



A before and after photo of regrowth post-wildfire in the Columbia River Gorge. PROVIDED BY RALPH BLOEMERS

‘Elemental’ film looks at Santiam Canyon fires, wildfire preparedness

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“Elemental,” a new documentary released this year, explores humanity’s current relationship with wildfire, offering a hopeful look into how to better prepare and live with such a powerful force as it becomes more common.

With over a third of the footage recorded in Oregon, capturing well-known infernos such as the Santiam Canyon and Eagle Creek fires, the 81-minute film is screening at multiple locations around the state, including in Salem for a week to mark the second anniversary of the Labor Day fires.

The film follows researchers and scientists studying how to better understand fire and the crucial role that forests play in the environment, including visual representations of how those natural landscapes can regrow and support life even after a burn.

Previous viewers of the documentary who had suffered losses from wildfire were left with a feeling of hope, because it represented their own struggle to seek out resources and solutions post-wildfire, said Ralph Bloemers, executive producer of the film.

“After the Eagle Creek Fire, there were so many people worried about the Gorge, who really love that place, and I wanted to be able to show them that their loved one was doing fine,” said Bloemers. “Nature comes back quickly, but in the process of making this and as fires in Oregon got worse, you learn that these fires often result in home loss and the destruction of communities. Houses don’t grow back like trees.”

Loretta Miles, owner of Salem Cinema, was

so moved emotionally the first time she watched “Elemental” she decided to run it in her theater for a full week, rather than the requested one-time showing Bloemers had been hoping for.

The documentary will run through Sept. 16 at Salem Cinema.

“Once I had seen the film, I knew they had something much more important on their hands than they even realized. It’s so powerful,” Miles said. “This information is urgent, and the film is done remarkably well without making you feel like you’re being lectured. The people who made this aren’t just passionate about filmmaking, but about the planet, and you can really feel that when you watch.”

There are two main veins of the documentary: developing a clear path forward to community safety and showing how the outdoor spaces people love – those that give a sense of place for Oregonians – can come back post-burn and offer a new kind of beauty, albeit different.

“When it comes to forests and wildfire, there is a lot of beauty in that cycle,” Jennings said. “We are not at a point yet where we’re going to lose those places we love to go, our best friends, even though a lot of them will change. This film shows that there are ways we can still experience the forest and that beauty we love.”

The documentary provides both inspiring and harrowing accounts from individuals who have survived the fires and are able to tell their stories themselves. A demonstrable solution offered in the film is home hardening, the process of preparing your home to be a defensible space in a multitude of ways, fo-



The Taylor Creek Fire. TRIP JENNINGS

cusing on durability and adaptation to the threats of wildfire.

“Playing the hand we are dealt, we are not capable of stopping wildfire,” Jennings said. “We go out every summer and fight this battle and every summer we come back and say we lost. We can’t keep playing that hand and expect a different outcome.”

“While we might not be able to stop wildfires, we can learn how to live with them and even how to thrive in that world.”

Already spreading across the Pacific Northwest, the film has impacted survivors of wildfire, firefighters and even politicians.

“It’s easy to assume a documentary about wildfire is going to be doom and gloom, and we do convey the seriousness of this issue and the intensity of the fires the last few years,” Jennings said. “There is an actionable, clear path

forward to living with wildfire, and it doesn’t look like concrete bunkers. This documentary just shows that it isn’t game over yet. The feeling of hope is real.”

Showtimes for “Elemental” will be listed on Salem Cinema’s website. It will also be shown at the Art House in Eugene and in other theaters across the west, including a screening in Ashland for the anniversary of the Alameda Fire. On Sept. 30, the film will also be shown at Upper McKenzie Community Center.

For more on available screenings of “Elemental,” visit elementalfilm.com/screen-elemental. For more on home hardening and fire preparedness, go to wildfirerisk.org.

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Farewell

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ers, John T. Hoblitt bought the newspaper around 1915. The Appeal had intermittent competition from other weeklies, including two renditions of the Tribune. Hoblitt purchased the second, which had been founded in Mount Angel before moving to Silverton, and consolidated the two publications.

The last issues of the Silverton Appeal and the Silverton Tribune were published on July 31, 1930, and the two became one. Hoblitt was the owner and publisher until he died in 1946. The family owned the newspaper until 1960.

The stories of history

Small-town newspapers have been relied on for generations to provide local news about schools, government, clubs and activities. In the early days of the Appeal Tribune, social life filled many columns. Reports of so-and-so being ill or traveling to Salem for the day were routine.

During wartime, the front pages were

often more somber, dotted with the young faces of hometown service members.

The Appeal Tribune published a regular front-page feature during World War II called “News from our boys in the service.” The roundup included items such as where they were stationed and when they visited home during leave.

But some never returned. They lost their lives fighting for our country. The front page of the May 26, 1944 Appeal Tribune memorialized 10 of those men.

Where to find the archives

Past issues of the Appeal Tribune have been preserved through various archive channels. The Silver Falls Library has the newspaper on microfilm. The University of Oregon’s “Historic Oregon Newspapers” collection includes more than 2,000 digital pages of the Appeal Tribune.

For those preferring the feel of newspaper and doing research the old-fashioned way, bound volumes — each containing a year’s worth of the weekly papers — are accessible through the Silverton Country Historical Society.

The Statesman Journal donated the



The first edition of The Silverton Appeal was published on May 17, 1880. The newspaper was donated to the Silverton Country Historical Society. CAPI LYNN / STATESMAN JOURNAL

bound volumes several years ago after the Appeal Tribune office downsized and before the Statesman relocated to its current location.

The Silverton Country Historical Society continues to be the steward of the collection. For more information on access, email [\[seum@live.com\]\(mailto:seum@live.com\)](mailto:silverton.mu-</p>
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