themselves the Tater Twins, are friends who have traveled abroad together, Martin said. Larry Bathe has returned to drive the truck.

Wash. lawmakers roll back veggie oil shipping rules

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — The Senate voted Tuesday to roll back a Washington Department of Ecology rule that would have made hauling vegetable oils for growers and food processors unprofitable for short-line rail companies.

House Bill 1136 passed the chamber unanimously, as the Senate joined the House in lifting from small railroads the extensive spill-response planning required of BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad, carriers of explosive crude oil.

"For the most part, vegetable oils won't be treated like crude oil," said Patrick Boss, a lobbyist for short-line railroads. "I think this bill makes a nice distinction."

The bill must be returned to the House to approve Senate amendments. If OK'd by the House and signed by Gov. Jay Inslee, the bill would adjust a 2015 law that reacted to an influx of Bakken crude oil traveling to Washington refineries.

Lawmakers were primarily

worried about fiery derailments. The legislation, however, didn't distinguish between biological and petroleum oils. Ecology applied the law to several rail companies that do not transport crude oil.

Ecology argued that vegetable oil spilled into water kills fish and waterfowl, pointing to damaging spills from a burning food warehouse and a tortilla manufacturer. Ecology couldn't cite a case of vegetable oil being spilled in a train accident.

Lawmakers declined to revise the law last year. Ecology finalized the rule early this year, requiring large and small railroads to contract with clean-up crews and equipment and hold regular drills.

Ecology estimated the rule would cost more than the revenue that small railroads say they collect by transporting plant-based oils.

"Maybe, in hindsight, last year was too soon," Boss said. "The issue really hadn't changed, but the timing was better, and sometimes these things have to percolate for awhile."

Senate, would require railroads that carry 49 or more tankers of vegetable oils a year to hold at most one "table-top drill" every three years. The House set the threshold at 24 tankers, a number that small railroads lobbied to raise.

Railroads that carry fewer tankers of vegetable oils could satisfy Ecology by submitting "a basic contingency plan."

"One of the things most important to us, and this compromise achieves it, is to have plans that are written and submitted," Ecology spill preparedness manager, Linda Pilkey-Jarvis, said. "You're going to have more rigor if you have to give the plan to someone."

The bill affects the agriculturally oriented Central Washington, Columbia Basin and Great Northwest railroads east of the Cascades.

In southwest Washington, the Portland Vancouver Junction Railroad faced \$40,000 in planning costs because it hauls one carload of mineral oil a year for the Bonneville Power Administration, the railline's lobbyist, Amber Carter, said.

Washington irrigation season outlook promising

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MOUNT VERNON, Wash. — The outlook for Washington farm irrigators this summer is about as good as it can get, given lots of high elevation snow that fell in March and the forecast for a normal spring devoid of rapid warmups and snowmelt.

The statewide snowpack was 121 percent of normal on April 3, up from 112 percent on March 6, said Scott Pattee, water supply specialist of the Washington Snow Survey Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon.

"We're probably about normal or a little behind on the snowmelt curve, which is just fine because with so much water coming off from lower levels we don't want that high elevation to come yet or we would possibly be flooding," Pattee said.

Streams and rivers throughout the state are full and running at 90 percent of normal and above from a



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Peshastin Creek, about 20 miles west of Wenatchee, Wash., runs full on March 26. Most Washington streams and rivers are full from melting snow and could flood if there's a fast warmup. Forecasters say that doesn't appear likely.

large snowpack. Snow below 3,000 feet elevation is now almost all melted, he said.

"In the past month, there was quite a bit of fresh snow in the high country and lots of rain. It was almost 200 percent of normal precipitation in the mountains in March," Pattee said.

Snow water equivalent snowpack in the Spokane basin was 96 percent of normal on April 3. The upper Columbia (Okanogan and Methow

streams) was 119 percent. The central Columbia (Chelan, Entiat and Wenatchee) was 115, and the upper Yakima was 102 and the lower Yakima 106.

The lower Snake near Walla Walla was 105, Walla Walla was 129, and lower Columbia was 136. South Puget Sound (from the lowlands to the Cascade crest) was 112, central Puget Sound was 121, north Puget was 113, and the Olympics 111.