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# THE INDEPENDENT

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## Honored Citizen 2021: Mayor Knauss receives prestigious award last week



Chewelah Mayor Dorothy Knauss was surprised to receive the Chamber's Honored Citizen award at last week's candidate meet and greet.

K.S. Brooks photo

### GENO LUDWIG

Chewelah Independent

Debbie Akers delivered the most startling speech at last Tuesday night's Candidate Meet and Greet when she invited unsuspecting retiring Mayor Dorothy Knauss to say a few words to the packed civic center

and then presented her with the Chewelah Chamber of Commerce "2021 Honored Citizen Award." No one was more surprised than the mayor.

As president of the chamber, Akers welcomed the political candidates and

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### FARMING

## Drought impacting the last drop on area farms

Historic drought pushes farmers in multiple ways as crops dry up, feed becomes hard to find and water rights get curtailed due to low water sources



Dry conditions in the spring and summer have area farmers choosing which crops to water.

Brandon Hansen photo

### BRANDON HANSEN

Contributor

"Pray for rain" That's what farmers are feeling right now as drought grips 70 percent of Washington. Last week, the Washington State Department of Ecology declared a drought emergency for most of the Evergreen State after a dry spring was followed by the beginning of summer's record-setting heat.

A drought emergency means the water supply is projected to be below 75 percent of average levels.

The Chewelah area is no exception. The Colville River, which snakes up the valley and is a source of water for several farmers, is currently running at 32.3 cubic feet per second which is markedly below the average of 139 cubic feet per second. The height of the river currently sits at 4.9 feet, and some longtime area residents say it appears to be the lowest level they have seen.

For farms like Hagen Cattle and Hay, this summer has been more troubling than just worrying about the necessity of turning the A/C up. "The water supply is dwindling," farmer Lorren Hagen said. "The Department of Ecology notified me last week that they would be shutting the water off on two of our water rights in about ten days. This means there won't be a third cutting of alfalfa which is another big economic hit."

For dryland farms like the Clover Mountain Dairy in Blue Creek, Washington, the soil is fully depleted at this point. "According to WSU's AgWeatherNet station on our farm, soil moisture is currently at four percent," Stacy and Virginia Thomas of Clover Mountain Dairy said. "Looking back at the data from previous years, we typically didn't reach that number until late August or September, if ever."

In southeast Washington, it's considered an exceptional drought area - the worst category - and dating back to



Front Porch Farms considers themselves to be blessed with water rights and the ability to irrigate, while dryland farmers have seen soil conditions that match up with late August. Brandon Hansen photo

2000, the drought monitor for the state has never classified anything in exceptional drought until this year.

An issue too, is not only have this year's yields been lacking, but next year's could suffer too. Farmers usually plant between late August and late September, but they will need rain to moisten the ground to allow the 2022 crop to establish itself.

While the statewide drought declaration excludes Seattle, Tacoma and Everett, that is because their water is well supplied from snow-fed reservoirs. The Department of Ecology has already restricted 392 agricultural water-rights holders in eastern Washington and 93 in western Washington in the Chehalis basin. The drought declaration allowed for applications to drill emergency wells and transfer water rights.

Front Porch Farm, a mainstay of the Chewelah Farmers Market and a very prominent farm along Highway 395 near Arden, said they had to prioritize what crops they could keep watered since there has been so little rainfall.

"We are fortunate in that we have water rights for our farm, but this year nothing is certain as far as the water supply," Front Porch Farm's Merritt Acheson said. "We

are trying to focus on getting water to the crops that need it and prioritizing getting those covered in an efficient way. We have utilized our big reels more in the hay fields this year as they can cover more acres much more effectively than the older wheel lines and hand lines do."

When the record-setting temperatures hit at the end of June and beginning of July, there was little farmers could do to escape the heat. Acheson said it's always a challenge for farmers to balance their health and do chores, so a lot of the strenuous work or "work that needs to be done is usually pushed to the cooler parts of the day in the early morning or evening. This results in short nights."

"Not only was this hot spell record-setting, but it came during some of the longest days of the year, which meant we had several 18-hour work days during that week," Acheson said. "We also have had to cancel or move some of our market hours to accommodate the heat. We have been spending more time down on our stretch of the Colville River, and we are so thankful that we do get a bit of a reprieve most nights from the heat. That's one reason we love this area."

Acheson said their farm's production of hay is

significantly down, not only because of the heat but because of late freezes in May that hit fields hard. "I would say we are running between 20 percent and 75 percent depending on the field, irrigation, soil, etc.," Acheson said. "We are doing our best to keep things alive and produce all the hay we can as there will be many animals depending on it this winter."

Front Porch Farm also has an extensive farm garden where some crops enjoy the heat and some don't. Luckily they have a drip tape and raised bed system that handles hot weather well and limits evaporation during extreme heat.

Farmers also have to worry about the health of their animals as well as their own. Clover Mountain Dairy's small herd could use the barn for shade, and Stacy and Virginia Thomas supplemented that with fans and water misters. "We fed hay so they wouldn't have to go out and graze in the heat of the day, and always ensured they had access to lots of clean, cool water," they said. "On the worst days, we were watering down the cows every hour which greatly increased our workload and stress level."

Feeding more hay and

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## Extreme conditions prompt land closures in region: DNR-managed lands east of Cascades closing

While visiting the Red Apple Fire on Tuesday, July 20, Commissioner of Public Lands Hilary Franz announced that, due to extreme fire danger and ongoing drought, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources is temporarily closing all recreational and public access to DNR-managed lands in eastern Washington beginning 12:01 a.m. on Friday, July 23.

This temporary closure will apply to DNR-managed state lands, conservation areas, community forests and any associated roads, trails, campgrounds, recreational sites or recreational facilities.

The Red Apple Fire alone has burned over 12,000 acres. Across our state, over 900 fires have burned more than

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## Hancock forest managers close lands

Hancock Forest Management announced on July 9 that due to increasingly dry conditions leading to greater danger of wildfire, and in the interest of protecting forest resources and public safety, its lands will be closed in NE Washington to public access beginning July 12, 2021.

The company noted that while this type of restriction is not needed in most years, this year is extraordinary in terms of wildfire risk for Washington and all neighboring western states. Hancock Forest Management is working closely with state officials at the Washington Department of Natural Resources. For inquiries about the closure, contact our office in Colville, WA (509)-685-2561.

"Our highest priority is the safety of people and property," said Scott Ketchum, General Manager of Hancock Forest Management's Northern Inland Division. "This precautionary closure is in the best interests of the community and the environment, and we appreciate everyone's cooperation with this request during these highly unusual times," he said. Hancock said they will continue to evaluate the situation including weather, fuel conditions and firefighting resources and will rescind this closure as soon as it is appropriate to do so.

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Date	High	Low	Precip.
July 13	99	53	0
July 14	100	51	0
July 15	99	46	0
July 16	93	51	0
July 17	88	51	0
July 18	88	46	0
July 19	94	48	0

\*Precipitation is not recorded weekends/holidays. Data gathered from City of Chewelah Weather Station

