

MORE FIRES: State spent record \$515 million fighting fires

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to British Columbia blew smoke into the Portland area, causing unhealthy air quality for days on end. In southern Oregon, unhealthy air lasted for months.

In total, the state spent more fighting wildfires in 2018, nearly \$515 million, than in any other year.

A problem of this scale, which spans millions of acres across numerous state lines, has no easy solution.

"We need it all. More thinning. More mechanical treatments. More prescribed burning," Bailey said. "But it needs to be strategic. You want to look for areas that haven't burned in a long time so, if a wildfire does start there, maybe it will be 5,000 or 10,000 acres instead of 100,000."

On average, roughly 165,000 acres a year have been treated with prescribed burns in Oregon over the last decade. Three times that area — about 470,000 acres a year over the past 10 years — have burned in wildfires. In 2018, wildfires scorched more than 830,000 acres in the state.

Still, there are examples of success. The Milli Fire, which burned nearly 25,000 acres in the Three Sisters Wilderness in 2017, could have been much worse had the area near the town of Sisters not been treated with prescribed burns before the wildfire.

In 2017, the Eagle Creek fire scorched nearly 50,000 of Oregon's most beloved acres in the Columbia River Gorge and rained ash and smoke on the state's densest population center. That same year, the Chetco Bar fire in southwest Oregon burned for five months and scorched nearly 200,000 acres.

"Firefighters had a path to approach," Sterns said. "(Prescribed burns) not only make fires less likely to grow, they make them safer to fight."

With fire comes smoke, though, and that's been the

big stumbling block in making wider use of burns. The Oregon Smoke Management Plan, adopted in 1972 to conform with the federal Clean Air Act, essentially prohibits any burn that results in visible smoke in a populated area. Every five years the plan comes up for review, and that process began early in 2017 with a series of five meetings across the state.

Among the stakeholders at those meetings was Carrie Nyssen, senior advocacy director for the American Lung Association, who sometimes felt like the odd person out at the meetings as one of the few who resisted the push to relax regulations.

"It's a difficult issue for the Lung Association. It's hard for us to support any policy that puts more smoke in the air," she said. "But we know there is no option where there's no smoke and we want to make sure folks in affected communities know when it's coming, what their options are and where they can go."

Joining Nyssen on the panels were public health officials, forest collaboratives, environmentalists, timber operators, elected officials and a tribal representative, all of whom aired their differences and forwarded a set of recommendations to state officials.

Among the recommendations: a relaxation of the threshold for smoke intrusions, but also an increase in communication to affected communities so arrangements could be made by those most vulnerable.

The benefits would be multifold, according to Bailey.

"If we proactively and consciously go after this buildup of fuels, it will reduce the amount of fire, the amount of money we spend on fire and the number of fatalities we have," he said. "All of that equals less smoke in the air."

State officials are reviewing comments on the proposed changes, which could be approved and put in place as early as January 2019.

GUEST RANCH: Group has appealed county decision

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livestock practices that qualify as a farm use under DCC 18.04.030.

Central Oregon LandWatch filed an appeal with the County regarding the approval of the conditional-use permit and site plan for the guest ranch.

Additional conditions of approval by the County stated that the guest ranch shall not exceed 18 events in a calendar year, and that none of the events may last for longer than 72 hours. The maximum number of event attendees shall not exceed 200 people at any one time.

There are requirements regarding number of guest lodging units (4-10), building height (not over 30 feet), event noise, food services for ranch guests and special-event attendees, existing vegetation around structures, and exterior lighting.

Conditions of approval also address signage, length of guest occupancy, unreasonable disturbance of neighbors, no overnight camping, parking spaces and surfaces, and landscaping.

The County approval was based on the application, site plan, specifications, and

supporting documentation submitted by the Coles.

The Central Oregon LandWatch appeal is based on the assertion that the applicants have not sustained their burden of proof on a number of key criteria, arguing that:

- "The livestock operation has not been shown to be 'existing and continuing' because it began around the same time the application for a guest ranch was submitted;

- "It has not been established that the proposed guest ranch will be incidental and accessory to an existing livestock operation because the size and scope of the existing livestock operation will be dwarfed by guest ranch activities;

- "The property has not been shown to use accepted livestock practices that qualify as a farm use; and

- "The application does not indicate that the dwelling of the livestock operator is located on the subject property."

Jennifer Cole indicated that no one from LandWatch has ever contacted them for information about the ranch operations and contends that the LandWatch assertions are not accurate. She provided the following statement to *The Nugget*.

"We have proposed, and Deschutes County has approved, a guest ranch that complies with the law. Guest

ranch lodging will be provided by an existing house and five small cabins. Guest events are limited so they will be less intense than those allowed on large ranch and farm properties with an agri-tourism/special event permit. The guest area is tucked in the trees where it will not interfere with farm use.

"We offer the following response to the issues raised in the LandWatch appeal:

"1. Our livestock operation is in existence now and was in existence when we filed our application.

"2. Our guest ranch use will occupy a small part of our property and will not dwarf livestock operations.

"3. We employ accepted farm practices in our ranching operation and our livestock operation is a 'farm use' as defined by law.

"4. Our property includes a dwelling for the livestock operator.

"Our guest ranch will operate like other approved guest ranches," Cole stated. "We have no intention of setting new precedents. We wish Central Oregon LandWatch had reached out to us directly, and sooner, but look forward to discussing their concerns and putting everyone's minds at ease."

A hearing before a Deschutes County Hearings Officer is set for January 8, 2019.

Thank you, Sisters Country, for your votes!

We did it!



And a huge thank-you to my volunteers!

Thank you for all of your support. I look forward to serving you and Deschutes County!

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