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that year. The county peaked at moderate drought levels throughout the following year.

The conditions are significantly impacting ag operations already.

"I have lost two cuts of hay over the last two years on Cottonwood Creek in Monument," said Farm Bureau member Gary Adams in comments supplied by Robertson. "I only get 30 days of water, so I get one cut (of hay) a year. So I have lost about 15 tons a year, a significant loss for a small farm."

In another experience that Robertson shared with the Eagle, Micah Wilson, a Grant County ranch manager, said the drought's impacts started last May. Wilson said the pastures his cows had grazed early in the season never recovered.

Like other ranchers across the West, he said the ranch he manages would be buying about 500 additional tons of hay this year.

He noted that, if conditions do not change, they would have to "destock" in the late summer, early fall.

Kyle Sullivan, Grant Soil and Water Conservation District's director, runs a ranch for his in-laws and his wife in Dayville. He said no spring rain added to less-than-normal precipitation. The lack of rain, coupled with low temperatures and steady winds, stunted grass growth.

Robertson reported a similar experience in a mildly warm winter, with low precipitation, that evolved into a cold, dry, mildly windy spring.



Drought conditions are significantly impacting agricultural operations.

Getty Images

# How does the heat affect drought?

Robertson said the heat essentially sucks out whatever moisture is in the ground and the plant.

"We don't get any (moisture) recovery at night, and plants cure much earlier," he said.

The lack of moisture reduces available feed for everything: cattle, wildlife and watershed function, he said.

Julsrud added that the heat, coupled with the wind, increases evaporation, dries the ground out faster and slows water spread in irrigation ditches.

He likened the phenomenon to watering a house plant that has not been watered for a month. The water, Julsrud said, does not soak into the soil. Instead it spills onto the floor.

"The same principle applies to the soil in the world," he said. "If they get so dry, and you try to spread water on it, it doesn't soak in. It just sheets off."

### Early regulations?

To maintain critical thresholds for rivers and streams lakes to maintain fish survival, the state's regulations of water allotments will likely kick in much earlier this year, Julsrud said — any day now.

Oregon's water laws are based on "prior appropriation." Under Oregon law, the person who established water rights next to a stream or body of water is the last to get shut off during times of drought or low streamflows. Meanwhile, those downstream from a "senior" rights holder have to curtail their usage.

Hailey Boethin, the county's assistant watermaster, said the water district is roughly four to six weeks early in receiving calls for state regulations.

She said when water users see the "writing on the wall," they work "collaboratively" together to best utilize the limited resource.

### Regional differences?

Boethin said the North Fork of the John Day River is typically a healthy system. Julsrud said this is because the river starts farther north than the other stems. The Middle Fork, Boethin noted, is the second best. Julsrud pointed out that the upper Prairie City country, including Reynolds Creek, does well in drier seasons as it starts up high in the hills.

Canyon and Dixie Creeks, he said, do not perform as well when low streamflows occur. Julsrud noted that southerly flowing tributaries around Prairie City are "generally pretty poor."

Boethin pointed out that some of the south Prairie City tributaries can be healthy in the upper timber country but unhealthy closer to the valley floor. Julsrud said this could be due to fault lines, cracks in the bedrock and a host of other "crazy things."

Robertson said he suspects some will have a harder time this year than others. Overall, he said, irrigators use very little of the total amount of water in the John Day system. Instead, he said they rely upon the system during the most critical time of the year when flows are the lowest.

Robertson said there are many proven techniques to extend the hydrograph when peak runoff occurs and when water is most critical for agriculture and aquatics. He said those improvements would dramatically improve flow conditions for both irrigators and fish but that Oregon appears unwilling to take those measures.

#### **Increased wildfire risks?**

Ron Simpson, Malheur National Forest fire and aviation staff officer, told the Eagle that a drought letter recently went out to range permit holders. Simpson, who emphasized that he is not a range expert, said that the grazing system is spread thin without the spring rain that usually generates more abundant grass growth.

"Depending on how many cows per acre are out there, I think (the drought) is just going to put stress on the system as a whole," he said.

Simpson said the drought conditions had put the fire season ahead of schedule by about a month.

Simpson said, without the spring rain, larger fuels that typically retain more moisture and are more fire resilient are drying out more quickly, leading to the potential for larger, more robust fires in the forest.

"That increases intensities and the burn intensity of the fire itself," he said.

## Paws

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nings, much like Marvin. Hope 4 Paws puts them together with owners who love them, and I think that's such a valuable service in this community."

The organization also works with canines.

Last summer, a lost border collie named Bailey wandered out into the mountains and appeared in the John Day Valley, according to Hope 4 Paws Director Scotta Callister.

Hope 4 Paws volunteer Shawn Duncan said Bailey was lost for about two and a half months in the valley before being captured by good Samaritans. Duncan said Bailey would not let anybody catch her because she was scared.

When Bailey was hurt and lying on a guardrail just outside of John Day heading toward Prairie City, a kind person noticed her and checked to see if she was alive, according to Duncan. Bailey, with a serious gunshot wound to one leg, noticed the person trying to check on her and tried to run away.

The good Samaritan followed Bailey until she stopped walking

away.

"(Bailey) was extremely skittish, too frightened to be caught,"
Callister said. "As sightings began to be reported, volunteers searched for her, and a good Samaritan was able to pick her up outside of town and take her to the vet, where she was placed under Hope 4 Paws' care."

Callister said the wounded leg was amputated due to the serious injury. The dog's family was reached, thanks to the help of social media posts.

Duncan said the family from



Contributed photo

When Kati Dunn gets home from work, she is greeted by an abundance of affection from Marvin, who was adopted through Hope 4 Paws.

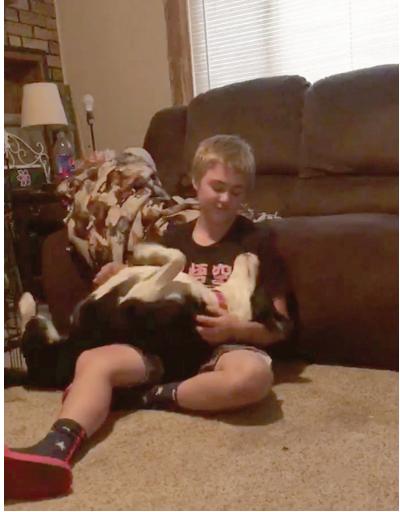
Scio told her, when the family went out horseback riding, they lost Bailey.

"They had since lost hope of finding their dog alive and had been unaware of the frantic rescue efforts that unfolded," Callister said. "The single mom and her 13-year-old son were elated to learn their Bailey was still alive."

Scotta said, thanks to the donations of generous people, the cost

of the amputation was covered, and Bailey and her family were tearfully reunited.

"Everybody pulled through, and I even had somebody get ahold of me and said they would cover the cost of the whole amputation, but by that time we already raised enough money," Duncan said. "The owner has a son, and that was his dog. They sent us a video of them reuniting, and it was a tear-jerker."



Contributed photo

Even with the amputated paw, Bailey is elated to be reunited with his owner Caige Shockey again.

Duncan said these stories happen often. She said she wished people would pick up the phone and call Hope 4 Paws when they need assistance. Even if a person is trying to let a dog or cat go, Duncan said the organization can help so the animal is not abandoned.

"We all need help at some point, and we are gladly willing to do that," Duncan said. "Whether it's re-homing, food, spay and neuter, whatever — we will help."

whatever — we will help."

Email hope4pawsgc@gmail.

com to get in contact with Hope 4

Paws.

"In 2021, we're looking forward to getting out in the community more, as conditions allow, and continuing to help address the needs of pets and pet owners in Grant County," Callister said.











