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Some of Todd Nash's cattle graze on the Wade Ranch near Lostine on Oct. 6.

Ronald Bond/EO Media Group

HIGH and DRY

Drought steals pounds from cattle, dollars from ranchers

By JAYSON JACOBY, RONALD BOND and BENNETT HALL
EO Media Group

For several weeks, Enterprise cattle rancher Todd Nash has daily filled a 1,000-gallon tank with water from his home just outside town and hauled it to one of his herds, which currently is feeding on land he is renting from the Wade Ranch a couple miles south of Lostine.

A well on the portion of land he is using dried up after about 2 1/2 weeks, resulting in the need to drive the narrow, winding dirt road into the backcountry.

But Nash knows others in the county have it worse.

"This is fortunate that I'm this close (to home)," he said, estimating he only has to drive around 10 miles one way — though the entire process of filling the tank, navigating the roads once off Highway 82 and emptying its contents into the well or a 3,000-gallon cistern on the land itself can take around three hours. "Some of the guys that are hauling water are quite a lot further out."

Other ranchers, he said, are hauling much more than the 3 1/2 tons he deals with on a daily basis.

Hauling water to cattle where there is none

may be one of the more visible impacts of the drought that has severely impacted Northeastern Oregon — and, really, the West — in 2021.

But it is far from the only one.

Because of the early start to the drought — fueled by a lack of the spring rains that ranchers depend on — many had to adjust on the fly to get needed food into their animals.

And with cattle, food means pounds, which equates to dollars in value.

Nash, who has been a cattle rancher since 1994, said he's never seen a year to compare with 2021.

First came an extremely cold April, with a hard freeze almost every night. That was followed by a heatwave, with unusually high temperatures in May and June leading into a scorcher of a summer. And through it all, precipitation was way below normal.

"It set up for the worst grazing season I've ever seen in Northeast Oregon," Nash said. "Even talking to the old-timers here, they've never seen such a tough forage year."

Nash's operation is relatively small, with only about 100 head of cattle. But as the president-elect of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, he talks to lots of other producers to stay

abreast of what's happening around the state, and he'll tell you that things are rough all over right now.

Throughout the state, extreme weather conditions this year led to poor forage conditions for livestock. The weather also impacted irrigators, leading to a poor hay crop. With hay in short supply and supplemental feed in high demand, the cost of cattle production has soared. Many ranchers also found themselves in the same plight as Nash, having to haul water to thirsty herds as ponds and springs dried up, adding another unanticipated cost to their operations.

Wallowa rancher Dennis Sheehy was forced to feed hay to his herds much longer than usual this spring due to a lack of forage on the range. He had to use about 80% of the hay he hoped to hold for this coming winter.

"We weren't able to turn out on some of our range land as early as we would (normally)," he said.

Each move made — even though necessary — seems to set off a detrimental domino effect. As the year went on, Sheehy for a time had to

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Ronald Bond/EO Media Group

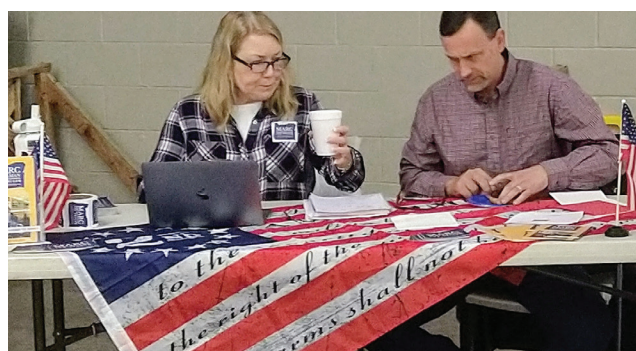
Wallowa County rancher Todd Nash turns the valve to begin transferring water from a tank into a holding cistern on Oct. 6. Nash, along with some other ranchers, has had to haul water to his herd due to a lack of water during the drought.

Grant County Conservatives speak out

By BENNETT HALL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — Roughly 100 people turned out at the Grant County Fairgrounds on Saturday, Oct. 30, to air their grievances with the government and rally for change.

Billed as an "urgent call to action," the event was organized by the Grant County Conservatives and was promoted in fliers and mailers distributed by the group as a



Bennett Hall/Blue Mountain Eagle

Gubernatorial candidate Marc Thielman passed out campaign information and spoke at a Grant County Conservatives rally in John Day on Saturday, Oct. 30.

way to stand up for personal liberty in the face of government overreach.

Saturday's five-hour rally was a follow-up to the Grant County Conservatives' kick-off event, which drew a little over 200 people to the fairgrounds on May 9. It was also a fundraiser for GCC-PAC, the organization's fledgling political action committee.

While the turnout was lower the second time around, that did little to dampen the enthusiasm of the people in attendance, who clapped and cheered for a dozen speakers who took a turn on the flag-draped stage of the Trowbridge Pavilion.

The speakers covered a wide range of topics, but there were a number of recurring themes, including:

- The need to stand up for

Christian and conservative values.

- Opposition to mask and vaccine mandates imposed in the effort to stem the COVID-19 pandemic.

- A belief that the danger posed by the virus is overblown and is being used as an excuse to exert government control.

- The importance of fighting back against a "tyrannical" government that is steadily chipping away at individual liberty.

Monument-area resident Bill Newman, who helped organize the May event, served as master of ceremonies, introducing the speakers, calling out raffle winners and calling for bids on a couple of auction items.

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Findley hosts meet-and-greet in John Day

By STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — State Sen. Lynn Findley, R-Vale, met with roughly a dozen Grant County residents Friday, Oct. 29, for a community coffee at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck in John Day.

In a wide-ranging session, Findley touched on redistricting, water issues, and where he comes down on the push in many rural counties to ditch Oregon for Idaho.

Findley said he had two distinct issues with how the Legislature handled redistricting, the once-a-decade process by which state governments draw new congressional and state legislative district boundaries after the U.S. census: one had to do with the congressional map while the other dealt with the legislative map.

Findley said politicians largely left the public out of the process. Moreover, he said, the majority Democrats blatantly gerrymandered the political boundaries on both maps to favor their party.

Oregon's steady population growth the state more political gavel in Congress. The U.S. Census Bureau's report, released in April, showed the state's population increased by 10% over the past decade, resulting in the need to create a sixth House district.



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle

State Sen. Lynn Findley (left) and John Day resident John Morris discuss issues on Friday, Oct. 29, during Findley's meet-and-greet with constituents at the Squeeze-In Restaurant and Deck in John Day.

The new map creates four safely Democratic congressional districts, one solidly Republican district and one that tilts slightly left and could be considered a toss-up.

Findley said the map was approved after House Speaker Tina Kotek revoked a deal she made with GOP lawmakers.

In April, Findley said, Kotek made "a handshake deal" that gave House Republicans equal representation on the redistricting committee in exchange for their promise to stop blocking bills with delaying tactics.

However, according to Findley, Kotek rescinded the deal on Sept. 20. According to Findley, Kotek essentially

split the House redistricting committee in two: a committee with equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans to finalize legislative maps and a committee with a Democratic majority draw the congressional map.

Since the issue is now part of ongoing litigation, Danny Moran, Kotek's communications director, declined to comment in a Monday email.

Findley said the Democrats also gerrymandered legislative districts, protecting their majority in both chambers and giving too much weight to incumbency.

For example, he noted a

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