

## FIRE SEASON: Drought conditions will persist in region

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the Northwest Interagency Coordinating Center (NWCC) seasonal fire potential model with the two-dozen or so local citizens who turned out for the open house.

The good news is that the heavy late snowfall that hammered Sisters at the end of February has left the snowpack in the mountains at 110 percent of normal. Unfortunately, however, that's not enough to break ongoing drought.

"With that moisture, they're still predicting drought for us," Osbourne said.

Models are predicting a "warmer than typical May-June-July," which could make for an active fire season. The next fire potential outlook will be released in May and can be accessed at <https://gacc.nifc.gov/nwcc/predict/outlook.aspx>.

Fire was on the minds of the participants in a Q&A session. The first question asked for a comparison between Sisters' situation and that of Paradise, California, which was destroyed by wildfire last summer.

Osbourne and Sisters Ranger District timber sale coordinator Steve Orange offered some assurances.

"We've done a lot of work around here in the last 20 years," Osborne noted.

That work includes prescribed burning and thinning projects to make forests healthier and less susceptible to catastrophic wildfire, and to make homes in the urban-wildland interface more defensible.

"We've done a lot of logging right in people's backyards," Orange noted, citing projects near Black Butte Ranch and Crossroads as examples.



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Forest Service fish biologist Mike Riehle confers with a Sisters citizen at a Forest Service open house on Thursday, April 11.

The SAFR (Sisters Area Fuels Reduction) project was designed to decrease hazardous fuels accumulations within the wildland-urban interface adjacent to the city of Sisters and surrounding communities to reduce the risk of high-intensity wildfire.

Orange noted that the recent Melvin Butte project reduced fuels south of Sisters, where the threat of fire could be significant.

"You'll see major changes going up the 16 Road to the snowpark," he said.

In comparison to Paradise, "we're well ahead of where they were," Osbourne said. "That said, we're not out of the woods, obviously."

In an ongoing effort to, as Osbourne puts it, "fight fire out in the woods and not on people's doorstep," the Sisters Ranger District will engage in prescribed burns of about 650 acres total this spring.

While fire is the greatest concern for an area that has seen 50 percent of the Sisters Ranger District territory burn since 2002, there are other issues of pressing concern. One citizen asked about illegal dumping and "off-site" camping in the forest.

SRD Law Enforcement Officer Fred Perl acknowledged that dumping is a significant issue.

"It goes on relentlessly," he said.

Perl relies on citizen tips when they see violations, and he noted, "I try to prosecute every case that comes across... my desk."

However, Sisters District Ranger Ian Reid acknowledged that keeping up with dumping could be a full-time gig.

"If we devoted all of our resources to trash, we wouldn't get a lot of other things done," he said.

Dispersed camping in the forest, often by homeless people, is also an issue. There is a 14-day limit on how long a person can stay in a spot, and when they move they're supposed to move five miles. It's up to Perl to enforce that.

Perl acknowledged that dealing with homelessness in Sisters "is a community issue for all of us," and noted that he works consistently with other community agencies and citizens to address the issues associated with it.

"It's a very difficult issue to deal with, but we are dealing with it," he said.

Sunday, April 21 9 a.m. & 10:30 a.m. | Saturday 7 p.m.

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## Forest Service plans a busy year

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

The Sisters Ranger District will be a beehive of activity in 2019.

"We spent a lot of last year recovering from the Milli Fire," Ranger Ian Reid told some two-dozen Sisters folks at an open house on Thursday evening at the Sisters Fire District Community Room.

That included reopening trails, including the iconic trail to the summit of Black Crater, which was severely impacted by that 2017 blaze.

The District also did significant work to restore natural hydrology in Glaze Meadow; to mitigate ribbon grass along the Metolius River; and engaged in an active prescribed burning program.

2019 is shaping up to offer a wide scope of projects. In addition to overseeing the removal of 2,100 trees along the Highway 20 corridor (*see related story, page 1*), the Sisters Ranger District will conduct a major project to fell dangerous and/or diseased trees and replant and transplant in the Suttle Lake area. The project is designed to address safety concerns and also to promote the health of the

forest.

They will also launch a major habitat restoration and vegetation management project on Green Ridge.

"We're still developing what that project will look like," Reid said.

One of the last fish passage barriers on Whychus Creek will be removed and new trail connectors will be added to the popular Peterson Ridge trail, and the trailhead will be moved.

Reid said the District will staff its office on Saturdays for two months at the height of summer.

A permanent toilet will be installed at the Whychus Overlook Trailhead and a new bridge will be emplaced over Indian Ford Creek.

And, if all goes to plan, the District will come out with a new District map — waterproof and in color — the first update in 19 years.

A final decision on fees for The Cascade Wilderness Strategies Project — intended to protect the wilderness from overuse by controlling public access. Reid clarified that there will be a single fee associated with a new permitting system.

"There would not be an additional stewardship fee on top of the fee," he said.

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