

GUEST EDITORIAL

ALBANY DEMOCRAT-HERALD

Fire season hits close

The Silver Creek Fire burning in a remote area of Silver Falls State Park isn't a particularly big fire — estimates have placed it at about 27 acres.

But even though the fire is located in a spot in Marion County that's a couple of hours from Linn County, this fire — in a place that is well-loved by mid-valley residents — still feels too close to home.

Last week, as if to drive the point home, the Substation Fire erupted southeast of The Dalles, and — in a matter of hours — grew to 50,000 acres, killing one person, destroying a number of buildings (including the historic Charles E. Nelson farmhouse) and forcing residents to evacuate. It's now burns close to 80,000 acres.

So, welcome to the 2018 fire season.

Linn County has been reasonably fortunate over the last few fire seasons. Although fires have raged in the county's eastern portion, and even though the mid-valley has filled with smoke from fires elsewhere, most of the county has been generally spared from the large, destructive fires that have ravaged other parts of the state.

In part, this is thanks to hardworking and skilled firefighters who do everything possible to stop small fires before they can grow bigger.

But, let's be honest — part of this is luck. And, sooner or later, our luck is likely to run out.

The Silver Creek Fire is an excellent example of the sort of blaze that might strike in some portions of Linn County.

The fire started in the Howard Creek drainage, a remote, steep, timbered area more than a mile from the park's boundary. Early estimates of the fire's size were hampered because of dense canopy, extensive understory and limited visibility due to smoke; improved mapping over the weekend allowed fire managers to more accurately gauge its size.

The area where the fire is burning is particularly challenging for firefighters, due to its remote location and steep slopes. The fact that the fire is burning in a mature forest with thick undergrowth adds to the challenges, and to the potential hazards: Falling snags have been known to severely injure or kill firefighters.

The fire has not had a big impact on activities at Silver Falls State Park. (If you're planning a trip to the park, though, remember to check frequently for updates, since conditions can change quickly.)

The story is different on the Substation Fire, which triggered evacuation of the towns of Moro and Grass Valley, and the closure of U.S. Highway 97 from Biggs Junction to near the highway's junction with U.S. 197. The person killed was reportedly found in a burned tractor and apparently was trying to build a fire line to protect a nearby home. The fire also prompted Gov. Kate Brown to declare a statewide wildfire emergency.

The cause of the Substation Fire is not yet known. Officials on the Silver Creek Fire finally determined that a lightning strike — most likely from a storm that passed over the area nearly a month ago — ignited that blaze.

Although lightning can be a fierce enemy of firefighters (and a lightning strike can smolder for weeks before bursting into flames), the fact is that most wildfires are caused by humans. Data from the Oregon Department of Forestry suggest that more than 75 percent of wildfires are human-caused.

Blazes across Oregon and the West will likely keep firefighters busy over the next eight weeks or so. There seems little chance that the weather will offer much of a break. Restrictions already are in place for state and federal forest lands; be certain you know which restrictions are in effect whenever you go out into the woods.

Keep this in mind as well: Careless actions by humans can cause fires. It's happened nearly twice a day in Oregon since the start of this year. Those fires endanger structures and puts lives at risk. Don't add to that risk.



Your views

Cruson: Happy to see the Hammonds pardoned

To the Editor:
I appreciate the work of Rep. Greg Walden persevering until justice was accomplished in the case of Dwight and Steven Hammond. I am grateful to President Trump for reviewing this case and seeing his way clear to right a terrible injustice. Hopefully these Eastern Oregon families can put their lives back together and once again enjoy the unique life of the high desert. I trust their experience will not be in vain and all involved will have learned from what has transpired and save other ranchers from such a fate.

Government has its place but not when it overreaches to "shock the conscience," as was stated by Federal Judge Michael Hogan, who presided over the case and used his discretion in sentencing. These men have more than served their

time and I am so happy to see this ridiculous decision overruled and the Hammonds pardoned.

Cheryl Cruson
Ontario

McClellan: La Grande cops are there when you need them

To the Editor:
How many times have you said, "Where's a cop when you need one?" My answer is: "Right here in the City of La Grande."

A couple of weeks ago, I had a utility trailer stolen from my property while I was gone for a few days. As soon as I noticed it was gone, I checked with a few friends, and no one had borrowed it. I called the La Grande Police Department to report the missing trailer.

Dispatch put me in contact with Officer Rogers, who asked me if the trailer had a license. It did not, but I gave him a description of

the trailer. I had to leave town, and Officer Rogers asked me to get in touch with him on my return so we could discuss the incident in more detail.

When I returned, I had remembered several unique features that would make the trailer easy to identify. I had little hope of ever seeing the trailer again.

Officer Rogers said he had a few ideas of who may be involved in the theft as other crimes had been committed in my neighborhood. He would follow up on my case and keep me informed.

Much to my surprise, that afternoon Officer Rogers called to report he was pretty sure he had found my missing trailer, and wanted me to meet him at the crime scene to identify the trailer he found. It was mine. The description matched perfectly. The thieves had tried to hide it under a cover, even painted the exposed tongue. Due to some very diligent police

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work by Officer Rogers and others from the LGPD, the thieves were outsmarted.

Many kudos to Officer Rogers and all the men and women of the La Grande Police Department for protecting us all from the bad guys.

Dick McClellan
La Grande

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