



S. John Collins/EO Media Group  
**Widespread drought has left elk, deer and even wild turkeys hungry and in poor condition.**

# Elk feast on farmers' haystacks across Pacific Northwest

By ANNA KING  
 Northwest News Network

RICHLAND, Wash. — Anthony Leggett's farm is nestled in the foothills outside Anthony Lakes in Eastern Oregon.

He grows pasture grass and beardless barley and puts up big stacks of hay to earn extra money for his young family. Leggett's farm costs include equipment, chemicals, fencing and fertilizers. But hay makes money.

"Your hay is your paycheck," Leggett told Northwest News Network. "That's how you pay your bills, that's how you support your family. And they just take it. You know, they're animals — that's what they do."

He said it's a frustrating situation and he does his best to safely haze the animals.

"(But) you know, if I chase them off my property, they just go to the neighbor's property and get into their haystack," Leggett said.

Across the West, widespread drought has left elk, deer and even wild turkeys hungry and in poor condition — even a bit desperate.

Wild elk are even attacking farmers' haystacks in Washington state and Oregon. Record snow across much of the Northwest's mountains has driven animals down to the lowlands — in gangs. And climate scientists say things may only get worse in the future.

Joey McCanna spends a lot of his winter teaching hay growers and ranchers how to build elk-proof electric fencing.

"The other big thing we have going on, that we have staff kind of running frantic on, is we have a lot of elk damage," McCanna said on a recent wildlife management Zoom online session. "Elk getting into hay stacks is one of the big ones."

McCanna is an expert on resolving wildlife conflicts with humans for the state Department of Fish and Wildlife. He teaches farmers how to set up automatic propane cannons to haze them with noise. But elk are smart — and sometimes it doesn't always work.

This year, drought has upped the stakes — hay prices are up across the West.

"This summer was very hot and dry. And alfalfa and grass hay is at a premium right now," McCanna said.

Meade Krosby is a senior scientist at the University of Washington's Climate Impacts Group in Seattle.

"So, one of the primary ways that wildlife is responding to changing climate is by moving," Krosby said. "They shift their ranges — they want to track the change in climate as it happens."

She said now more than ever

before, animals will need to move quickly. Climate induced floods and fires in the Northwest are dramatically pushing animals around on the landscape. She said wildlife will need safe corridors to run for it.

"They have to move so fast, but they have all this stuff in the way," Krosby said. "They have roads and highways in the way, they have cities in the way, agricultural areas. And all of these form these barriers to wildlife getting to where they need to go to shift their ranges to adapt to climate change."

Making things worse, elk can starve on hay.

Elk have four-chambered guts that change their bacteria with the season and what's available to eat. In the spring and summer, bacteria colonies adjust to digest green shoots and high-protein feed. But, in the fall and winter gut bacteria are essentially programmed to eat big quantities of dried twigs and grasses with a lower energy.

"The bug is clostridium perfringens," Colin Gillin explains. He's the state vet for Oregon's Department of Fish and Wildlife.

"It's a bacteria that all ruminants carry in their guts, it's just you don't want that clostridium to get out of control," Gillin said. "And it's when you throw corn in there, it starts to have a party."

In this case, the corn is hay.

The bacteria break down the walls of the stomach and intestines, so an elk can starve to death with a belly full of alfalfa.

At the Northwest Hay Expo in Kennewick, Washington, mostly men, mostly unmasked, roam around the great hall, slapping hands and checking out the latest in twine, balers and tarping technology. Pamphlets, ball caps and squishy stress-balls shaped like little tractors litter vendor's tables.

A vendor motions to a passing farmer, "Hi, ya, how you? Enjoying your day so far?"

Clint View is from Walla Walla, Washington. He's with a major tarping company called ITC Services in Moses Lake. He said one solution for growers is to install "elk curtains," which are tarps covering the sides of big stacks. Left unprotected, View said, "Stacks have fallen on elk 'cause they'll eat into it so much that it will actually destabilize the stack and it will collapse and fall in on the animals."

Every year, elk break down the fences of Leggett, the Anthony Lakes farmer, to get at his hay and crops. And every year, he fixes them.

Still, Leggett has made his peace with the elk.

"We just happen to live in a spot where there's a trail that they come down on," he said. "For us, it's life."

**'YOUR HAY IS YOUR PAYCHECK. THAT'S HOW YOU PAY YOUR BILLS, THAT'S HOW YOU SUPPORT YOUR FAMILY. AND THEY JUST TAKE IT. YOU KNOW, THEY'RE ANIMALS — THAT'S WHAT THEY DO.'**

Anthony Leggett | farmer

# Miracle-Ear Hearing Aid Sale

**Tiny Hearing Aids**  
 On sale for a limited time!

*Tiny Digital technology delivers the clearest, most accurate sound quality available in hearing aids!\**

Offer ends February 4th, 2022



**FREE hearing tests\***  
 Reveals if and where you need hearing assistance and is recommended for everyone over 50 years old.



**Attention hearing aid wearers:**  
 If you already wear a hearing aid (any make or model), we can help you, too! Our **FREE** computerized analysis and tune-up help keep your hearing aid working its best.\*\*

**FREE ear canal inspections\***  
 Sometimes it's nothing more than excessive earwax. We use our state-of-the-art Video Otoscope to look inside your ear canal. You can watch on a video monitor as it happens.



**Fully Digital Hearing Aid**  
 Many Styles Available!

**DON'T WAIT!**

For a limited time only  
 Receive 2  
**AudioTone™ Pro**  
 Hearing aids

Now Only...

**\$28!**  
 per month†

**LIMITED-TIME OFFER. CALL TODAY!**

**Miracle-Ear Center**  
 Youngs Bay Plaza  
 173 S. Hwy 101  
 Warrenton, OR 97146  
 (503) 836-7921

**Miracle-Ear Center**  
 2505 Main Ave N, Suite C  
 Tillamook, OR 97141  
 (503) 836-7926

\*Our hearing test and video otoscopic inspection are always free. Hearing test is an audiometric test to determine proper amplification needs only. These are not medical exams or diagnoses nor are they intended to replace a physician's care. If you suspect a medical problem, please seek treatment from your doctor.  
 \*\*Hearing aids do not restore natural hearing. Individual experiences vary depending on severity of hearing loss, accuracy of evaluation, proper fit and ability to adapt to amplification. Only your Miracle-Ear® representative can determine which model and options may be right for you.  
 †\$28 per month. Calculated at 12.9% interest for 60 months, most qualify with Miracle-Ear® Patient Financing.  
 \*\*\*If you are not completely satisfied, the aids must be returned within 30 days of the completion of fitting, in satisfactory condition for a full refund.

To Receive the Offer Mention Code:  
**22FEBOFFER**



Trusted for Over 70 Years