

# Smoke thwarts XC runners again

By Charlie Kanzig  
Correspondent

Halfway to the Northwest Classic Saturday morning, head cross-country Coach Josh Nordell got the message that the meet had been cancelled due to poor air quality in Eugene due to forest fires. The Outlaws were forced to cancel their own meet a week earlier. Most of the team has not competed yet this season.

Within minutes of the news that the bus would have to head back home, Nordell and his assistant coaches developed a different plan for the day to give the team a good workout. Skies were relatively smoke-free around Clear Lake, so the team piled out of the bus at the top of the McKenzie River Trail and headed down to Carmen Reservoir. Some members circled the lake to add in some extra mileage.

"It's been a season of needing to be flexible and patient," said Nordell, noting that the team has missed numerous practice days due to poor air quality since training began August 14.

"The good news is that the kids have been great and are making most of the days when they can run," he said. "We had some high quality workouts last week, which is really the most important thing right now."

Nordell was able to add a meet to the schedule as well, to make up for the two cancellations. The team will now travel to the Stayton Invitational on Wednesday, September 20, which will help the runners and the coaches gauge conditioning



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Iris Diez enjoying the McKenzie River trail with her teammates. The XC team held a training run Saturday on the trail after the Northwest Classic meet in Eugene was cancelled due to poor air quality.

on a 5,000-meter course in advance of competing at the Seaside Three Course Challenge on Saturday.

Such has the challenge been about juggling the practice and meet schedule. Nordell admitted that he dreamed recently that he had the team out in front of the high school for practice with a foot of snow on the ground and the air still smoky.

"I guess having to check the AQI every day numerous times has now even impacted my subconscious," he chuckled.

Air quality aside, Nordell is seeing the boys and girls teams really beginning to coalesce and is very excited to see how they do in race situations in the upcoming weeks.

He said, "Teams throughout the state are dealing with

the smoke issue, so I have faith this will all work out for the team in the days and weeks ahead."

Despite most of the team not having raced yet, both the boys and girls squads have gotten votes as being among the top 10 in the 4A coaches' poll.

"Hopefully we'll prove we belong in those rankings soon," said Nordell.

The race in Stayton will take place at Stayton Middle School beginning at 4:30 p.m., while the Three Course Challenge is held at Camp Rilea, north of Seaside with the high school races beginning at 10:10 a.m.

**PREVENTION:** Western forests have a heavy fuel load

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Exacerbated by drought and thick vegetation, wildfires are "more damaging, more costly and threaten the safety and security of both the public and firefighters," Zinke said. "I have heard this described as 'a new normal.' It is unacceptable that we should be satisfied with the status quo."

Zinke's memo did not call for new spending, but he said federal officials "must be innovative" and use all tools available to prevent and fight fires. "Where new authorities are needed," he added, "we will work with our colleagues in Congress to craft management solutions that will benefit our public lands for generations to come."

The Interior Department oversees more than 500 million acres supervised by the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies. The Forest Service, a unit of the Agriculture Department, is the nation's largest firefighting agency,

with more than half its budget devoted to wildfires.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and Western lawmakers have complained that the current funding mechanism — tied to 10-year averages for wildfire — makes it hard to budget for wildfires, even as fires burn longer and hotter each year.

"I believe that we have the right processes and the right procedures of attacking and fighting fires," Perdue said in a speech last week. "But if you don't have the resources and the means of dependable funding, that's an issue."

Perdue called on Congress "to fix the fire-borrowing problem once and for all" so that officials are not repeatedly forced to tap money meant for prevention programs to fight wildfires.

"Fires will always be with us. But when we leave a fuel load out there because we have not been able to get to it because of a lack of funding, or dependable funding, we're asking for trouble," Perdue said.

"If we don't start managing our forests, the forests are going to start managing us," said Sen. Steve Daines, R-Montana.

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