

SPRING RAIN | GRANT COUNTY

Spring rains ease drought concerns in Grant County

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — While Grant County is still in a drought, the situation may not be quite as dire as was projected earlier this year — and it's much better than it was at this time in 2021.

Robust rains throughout the early spring have largely blunted drought concerns, even though Drought.gov, the national integrated drought information system, says almost 87% of Grant County is currently affected by drought at some level.

Kyle Sullivan, manager of the Grant Soil and Water Conservation District, said the rains throughout April and May definitely helped, but he's heard mixed reports about their impact.

"That's what I'm hearing," he said. "I think I was visiting with someone from the South Fork (John Day) area, and (they said) that they were having issues with springs drying up and a lot of the things we were seeing last year."

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— Ken Holliday, Grant County rancher

On the other hand, Sullivan added, the local hay crop looks much more bountiful than it did at this time last year.

"Driving through the upper (John Day) valley, it seems that everyone has their hay down now, and before they cut it, it was a lot taller and seemed to have a lot more volume to it, certainly, than it did last year," he said. "I'm not sure how extensive the rains were in hitting everybody in the county; it might be a bit more localized."

Grant County rancher Ken Holliday said the wet spring helped ranchers avoid a potentially bleak year coming on the heels of last year's historic dry spell and record-setting heat wave in late June.

"All the guys in the cattle industry, I tried to tell them one year of this stuff is one thing,

but you get two years in a row and we're in big trouble," he said.

Following the damp spring, Holliday said he's optimistic, and he stressed to the people working on his ranch that a little moisture in the late spring can make all the difference.

"I kept telling my guys, if we get three good rains in May and June it'll be a whole different year than last year," he said.

Holliday says he is leaving more feed in his pastures than he ever had last year.

"Everything is healing up," he said. "The carrying capacity is above normal. Mother Nature is an amazing thing if it goes in your favor. Sometimes not, but this time it went in our favor."

Shaun Robertson, president of the Grant County Farm Bureau, said the spring mois-

ture has been a blessing and has allowed the county to make significant gains from last year's severe drought.

"Across the county, landowners are talking about putting up record amounts of hay and haying ground that hasn't seen a crop for decades," he said. "That's quite a turnaround from last year, when local producers were reducing herds and feeding hay early because of the lack of a fall range."

Robertson said there is a double edge to an abundance of spring moisture as talk of conservation falls by the wayside when water storage is in good shape.

"Nobody feels like it's necessary to talk about water conservation, but those conversations are just as important when you have lots of water as they were during last year's drastic water shortages," he said.

"This is a very, very important topic for everyone and something that isn't getting any kind of attention it deserves, regardless of the hundreds of times we visit and revisit over the centuries as a community."

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