

# Wildfire

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Oregonians who headed south to help battle the blazing front lines in California. Oregon Department of Forestry officials reported that several hundred ODF and association firefighters from the state dug control lines and put out spot fires during their assignment.

The duties were weighty and often different than those to which the local firefighters were accustomed.

Assistant Fire Chief Brad McKenzie noted that in Oregon "Type 3" fires are strictly defined: firefighters tactically patrol assigned divisions while prepping and protecting structures. Reports back from California indicated they not only patrolled and prepped structures but interacted with other hand crews and assisted in digging and putting in a wet line around structures.

Morlan said safety issues were paramount. "Thick smoke, unkept, narrow roads, potential fall power lines and trees — and other drivers," Morlan described the hazards. "You just always want to be aware what is going on around you."

Morlan recalled the only constant was change. "Fire conditions changed every day. At briefing we were constantly reminded to keep our heads on a swivel

and know your trigger points," she said. "The winds played a major role in the fire's behavior."

ODF spokeswoman Bobbi Doan noted that a lack of significant rainfall in the area since February provided substantial dead and dry fuel that carried the fire deep into the Los Padres National Forest as well as nearby communities. That coupled with unusually prolonged Santa Ana winds spread the fire through rugged terrain in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties.

"With winds like that, it makes you realize just how quickly a good situation can go bad," Morlan said.

ODF officials said association firefighters from Oregon engaged on the Thomas Fire northwest of Los Angeles for almost two weeks. During that time, it grew to more than 272,000 acres, approaching the size of 2003's Cedar Fire in San Diego, which to that point stood as the largest wildfire in California in modern times.

The Thomas Fire eventually eclipsed the Cedar Fire. ODF reported that Oregon sent the largest contingent of fire engines and personnel from out of state to help California with the blaze, which began on Dec. 4. Just before Christmas some 300 Oregon firefighters deployed through the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal were demobilized.

"We're proud of the job our firefighters did helping our neighbors to the south," said Oregon State Forester Peter Daugherty. "Other states, including California, were there when Oregon needed help over the past few

years and we're glad we're able to reciprocate.

"Wildfire is a common threat across the Western states, and sharing resources when they can safely be spared is a key way to meet the challenge."

Doan said Oregon's mobilization was part of a mutual-aid agreement that saw California firefighters travel north this past summer to help during an especially intense outbreak of wildfires in Oregon.

She noted that at its peak the Thomas Fire engaged more than 8,400 firefighters. Wind-driven flames forced the evacuation of thousands of area residents and destroyed more than a thousand structures, according to Cal Fire.

"It's been an honor being able to work on the line with these guys," Morlan reflected. "Everyone stepped up to help each other and worked hard every day. The constant willingness to teach myself and my crew new tips and tricks was amazing. I've never had a crew that persistent with teaching others."

"Every day was an adventure and we did it with a smile on our faces. Despite being the only engine not from that area, it felt like home," she added.

"I'm sincerely proud of the dedication these two showed," Aumsville Chief Roy Hari said, "by taking this dangerous, 14-day assignment nearly 1,000 miles from home."

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# Growth

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greeted with open arms by long-standing residents, but the trajectory was understood.

"It's because that's where companies located," Carter said of the Portland metro area. "It wasn't because city councils or residents wanted their towns to grow."

She noted that Silverton's location — away from a major artery such as Interstate 5 — alleviates some of the worry about rapid growth in the same vein as Portland metro communities. But not entirely.

"I would love to see Silverton stay the way it is, (but) it is a regressive attitude to think that we can remain a 19th-century town in the 21st century," Carter said. "We will attract new people. We can't have a in-my-backyard attitude toward everything. We have to face the fact that we will grow."

Part of facing that is anticipating the growth and, perhaps, affecting the complexion of it.

"Our residents must play an active role in shaping how Silverton evolves," Palmer said, encouraging residents to be active in everything from city government and commissions to civic groups and events. "That is how we ensure that what makes us special will continue regardless of any other changes."

**Who pays?**  
One issue Silverton's city council anticipates reviewing this month is system development charges, fees paid to the city by developers to offset costs of needed new infrastructure. Council President Jason Freilinger has been the point person on that topic.

"I am very concerned about Silverton doing it due diligence in making sure we are smart about growth," Freilinger said. "The State of Oregon has really placed a very high burden of proof on cities to show why they would deny an application to increase growth through annexations, zoning changes, and building

codes."

Freilinger said Silverton's SDC fees are, for the most part, adequate when construction takes place in areas that are already developed.

"The problem we face now is most of the push we are experiencing is for developments well beyond our current infrastructure limits on the fringe of Silverton," he said. "Typically when it comes to the cost to run streets and storm-water infrastructure out to a development on the outskirts of town, SDC fees are only covering on average 25-to-50 percent of the cost. That means that unless we do something to fix the city processes, 50-to-75 percent of the cost for street and storm-water are placed as a future burden on the utility rate payers in Silverton."

That issue is expected to emerge for discussion in the near future.

"This is unacceptable to me as a utility rate payer and city councilor, which is why I feel we need to either look at our SDC methodology or creating special assessment districts like we did with Steelhammer Road," Freilinger said.

**Who plans?**  
One growth question that cropped up at the Town Hall was the efficacy of the city's comprehensive plan, which a new resident to the area cited as being 37 years old. That's not entirely true as it's been adjusted multiple times over the decades.

Community Development Director Jason Gottgetreu said those adjustments are ongoing, and are patterned within state stipulations that cities and counties meet mandatory standards dealing with land-use, development, housing, transportation, and conservation of natural resources.

"Silverton adopted its first comprehensive plan in 1979, and updated elements in 1980 and in 1989. The recent element updates were in 2000 and 2002 for housing and urbanization, respectively," Gottgetreu said.

Gottgetreu said development within the city limits must conform to established zoning standards and criteria, while

development within the urban growth boundary, area that is anticipated be annexed by the city in the future, must conform to the comprehensive plan designation, which dictates what the property can be zoned upon annexation.

Those developments are potentially wide ranging, including homes, apartments, commercial and industrial properties and parks or public areas.

Portland State Population Research Center coordinates the 20-year population figure for the state and estimates Silverton's annual growth rate to be at 1.4 percent.

That 20-year population number is used to evaluate the improvements and upgrades necessary to serve the future population.

"A cost estimate is generated for the improvements which are then divided by the future uses to calculate a cost per-person number," Gottgetreu said. "These numbers are the basis of the (SDC fees), which are intended to collect the funds needed for future improvements to serve the future population."

Gottgetreu said public facilities plans have received significant updates.

"The city took a more individualized and detailed approach during the recent public facilities updates," he said. "These include the following master plans that have a 20-year planning period planning for a 2030 population of 14,418."

The updated plans are more detailed than ones they replaced. Gottgetreu used traffic plans as an example.

"When estimating the amount of traffic anticipated to be generated over the next 20 years, the land inside the UGB was divided into 35 different areas which were then looked at individually to calculate the development potential within each area, which was then estimated as a future traffic estimate," he said.

"Each area was then forecasted as to where the future cars may travel to during the morning and evening rush hour. This was then put into a computer model of the Silver-

ton Transportation network to see which intersections would need improvements to deal with the increase in traffic in the future."

**Who patrols?**  
Silverton Police has 16 sworn officers funded through the city's general-fund and 17 total.

"In 2015, we were able to add an additional officer, in partnership with the Silver Falls School District," Police Chief Jeff Fossholm said, noting that the school district pays for 75-percent of that officer. "They get a full-time school resource officer that is able to travel and handle any issues (in the district) ... We get the officer back during the summer for regular patrol at time when most officers want to take vacation time, which greatly helps with our staffing levels."

The size of the force and the facilities can be affected by growth, but the department has adjusted to it.

"As the city has continued to grow over the last several years, we have been very fortunate in that crimes occurring within the city have remained at or about the same level as in previous years," Fossholm said. "Silverton continues to provide its residents full police services. This is something that has not occurred in larger agencies such as Salem Police or Marion County Sheriff's Office, where they are no longer able to respond to traffic accidents unless they are blocking or there is injury, as an example."

"With the increase in annexations and expansion in Silverton's boundaries, additional streets, neighborhoods and the park system, it does spread us out and gives us more overall acreage to patrol and respond to problems and handle calls for service within," Fossholm added. "This has caused a slight reduction in being able to patrol all areas of town equally and for some parts of town have a little longer response time on calls for service."

The chief said complaints have been minimal, but the department has assigned a traffic officer to specifically deal

with traffic complaints and accidents, which overrun that officer's 40-hour work week and requires some additional assistance from patrol officers.

"A big issue facing the police department is... we are out of space for any additional personnel in our current building," Fossholm said. "I currently have three officers per desk and we don't have any room for the officers to store their extra equipment or duty bags."

"The (code and parking) officer has an office upstairs in Public Works because there is no extra space in the police department," he added. "This does not account for the numerous and other problematic issues such as a lack of evidence storage space, inadequate booking area with sight and sound separate between adult and juvenile offenders, a formal (audio and video recorded) interview room, meeting rooms for victims, weapons and ammunition armory, department training room in which the entire department can meet and train together, locker room space, area to process evidence — to name a few from a long list of issues."

Fossholm said as the town continues to grow he anticipates requests for additional officers and staff will come with it.

"I'm not sure exactly when or what year that might occur, but once we get there I'm sure it will be readily apparent based on the number of calls for service, not being able to provide full service or not being able to handle calls within a timely manner," he said. "The good news is that we are not there yet, but when it's time we will make the request and provide justification for such a request."

**Public school populations**

Silver Falls School District Superintendent Andy Bellando said enrollment in the district's 13 schools is tracked monthly, and the district's largely rural boundaries — 260 square miles — means that only about 50 percent of the elementary school enrollment hails from Silverton.

Bellando said a few of

## Silverton

| Year | Population |
|------|------------|
| 1880 | 229        |
| 1890 | 511        |
| 1900 | 656        |
| 1910 | 1,588      |
| 1920 | 2,251      |
| 1930 | 2,462      |
| 1940 | 2,925      |
| 1950 | 3,146      |
| 1960 | 3,081      |
| 1970 | 4,301      |
| 1980 | 5,168      |
| 1990 | 5,635      |
| 1991 | 5,725      |
| 1992 | 6,050      |
| 1993 | 6,080      |
| 1994 | 6,170      |
| 1995 | 6,405      |
| 1996 | 6,565      |
| 1997 | 6,675      |
| 1998 | 6,740      |
| 1999 | 6,745      |
| 2000 | 7,414      |
| 2001 | 7,420      |
| 2002 | 7,680      |
| 2003 | 7,980      |
| 2004 | 8,060      |
| 2005 | 8,230      |
| 2006 | 8,915      |
| 2007 | 9,205      |
| 2008 | 9,540      |
| 2009 | 9,585      |
| 2010 | 9,222      |
| 2011 | 9,265      |
| 2012 | 9,290      |
| 2013 | 9,330      |
| 2014 | 9,460      |
| 2015 | 9,590      |
| 2016 | 9,725      |
| 2017 | 10,070     |

Data are compiled by Population Research Center.

The source is U.S. Census Bureau for decennial Census populations; and for intercensal population estimates, the source is the Population Research Center's Population Estimates Program, Portland State University.

the district schools are at capacity, but most are not. The district can regulate enrollment by adjusting its allowed out-of-district transfers.

"This will help address enrollment growth in the future," Bellando said.

"School district enrollment remained flat for about 20 years — between 1994 and 2014," Bellando noted. "We experienced an average of 1-percent growth in total enrollment each of the past three years, which may indicate that growth will continue."

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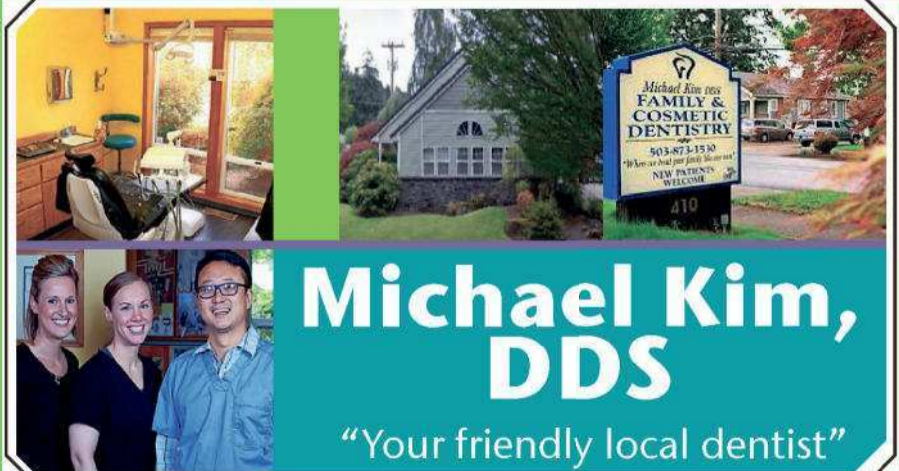
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