

“Let it burn” scenario a myth

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Firefighting in wilderness areas is often misunderstood. It seems that each time there is a fire in the Three Sisters Wilderness the old saw about “letting it burn” or not being allowed to fight fire in the wilderness surfaces again.

Last week, the question was put to acting Sisters District Ranger Amy Tinderholt: “Are there laws prohibiting fighting fires in the wilderness?”

The Federal Wilderness Policy Act directs that no forest treatment can be done in the wilderness. In other words, no selective cutting

of timber and no planned prescribed burns are allowed.

However, should a wilderness fire start in the Deschutes National Forest, all means of fighting fires are allowed. As soon as the Milli Fire was spotted from the air, Tinderholt immediately approved an initial attack team, rappellers, hot-shot crews, aerial retardant and water drops in an effort to keep the fire small — the goal of the Forest Service regarding fires in the wilderness.

Lack of resources available and then a low cloud cover kept an immediate response at bay. (See “How did the fire get so big?”

page 1.)

There are laws requiring the incident commander or official in charge to seek approval for the use of mechanized equipment on a fire in the wilderness. Due to the large size of heavy equipment like bulldozers for creating fire containment lines, it is difficult to get into rugged terrain. Space limitations amid a thick forest of trees also makes maneuvering large equipment a challenge.

In the wilderness, it is much more difficult to get firefighting personnel into the fire location and even more difficult to get them out quickly and safely, if they are threatened by fire behavior.

FIREFIGHTING: Lack of resources early hurt Milli effort

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available.

Resource orders were placed with the Central Oregon Interagency Dispatch Center (COIDC) for all approved resources. At that time, the Milli Fire was low priority due to the lack of structures and lives at risk. The location of the fire in the Three Sisters Wilderness provided very limited access and there was danger for the firefighters from the snags and hazard trees in the Black Crater burn.

The Type 3 team ordered for the Milli Fire was diverted to the Whychus Fire due to the values at risk. Another Type 3 incident command was assigned to the Milli Fire. Resources were stretched thin nationwide.

Requests for resources get sent from COIDC to the office in Portland and on to the national headquarters in Boise where they look at the priorities nationwide. On August 12, there were nine Type 1 fires and 19 Type 2 fires. There were more than 15,400 firefighters already on fire lines around the U.S.

From August 10 to August 13, the number of firefighters on fire lines jumped from 15,000 to 21,000 nationally. There are usually 30,000 personnel available, so the pool was smaller by 9,000 firefighters. There have been 2.5 million more acres lost to wildfire this year than the 10-year average of 5.6 million acres.

On August 13, retardant planes were finally available, but a change in the weather brought in a low cloud layer,

grounding the planes due to reduced visibility. Seven rappellers were able to get in to anchor the fire by beginning a fire line.

August 14 saw the ordering of a Type 1 team with the Type 3 team fully engaged in firefighting efforts, using mechanical equipment on the lower part of the fire and working by hand higher up.

Burnout operations were necessary as the fire moved to

the north and east. Residents of Crossroads, Three Creek Road, and the Edgington/Remuda Road area were evacuated from their homes, but have now returned. At the peak of the fire there were over 900 fire personnel engaged.

The Milli Fire acreage remains at 24,025 with 60 percent containment. Smoke continues to impact the Sisters community.



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Organization expands its efforts to save shelter pets

By August Frank
The Register-Guard

EUGENE (AP) — Jasper, a large snow-white American husky, jumped into the arms of animal rescuer Shafali Grewal, who said she wished she could keep him. They stood beside the Rescue Express bus, which was parked outside Almost Home Pet Boarding in San Fernando, California. Grewal petted Jasper while trying to disentangle herself from the leashes that two other dogs had wrapped around her legs.

The dogs' lives were going to change.

Jasper, along with 24 other dogs at the San Fernando stop, were about to take a ride aboard the Rescue Express bus to the Pacific Northwest, where they would have better odds of adoption.

For almost three years, Rescue Express, a Eugene-based organization headquartered on a farm, has functioned as an escape vehicle for cats and dogs that had

been living in overcrowded California shelters, where they were under threat of being euthanized for lack of space.

Rescue Express crews help get such animals adopted into forever homes.

Since its start in February 2015, Rescue Express has expanded from one to three buses, and it transports more than 125 animals each trip, every weekend, in partnership with more than 200 pet groups between California and Washington.

As of late July, Rescue Express had transported more than 10,600 animals.

It's not an easy trip. It's a crowded, sometimes noisy ride to safer locations and a better future.

After the Rescue Express crew loaded up 24 carriers, the bus headed north, toward its next stop in Bakersfield, California.

A single dog began barking from the back and, as the bus rattled down the freeway,

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