

Measuring fire season in gallons

So, just how severe was Oregon's wildfire season this summer? About 838,000 gallons' worth, according to Neal Laugle, the Oregon Department of Forestry's (ODF) aviation unit manager.

That's how much liquid retardant the department's air tankers dumped on fires in 2015. And that figure doesn't include the thousands of gallons of straight water dropped by ODF contracted helicopters in close support of ground firefighting forces.

The window of opportunity in which to stop a new blaze from growing large has shrunk from days to hours, due to the extreme summer weather and forest fuel conditions. Fire managers with ODF and the fire associations increasingly rely on air power to even the odds, launching air and ground resources simultaneously, which often shaves response time to minutes.

ODF's contracted large air tanker can reach a fire quickly and deliver 3,000 gallons of retardant in a single load. This slows fire growth and buys time for fire engines and hand crews to arrive on scene and begin direct attack. Single-engine air tankers (SEATs) use their speed and maneuverability to box in a fire with multiple, smaller retardant drops. All told, air tankers logged more than 700 flight hours this summer. The agency's helicopters put in 834 hours slinging water to hot spots with their

cable-suspended buckets.

This summer, most of the aerial firefighting took place east of the Cascades (86 percent), followed by southern Oregon (14 percent), and northwestern Oregon (less than one percent).

In 2015, the Douglas Forest Protective Association in Douglas County flew 60 helicopter missions and also assisted ODF's Southwest Oregon District and the Willamette National Forest. A small plane flew 55 missions that included fire detection, monitoring of existing fires, and guiding air operations (air tankers and helicopters) over fires.

The department's Southwest Oregon District (Jackson and Josephine counties) conducted 150 missions, including air tanker and helicopter flights. Helicopters performed air attack, helitack (insertion of firefighters at fires, along with making water drops) and transport of personnel and cargo.

Coos Forest Protective Association logged 55 flight hours on 19 different fires in Coos and Douglas counties to quench the flames with water drops. In addition, CFPA aircraft flew reconnaissance during lightning events to detect new fires.

ODF's aggressive firefighting tactics can create an "airshow" of multiple tankers and helicopters over an active fire. When the meter is running on all these aircraft, costs

mount quickly. But stopping even one high-potential blaze from spreading to thousands of acres can save millions of dollars in the long term.

Damage to the forest resource, which includes timber as well as fish and wildlife habitats, typically totals at least three times the firefighting expense.

As an example, the 26,000-acre Stouts Creek Fire in Douglas County cost \$37 million to extinguish. And that is just for suppression. Damage to the forest resource, which includes timber as well as fish and wildlife habitats, typically totals at least three times the firefighting expense.

No one can accurately predict the intensity of future fire seasons. But the current trend has the department, its partner resource agencies, and private forest landowners scrambling to meet the challenge. Aviation will undoubtedly continue to play a major role in Oregon's fire-protection system in the years to come.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Gingerbread house at Aspen Lakes.

Follow the Gingerbread Trail till January 5

Take your friends and family members for a walk on the Ninth Annual Gingerbread Trail, a benefit for Sisters Habitat for Humanity, while they are visiting this holiday season.

This year, 19 businesses created gingerbread houses for the fundraiser. Maps are located at Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce, Sisters Habitat ReStore and Thrift Store as well as all participating businesses.

Gingerbread enthusiasts are encouraged to vote for

their favorite house by placing money in the wooden Habitat house bank located near each sugared home. Of course people are invited to vote for more than one home.

The gingerbread creation with the most money wins the People's Choice Award. A Best in Show Award will be decided by three independent judges. Participating businesses will display their creations until January 5.

All proceeds benefit the building program of Sisters Habitat for Humanity.

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"O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: Come and save us, O Lord our God."

(Magnificat Antiphon, Vespers of December 24)

Christmas Liturgy Schedule

Christmas Eve: 5:30 p.m. Vigil Mass
8:00 p.m. Vigil Mass

Christmas Day: 10:00 a.m. Mass

Solemnity of Mary Mother of God
December 31 • Vigil Mass 5:30 p.m.
January 1 • Mass at Dawn 10:00 a.m.

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