

Cattle:

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The ranch

Warnock issued a statement on the situation by email Jan. 2.

"I am not aware of any plans or attempts to seize any assets," he said.

He also described the situation.

"Dean Oregon Ranches cows were all purchased in Oregon and Washington and began arriving on Dean Oregon Ranches property October of 2020 and continued arriving through July of 2021. The cows were a mixture of spring and fall calvers," Warnock said. "They were all acclimated to this climate, but not all acclimated to this specific terrain. Some do not know how to navigate canyons, so they have wandered in the wrong direction as we searched for them and brought in other groups. New cows are more difficult to gather than cows that have run on the same range for several consecutive years and know the way home. These



Calves rescued from the deep snows in the Upper Imnaha get some refreshment Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, at the Joseph-area ranch of Mark and Anna Butterfield. They are among many rescued in the past week.

cows are not calving in the snow; the ranch's fall calving season was October through November. When we began gathering in September, there were 1,613 mother cows on summer range.

He acknowledged bovine

casualties in the recovery efforts.

"Despite the efforts of our crew and the community, 10 cows have been found unrecoverable," he said, adding that "1,548 Dean Oregon Ranches mother cows were successfully gathered by Dean Oregon Ranches crew before the snow. After the snow, 34 mother cows have been gathered through the joint efforts of our crew and the community. Of those, 26 were Dean Oregon Ranches cattle; the others were owned by neighboring ranches."

Warnock expressed his gratitude to fellow ranchers assisting in the recovery.

"We truly appreciate the effort the community has shown in this final push to gather the remaining cows," he said. "We plan to continue aerial searches and hope to bring in the majority of the remaining 29 mother cows."

County involved

At an emergency meeting of the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners on an unrelated matter Dec. 30,

Nash — who is a rancher and president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association — said information on the situation at present was limited.

"The things we do know is that this was a Forest Service permit for the Upper Big Sheep Creek and the Upper Imnaha," Nash said after the meeting. "It takes in a large area — 72,000 acres — known as the Marr Flat Grazing Allotment. They had a viable permit to go on sometime in the spring. They were supposed to have all cattle removed according to the Forest Service permit. By the 15th of October, there were still cattle that remained out there and are in very deep snow, some of them have expired. There is a rescue effort being made right now to try and rescue as many as possible. We've committed county resources to it. There've been a number of people who have volunteered or have contributed time. There's been helicopters that have flown feed into some that were extremely isolated and the rescue continues. Those are the basic facts that I do know."

Nash went on to specify the county resources.

"The Road Department cleared about 10 miles of road in a heavy snowfall area on the Upper Imnaha," he said. "They cleared about 90 trees out of the road. Compounding the heavy snowfall that came all at once, we had an event where we had rain and heavy snowfall afterward. There are trees across a lot of the access roads that they're trying to get down right now that has exasperated those efforts to try to extricate the cattle from their situation."

He was unsure how many cattle were involved, but was aware some had young calves.

Rancher Casey Tippett said he called the Forest Service in November after hearing reports from hunters that cattle were on land where they weren't supposed to be, but he never heard back from the federal agency.

"Those cattle should've been taken off that land a long time ago," Tippett said



Anna Butterfield/Contributed Photo
Dr. Brooke Greenshields of Double Arrow Veterinary Clinic in Enterprise, left, and rancher Anna Butterfield at Butterfield's ranch northeast of Joseph attend to one of the calves rescued from the Bob Dean Oregon Ranch in southern Wallowa County.

Dec. 30. "When they take strange cattle to an allotment, when winter hits they don't know how to get out. The people who know that country should've been getting them out."

Humane Society

Carol Vencill, president of the local Humane Society, said she, too, was unsure of the numbers, but said the snow was 7 feet deep in some places.

"Adam Stein is really the hero in all of this," she said of the Joseph construction contractor who got the ball rolling.

She said he started gathering people to help after viewing the cattle from the air.

Warnock added his take on Stein's assistance.

"I contacted Adam Stein to fly for the ranch and flew with him to look for cows multiple times," Warnock said. "I am very thankful we reached out to Adam — he has been awesome through all this and his expertise in the snow and in the air has been an invaluable resource."

Nash said various agencies have been apprised of the situation, ready to lend what aid they could. He said the Wallowa County Sheriff's Office and the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest are aware, as well as others.

"I've had some discussion with the Oregon Department of Agriculture on this situation," he said. "They're the ones with the Brand Department a lot of the (state laws) concerning the current situation."

Peter Fargo, public affairs officer for the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest based in Baker City, said in an email Dec. 31 that the county, the sheriff's office and volunteers not only had been rescuing cattle, they "have been hauling hay and water with snowmobiles, side-by-sides and helicopters. The priority of the operation is first on every-

one's safety and then saving as many cattle as possible."

He said the Forest Service instructed the permittee and ranch manager to remove all the cattle in October.

Fargo estimated there were an estimated 70 head of cattle still on the allotment Dec. 21 and as of Dec. 30, there were up to 25 animals still unaccounted for. Tom Birkmaier, president of Wallowa County Stockgrowers, said he has heard the numbers are higher, but couldn't say exactly how many.

But mostly it's people in Wallowa County who are getting out the effort to rescue the stranded cattle and calves.

"There's a lot of people who are quite concerned," Nash said.

Birkmaier, who ranches on Crow Creek where he and wife, Kelly, have been caring for some of the rescued calves, was emphatic in his concern for the situation.

"Several factors created near perfect storm that led to an unfortunate series of event impacting a group of cattle in southern Wallowa County. Apparent mismanagement, extreme weather events and lactating cows with young calves all played a part," Birkmaier said. "Over 40 folks nearly all volunteers, mostly led by Adam Stein's common sense and tireless commitment both in the air and on the ground have been working the past 10 days on an incredible rescue of many livestock."

Still, many livestock have succumbed to the conditions.

"As Wallowa County stockmen, we need to hold each other accountable, work hard to support to help and support those in need and do everything humanely possible such as this from happening again in the future," he said. "In addition, serve our animals with the animal husbandry practices they so deserve."

ZOE HERMENS

Zoe Hermens, of Wallowa, had two solid scoring efforts in two wins for the Cougars' girls basketball team last week. She netted 14 points in a 39-18 victory over Condon on Dec. 28, and two days later, scored 20 points, including 11 in the second half, to spark Wallowa's second-half rally in a 49-46 win at Enterprise, the Cougars' sixth of the season.

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