



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian File

Irrigation equipment waters fields outside of Echo on Friday, July 24, 2020.

Drought:

Continued from Page 2

And often as not the seasonal downpours arrive to provide at least some relief.

May, on average, is the wettest month in Baker County.

And June ranks a close second.

“If it starts raining, that obviously changes the dynamics,” Bennett said.

Mark Ward certainly wouldn’t begrudge a few cloudbursts.

Not even if a tempest turned his family’s fields in Baker Valley into temporarily muddy messes.

“If a rainstorm keeps me out of the fields, I’m OK with that,” Ward said.

The Wards grow potatoes, wheat, peppermint, alfalfa and silage corn, among other crops.

Mark Ward said that despite the relatively brief bout of wintry weather in February, and the stingy skies that prevailed during March, the soil moisture in his family’s fields was “pretty good” the last week of March.

“It’s not mud but it’s not dust,” Ward said.

He’s much less pleased with another weather phenomenon.

Wind.

A series of storms that swept through the region starting in early March delivered sparse precipitation, and in some places scarcely a drop or a flake.

But the parade of cold fronts produced copious amounts of wind.

This isn’t uncommon, to be sure.

Wind, in the most basic meteorological sense, is merely the movement of air from areas of high pressure to low. When a cold front, which is the dividing line both between warm and cold air and between higher and lower pressure, pushes off to the southeast, the air pressure in Northeast Oregon rises.

The resulting pressure gradient causes air to rush toward the departing cold front, which explains the prevailing wind directions of west, northwest and north, depending on the terrain.

The canyons and valleys, notably the Grande Ronde, North Powder and Baker valleys, and Ladd and Pyles canyons, act as natural funnels, squeezing the air and causing the wind to accelerate.

Wind gusts topped 30 mph on 12 days in March at both the Baker City Airport and the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, with peak gusts topping 50 mph on several days in both places.

“A 50 mph wind, that sucks a lot of moisture out of the ground,” Ward said.

Umatilla County outlook

Oregonians typically divide the state geographically between east and west. But for the 2021 irrigation season, Scott Oviatt is splitting Oregon between north and south.

The snow survey supervisor for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Oregon office, Oviatt said people could draw a line between Ontario

See Drought, Page 4

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