

Ranchers, hay producers hit hard by drought and heat

By EMRY DINMAN
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin



Two large stacks of hay sit along West Whitman Drive west of College Place, on Tuesday, July 27, 2021.

Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WESTON — In the foothills of the Blue Mountains, just down the road from Weston, rancher Cheryl Costner has watched as the mountain range land where her cattle feed has grown brittle and dry under the ongoing drought.

Ranchers throughout the West with little viable pasture for their livestock are turning to hay markets to supplement their feed, driving up prices for a supply that has been likewise diminished by the combination of drought and June's heatwave. Now, some are worried about finding — and affording — enough to feed their animals.

"We're rather nervous," Costner said.

Costner's livestock typically have more than enough forage where they're located, but the pasture has dried up faster than almost ever before, Costner said. She owns Upper Dry Creek Ranch with her husband, Robert, and typically expects the range to dry up toward the middle or end of July.

"We're not in any place that is going to have water coming out of a pipe," she said. "When mother nature quits with the rain, we're done with our moisture."

But this year, the grass dried up several weeks early at the beginning of July. Costner can recall only one other year in the last 17 where the grass became parched before the Fourth of July. When the pasture dries up, the grasses become less palatable to the livestock and can contain as little as half the protein, Costner said. That in turn can cause the livestock to drop weight, whether they're older cows or young heifers that are nursing a calf while continuing to grow, she added.

"We've never felt like we have to supplement alfalfa (for the cows) in the past," Costner said. "This year we're considering it. We're already seeing some of the body condition on our cattle

decreasing."

Sheep are particularly sensitive to diminished feed quality, especially when they're lactating. But the Costners have arranged to graze their sheep in a circle-irrigated field in Touchet, Washington, having struck a deal with a farmer there. While the field's cover crop, barley and vetch, has dried up under the drought conditions, the weeds — prickly lettuce, redroot pigweed and lamb's quarters — still are viable and highly nutritious. Between the weeds and barley heads, the lambs are staying well fed, Costner said.

But the Costners are looking at increased feed costs for their cows, if they can even

order enough to get through the winter.

"I do have some hay ordered right now," she said. "But it's not enough."

Hay supply also hit by drought, heat

On the other side of the equation, producers who grow grasses or legumes that get sold as hay also have been hit hard by the hot and dry year.

Hay is typically irrigated, said Tim DeRuwe, a grower in the Walla Walla Valley who sells hay to both local and export markets. Local farmers primarily rely on surface water to irrigate their crops, such as from the Walla Walla River or smaller creeks, added Craig Chris-

tensen, a Walla Walla Valley grower specializing in small bale hay who sells mostly to local buyers, often to be fed to horses.

"Those dried up probably six weeks earlier than they normally do," Christensen said.

Growers with water rights and access to wells can get through the added strain from the drought, DeRuwe added. But those water rights are usually only loosened when the state issues an emergency drought declaration, as Washington did July 14.

"If you're looking around, you'll see a lot of alfalfa fields that are burnt up already," DeRuwe said.

The heat wave that struck the Pacific Northwest in June also left its mark on the hay industry. For legume varieties of hay such as alfalfa, producers want to cut the crop before it blooms, which increases the hay's fiber and decreases its protein, DeRuwe said.

The heat wave's impact on grass hay is hitting the small bale producer harder.

"It's not responding to the water or anything," Christensen said. "It just gets too hot. We can't get it wet enough, and it just seems to not want to grow."

As Christensen looks to

the years ahead, he said he worries that recovery could be a long process even under ideal conditions.

"The thing that scares me the most, the drought doesn't end the first day it rains," he said. "Recovery from a drought of this nature could take years."

Higher prices, instability

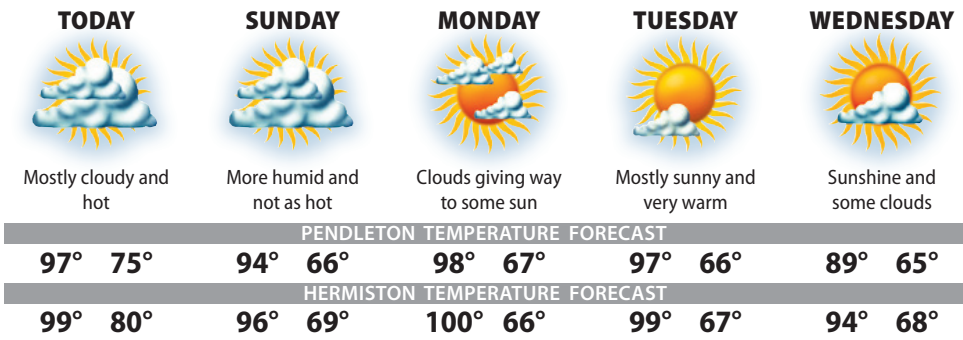
Local prices for large bales of hay — small bales are significantly more expensive — are shaping up to be around \$210 a ton, DeRuwe said, around 20% more than the average year.

Increased prices are beneficial in the short-term for hay growers, but growers are worried that those higher prices and historic demand for their product may have disastrous long-term effects.

"It's good for the meantime, but it comes back to haunt us later on," DeRuwe said. "Get too pricey and export people in foreign countries can't afford to buy it. Greed isn't the best — what we need is a good average."

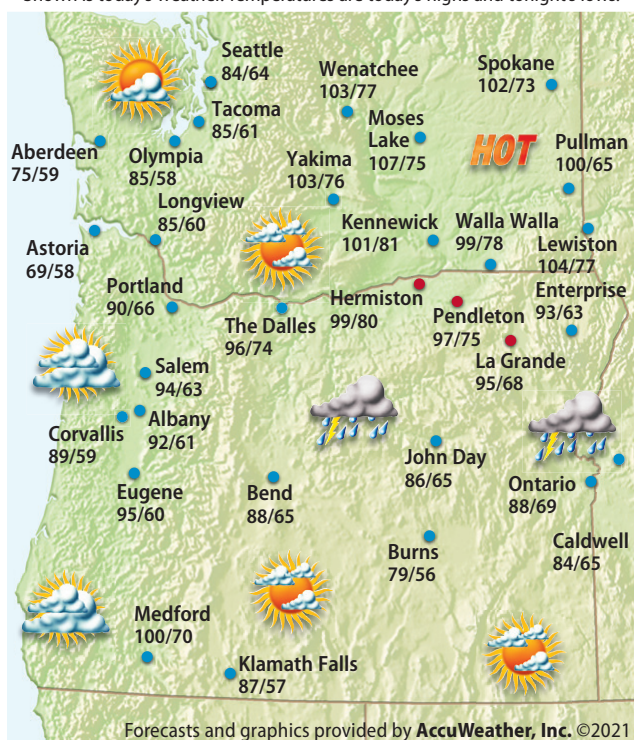
For his part, Christensen said he is concerned that some ranchers, both locally in the valley and across the U.S., will collapse under the strain of high prices and desiccated pasture forage.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	104°	65°
Month to date	92°	60°
Normals	92°	60°
Records	109° (2020)	40° (1933)

PRECIPITATION through 3 p.m. yest.

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	0.02"
Normal month to date	0.35"
Year to date	4.36"
Last year to date	8.63"
Normal year to date	8.30"

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	108°	67°
Normals	95°	60°
Records	110° (2020)	46° (1953)

PRECIPITATION through 3 p.m. yest.

24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"
Month to date	Trace
Normal month to date	0.12"
Year to date	1.93"
Last year to date	1.66"
Normal year to date	5.14"

WINDS (in mph)

Today	Sun.
Boardman SW 6-12	S 4-8
Pendleton WSW 7-14	SSW 6-12

SUN AND MOON

Sunrise today	5:38 a.m.
Sunset tonight	8:25 p.m.
Moonrise today	none
Moonset today	1:54 p.m.

MOON PHASES

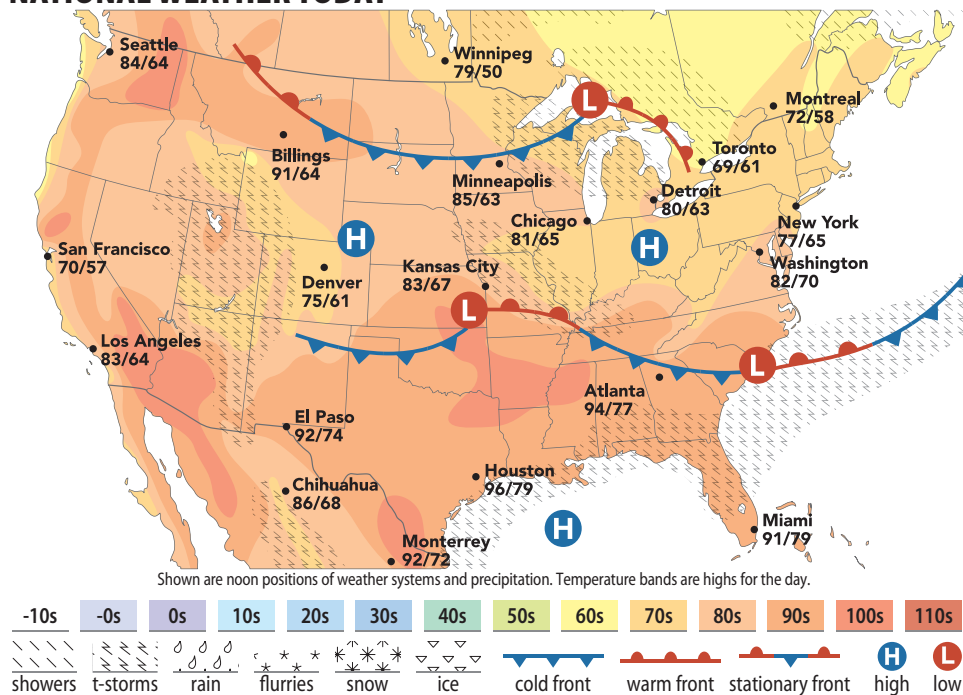
Last	New	First	Full
July 31	Aug 8	Aug 15	Aug 22

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 109° in Richland, Wash. Low 37° in Wolcott, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Walla Walla shooting suspect released after getting \$100,000 bond

By JEDIDIAH MAYNES
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

WALLA WALLA — A Walla Walla man accused of shooting two people early Tuesday, July 27, had his bail set at \$100,000 on July 28 in Walla Walla County Superior Court and was released later in the day from Walla Walla County Jail after posting bail.

Miguel "Junior" A. Ferrusca, 21, was arrested by Walla Walla police and booked into the jail for investigation of two counts of first-degree assault, a Class A felony. Prosecutors filed charges on July 28.

Walla Walla County deputy prosecuting attorney Jennine Christensen said in court that one of the victims was shot in the shin and the other was shot "multiple times" and his condition was unknown.

According to court documents, Ernesto Moreno Madrigal, 25, was shot in the leg and Julian D. Saldana, 19, was shot multiple times.

Police noted Saldana's injuries prevented him from speaking to detectives while he was being treated at Providence St. Mary Medical Center in Walla Walla, accord-

ing to the documents.

Police said Moreno Madrigal spoke to detectives, saying Ferrusca was the one who shot at them in the 200 block of Tausick Way.

Moreno Madrigal said he had come along with Saldana to pick up an unidentified female and Ferrusca and a few other men confronted them, according to a press release from the Walla Walla Police Department. Police said they were told Ferrusca was holding an assault-style gun, demanding they leave.

Ferrusca then allegedly shot Saldana multiple times and Moreno Madrigal was hit in the leg. Saldana fell and Ferrusca allegedly kicked him while he was down, according to the records.

Saldana and Moreno Madrigal got back into their car, with Saldana having to be helped in by his friend, according to the release. They fled and waved down paramedics at the intersection of South Second Avenue and East Main Street.

Police were notified of the two victims at the hospital and interviewed Moreno Madrigal there before interviewing Ferrusca after 3 a.m.

According to the documents, Ferrusca told detectives he heard 10 loud bangs around 12:30 a.m. while he was going to bed, but he was unsure if they were fireworks.

Police asked him about being named as the attacker in a shooting that night outside his residence and Ferrusca followed that question by asking about "stand your ground" laws in Washington, according to the records.

Police gave him a brief explanation of self-defense laws, they noted, and Ferrusca asked to speak to an attorney. Detectives ended the interview, documents showed.

Ferrusca's family was in court to ask for a lower bail amount and for Ferrusca to be released on house arrest.

Judge Pro Tem Robin Olson said he wouldn't reduce the bail amount at the time nor allow for a 10% cash equivalent. Olson said he needed more legal information sorted out before making any such decision.

"This is a very serious offense," Olson told the family.

Olson also ordered for electronic home monitoring if Ferrusca did post bail before July 29.

IN BRIEF

Wolves injure steer, kill one heifer

BAKER CITY — Wolves from the Lookout Mountain killed another cow and injured one steer in eastern Baker County during the past week, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife concluded after biologists investigated the two cases.

Those are the third and fourth attacks on cattle attributed to the Lookout Mountain pack since July 13. All were in the same general area northeast of Durkee.

In response, Baker County commissioners asked fish and wildlife to approve a lethal take permit and assist with killing some of the wolves from the Lookout Mountain pack,

said Brian Ratliff, district wildlife biologist at ODFW's Baker City office.

As of July 21, state officials had not approved the permit.

The most recent investigation was Monday, July 26, in the Manning Creek area northeast of Durkee.

A rancher on July 25 found an injured 850-pound, 1-1/2-year-old steer on private land, according to an ODFW report.

A department biologist examined the injured steer and concluded, based on more than 40 bite scrapes above the left hock, along with deep tissue trauma and missing tissue, wolves were responsible and estimated the attack was 10 to 12 days earlier.

—EO Media Group

CORRECTION: In the Page A3 story "Delish Bistro readies for reopening," published Thursday, July 29, the photo caption misspelled the name of an individual. The correct name is Sarah Siena-Hull.

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