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**June 3, 2008****EDITORIAL**

## **A Wet Western Spring**

Take it as a rule of Wyoming life: a wet rancher is a happy rancher. And right now, many of the ranchers in the state are sopping and grinning.

After a couple of weeks of heavy rain, the creeks in North-Central Wyoming — near Buffalo — were near flooding last week. Near Lander, where the annual rainfall is just more than 11 inches, more than 6 inches of rain fell in May — a new record.

What didn't fall as rain last month fell as snow, which means that the snowpack in the mountains is heavy and deep, likely to last well into the irrigating season. In a year like this one — incredibly rare — the rain falls as grass, and the grass grows as cattle.

This deluge won't do away with the memory of the past few years, which have been bone-dry. Again and again, ranchers have been forced to cut back their herds because there wasn't enough grass to sustain them.

According to the tree rings of Douglas fir and limber pine, the worst drought in the history of Wyoming — if that's the way to put it — took place from 1262 to 1281. But there were no cattle then, no ranchers and no Wyoming, so that drought has only entered the folklore of trees. The recent drought has been bad enough. July 1999 to June 2004 was the driest five-year period on record, and the past three years haven't been much better.

To live in Wyoming is to know that there's no absolutism in a good soaking, no matter how heavy the rain is. The sun will come out, the wind will blow and ranchers will be irrigating before too long. The trees will take note of this unexpected season, and so will the hayfields and creek bottoms, which are filled with birds. Residents of some of the small towns in the state have been heard muttering about enough rain already. But they try to keep it to themselves.

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