

Anthony urges more prescribed fire

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Former Sisters District Ranger Bill Anthony, acting as a representative of the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project (DCFP) (see sidebar), asked the City Council to consider providing a letter to the Oregon Smoke Management Review Committee urging them to agree to changes suggested by DCFP to the current Oregon Smoke Policy.

The changes, which would encourage more use of prescribed fire, while still working to protect the air quality and health of our communities, include:

- Incorporate language that reflects differences between dry and wet forest and their respective fire regimes;
- Align Oregon's smoke policy with EPA's empirically based 24-hour air quality standard;
- Prioritize high-risk/high-value treatment areas, such as Wildland Urban Interface zones, with maximum flexibility and opportunity to implement prescribed fire; and
- Develop and implement

a public health strategy to protect people from short-duration prescribed fire smoke.

The DCFP contends that, "Although well-intentioned, current regulations restrict our opportunity to fight wildfires before they happen."

They are asking the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to carefully consider the four changes they are proposing as work is done to update Oregon's Smoke Management Plan.

"Changes to the Smoke Management Plan are necessary for a meaningful increase to prescribed fire treatment. And while we recognize that increased prescribed fires will have short-term increased health impacts, we believe that these will be less than the impacts of wildfire," asserts the DCFP Steering Committee.

Anthony told the Council, "We can do more in our forests to reduce the threat of forest fires." That more would include mowing, small tree thinning, and more use of prescribed burns in the spring and fall.

As witnessed with this year's Milli Fire, wildfires are growing larger, more destructive, and increasingly impacting the health and safety of our communities. This is a result of unnaturally dense forest conditions created by 100 years of fire suppression filling the forests with ready-to-burn fuels. Coupled with a warming, drying climate, these are perfect conditions for extreme wildfires and dangerous smoke that threatens residents' well-being, way of life, and future.

"This was the most depressive smoke conditions I've experienced," Anthony said of the Milli Fire. "I felt like a prisoner in my home."

Anthony would prefer to see "the intrusion of smoke at lower intensity for three or four days" with prescribed fire as opposed to weeks of intense smoke conditions from a significant wildfire.

Compared to the ramifications of wildfire, according to DCFP, prescribed burning is a smarter, safer, and more affordable way to reintroduce the kind of "good fire" to the forests that will keep them healthy and reduce the risk of wildfire to surrounding communities.

Collaborative group seeks forest restoration

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

The Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project (DCFP) is a Central Oregon community organization established in 2010 to restore the local forests to a healthier, more resilient condition through balanced, science-driven restoration projects.

This volunteer stakeholder group represents a wide set of views and values and is one of 23 landscape restoration demonstration projects established by Congress.

The DCFP committee includes experts on forests, watersheds, wildlife, fire safety, timber, natural resource policy, recreation and tourism, local government, and conservation. They are environmentalists, businesspeople, professional foresters, research scientists, loggers, outdoors lovers, private landowners, elected officials, tribal members, and governmental policymakers.

Fires are a natural part of the eastside forest

ecosystem. Prior to the years of intensive fire suppression, natural, low-intensity fires burning every five to 25 years kept mid- and lower-elevation forests healthy for millennia.

Research has shown that thinning, followed by controlled burns, is the most effective tool available to reduce the intensity and severity of future wildfires. Without changes to the Oregon Smoke Management Plan, at the current pace, it will take more than 25 years of prescribed fires just to catch up.

Prescribed burns, conducted mainly in the spring and fall, are carefully planned and implemented under prescribed conditions of temperature, wind, and humidity. They are managed to be safely controlled and to minimize the likelihood that smoke will blow into nearby communities. Wildfires can be catastrophic and release large amounts of smoke and particulates into the air. Smoke from wildfires has the potential to be exponentially worse than from prescribed burns.

Celebrate the holidays in Sisters Country

Friday, November 24
Christmas Tree Lighting
 5:30 pm • Fir Street Park
 Central Oregon Mastersingers
 Victorian Carolers

Saturday, November 25
Christmas Parade
 2:00 pm • Hood Avenue

Saturday, November 25
Visits with Santa
 3:00-4:30 pm
 Chamber Office
 291 E Main Avenue

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