

MOHRS: Couple learned lessons from close proximity to fire

Continued from page 3

have two horse trailers, and always keep one hooked up for such situations.

“Our horse trailer has living quarters that we keep well-stocked,” said Jessica. With their lodgings and animals secure at a ranch outside of Sisters, the Mohrs turned their attention to their property.

“We asked friends and family to help pack some valuables,” said Doug. “While Jessica oversaw that, I was doing defensible space techniques, testing our generators, preparing our water truck, setting up fire hoses around the house and turning on our sprinklers. We have an active management plan for our 340 acres, but it’s not fully automatic. We have to engage it.”

By August 17 the Mohrs were officially out, remaining evacuated for the next 11 days. The fire crept ever closer, eventually drawing within less than a mile of their structure. During those uncertain times, the Mohrs attended the community meetings, and remarked on the professionalism of the management teams, often under the pressure of understandably upset residents.

“The leadership team was impressive, and we got to meet face-to-face with a lot of frontline people and management,” said Doug.

Although their structure was one of the closest to Milli’s path, the Mohrs felt assured of its safety, both because of their own due-diligence management, and the reassurances of people like the Oregon State Fire Marshal.

“The green team was extremely helpful, kind, and kept us well-informed,” said Jessica.

The Mohrs did have a rough evacuation plan in place before Milli, but would make a few practical adjustments based on this experience.

“Have a checklist,” said Doug. “As more people got involved helping us, there were more opinions about what to take.”

He recommends thinking through two scenarios: one similar to Milli, where distance and time are in the fire personnel’s favor, and one quick-strike scenario in which structure survival is not as assured.

Jessica recommends remembering everyday practical items.

“I realized after we were out that I had only taken one

pair of pants, and left food in the freezer!” she said, laughing.

A Forest Service employee escorted her in to get some necessities that were overlooked in the hustle and bustle.

“I learned how unattached we are to our stuff. We did take videos for insurance purposes, just in case,” said Jessica. “You realize what’s important.”

“With the community support, even if our house did burn and everything in it, we have what is important.”
— Jessica Mohr

On returning to their house, before even unpacking, they first went through and evaluated their belongings, donating many things that had seemed so “necessary” before to the Habitat for Humanity ReStore.

The couple also plans to adjust their own forest management strategy for their property.

“I was following the code-book and law, which says

every 10 years you manage so many acres, but you really need defensible space management on a more regular basis,” said Doug, who now plans to engage in management annually. “I think this is a good opportunity for the Forest Service and ODF to revisit their readiness and management plans for wilderness fires, especially for times when resources are scarce.”

“My dad was a big advocate of forest management and worked in the Forest Service,” said Jessica. “He always taught us it was important to take care of our forests. Forest management for our property is based on that. It does include controlled burning to remove fuels. We thin trees out. A lot of the people in the forest service are advocates of the same principles. They are working to improve the system, not succumbing to it.”

The biggest lesson that the Mohrs learned, though, was just how much they can rely on their community of friends and family during perilous times.

“With the community support, even if our house did burn and everything in it, we have what is important,” said Jessica.

“Friends, family, and community involvement



PHOTO BY EMILY WOODWORTH

Doug and Jessica Mohr’s home was very close to the path of the Milli Fire.

are essential,” Doug added. “We felt secure with the information that was

provided and the support we received from those closest to us.”

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