



Brad Carlson/Capital Press  
**Mike Williamson checks shoots for frost damage May 24.**

## Idaho vineyard operators navigate cold, wet weather

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

Mike Williamson had 6-8 inches of shoot growth in his vineyards in late May, far less than the typical 12 inches or more.

“Most varieties fared well through this, with some shoot loss,” said Williamson, who co-owns Williamson Orchards & Vineyards on south-facing slopes between Caldwell and Marsing, Idaho.

Cold, wet weather around the state in April and part of May caused some frost damage, but growers welcomed much-needed water.

“Because of the bit of frost damage we saw, it probably won’t be a bumper crop,” Williamson said. “I don’t know if it will be a deficit, but it won’t be maxed-out tonnage — probably down just a hair this year.”

Nearby, Ron Bitner of Bitner Vineyards said frost around April 10 caused some damage in the region but it is too early to tell how much. Early season cold can cause primary bud loss, though frost damage is variety-dependent.

“Even this week we lost some buds in low spots” from earlier cold, he said May 25.

Bitner said seasonal heat accumulation so far is below average. Wine grape development “might catch up some, depending on the summer.”

Williamson said each bud off the cordon — a horizontal, belt-high woody structure — can produce a primary, secondary and tertiary shoot. The secondary can take over if the primary is damaged, but its fruit cluster will weigh 30-50% less.

“We’ve made it through bud break and now we are up to the first big push, or shoot flush,” he said. Shoots will “push hard through to the middle of June, and by the end of June will be up to 3 feet” before crews limit growth.

Williamson said May 23 his vineyards could be about five days behind schedule, which could change.

In the Hammett area east of Mountain Home, Cold Springs Winery owner Arthur Reece said his vineyards had good fruit set, which bodes well for tonnage.

As for frost, “we had one night that was kind of scary, but I think we survived it,” he said. His grapes so far are on schedule.

Reece trimmed vineyards a bit differently. He expects to increase yield from last year, when harvest started about a month early following a prolonged period of high heat.

“Last year was so hot, all the grapes decided they needed to be picked at the same time,” he said. And the shorter season cut management time.

“If we get a normal summer, everything is going to work,” Reece said.

Art McIntosh, who co-owns Lindsay Creek Vineyards south of Lewiston, said buds on the property, which is at a higher elevation than some in the region, did not emerge before the freeze.

He said the vineyards look good but could use more heat. A return of wet weather would prompt the team to watch for powdery mildew.

Cold, wet weather set the vineyards back about a week but “we probably won’t put the sprinkler on for some time,” McIntosh said. “We have good moisture in the ground.”

# Grazing accused of worsening climate change impacts on Oregon spotted frogs

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

EUGENE, Ore. — A grazing plan is under attack for allegedly failing to adequately examine climate change effects on Oregon spotted frogs in the Fremont-Winema National Forest.

In a lawsuit, environmental advocates claim that federal officials didn’t sufficiently analyze how more frequent and severe droughts will aggravate impacts from grazing on the protected species.

“You can’t assume the same hydrologic conditions that occurred the last 10 years will occur the next 10 years,” said Lauren Rule, an attorney representing the Concerned Friends of the Winema and four other environmental nonprofits.

While climate change was mentioned in an environmental review of the grazing plan, the groups claim it didn’t account for water conditions growing worse over time.

“It did not consider all the factors that it needed to consider,” Rule said during May 24 oral arguments in Eugene, Ore.

The environmental plaintiffs filed a lawsuit against a grazing authorization for the 160,000-acre Antelope Allotment in 2019, arguing the permit violates the national forest plan, the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The nonprofits have now asked a federal judge to declare the U.S.



Patrick Pennarola/USFWS

**An Oregon spotted frog. Environmental nonprofits want a judge to shut down grazing on roughly 80,000 acres in Oregon’s Fremont-Winema National Forest.**

Forest Service’s “allotment management plan” to be unlawful. They also want the judge to shut down grazing in two pastures, Chemult and North Sheep, that make up roughly half the allotment.

U.S. District Judge Michael McShane asked the environmental plaintiffs and federal officials to focus on climate change effects during oral arguments held May 24 in Eugene, Ore.

Droughts reduce water levels in Jack Creek, which flows through the allotment, as well as the number pools that attract both frogs and cattle, Rule said. “If much or most of the creek is limited to intermittent pools, that’s when we have the problem.”

Cattle drink from these remaining pools, decreasing water supplies and

polluting them with manure while trampling or displacing frogs, according to the plaintiffs.

Tadpoles are vulnerable when the waterway dries up earlier than normal, if they’re not yet mature enough to hop toward moisture, Rule said. “If they have not metamorphosized to find pools in the creek, they will die.”

The Forest Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service did not recognize that such problems will become worse while examining strategies to mitigate grazing impacts, the plaintiffs said.

Their mitigation measures aren’t specific or timely enough to protect the frogs when they’re facing multiple stresses from drought, Rule said.

For example, the rules don’t set clear directives for when or how

quickly cattle must be fenced off or removed from pasture, she said. “It all sounds good but it will take time and these frogs don’t have time.”

Sean Martin, the federal government’s attorney, countered that the environmental review complied with all the relevant laws and relied on the best available science.

Federal officials recognized that recurrent droughts harm the frogs by drying up water sources, so the plan requires ranchers to exclude cattle from Jack Creek when stream levels are low, he said.

“I don’t think it pulled any punches,” Martin said.

A “biological opinion” required under the Endangered Species Act included mandatory protections that are meant to prevent injury to the frogs during drought conditions, according to the government.

“It has consequences if it’s blown off, judge,” he said. “If the permittee did not abide by the ESA, they’d be looking at major problems in the future.”

The law doesn’t require “perfection” from the federal government’s analysis, but it does require a “rational framework,” Martin said. In this case, the conclusions and protective measures implemented by federal scientists are entitled to deference.

“Their job is policing the ESA,” he said. “I don’t think we want to assume the biologists and rangeland ecologists acted negligently or in bad faith.”

## Valley Wide Cooperative boosts payout to members

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

Valley Wide Cooperative’s total annual compensation to members has been increased in part to help farmers and ranchers deal with higher input costs.

Valley Wide and Valley Agronomics announced a total patronage allocation of \$8.2 million, a record high. Of that, \$2.5 million will be distributed as cash, the rest in stock equity that members retire over time following a schedule.

The total allocation will go to

more than 3,000 patrons in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Utah and Nevada.

On average, Nampa, Idaho-based Valley Wide each year distributes 2% patronage on purchases made through Valley Wide and Valley Agronomics.

Patronage distributions totaled \$7.58 million a year ago and \$4.62 million two years ago. Ag Link Inc., a Washington-based farmer’s cooperative, last fall merged into Valley Wide.

Valley Wide serves more than 60 communities.

Separately, Valley Wide’s board of directors approved a scheduled, revolving stock retirement of \$4.5 million — of which \$2 million is a special redemption of current-year equity.

The cooperative said the special redemption, to be paid in cash rather than stock, will go directly to members to help with rising input and production costs.

Ben Faulk, Valley Wide chief financial officer, said in a release that members’ commitment to Valley Wide and Valley Agronomics through good times and lean times

“has given Valley Wide the balance sheet to declare this special redemption at a time our members are experiencing inflationary costs as it relates to fuel and fertilizer.”

Valley Wide also approved a special redemption two years ago as COVID-19 challenges increased.

Sales in fiscal 2021, which ended Aug. 31, totaled about \$598.8 million for pre-tax net income of \$21.3 million.

Erica Louder, communications director, said sales have increased recently in step with higher prices for agronomy inputs and fuel.

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