

FIRE

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grow by the hour,” he said.

Deedon said that with resources in Oregon becoming more scarce, aid is coming from other states. While in the Promise area Thursday, July 22, several trucks from Idaho passed by. He said there also are resources from Arizona and even a PIO from Louisiana.

Contract firefighter arrives from Salem

Another firefighter told how difficult the work is. Juan Mora, of Salem, has been battling blazes since 2000 and is now a contract firefighter. He arrived on the Elbow Creek Fire early Thursday and began checking out the situation.

“I like to check the whole ground I’m going to be working on first,” Mora said from Sloan Point, a staging area for Division Whiskey. He said highly trained hotshot firefighters were down Grossman Creek.

“It looks like it’s holding, but you never know with the winds you’ve had. It could pick up,” he said. “You do put in work. It’s not just a hike in the woods. We take it seriously. We work all year long on the forests. We plant, we thin. It’s a lot of stuff like dry-mopping and harder stuff.”

Dry-mopping, Mora said, is to use a pulaski to dig 2 feet of dirt to cover



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Brett Deedon, a trainee public information officer with the office of the Oregon State Fire Marshal, looks toward a property along Promise Road on Thursday, July 22, 2021, near the Elbow Creek Fire. A fire break was cut in the dirt around the house in an attempt to provide protection to the structure.

any burning or flammable material.

“What you’re doing is taking out the oxygen from the fire,” he said.

Proximity is really bringing it home

But knowing the people here brings it home all the more.

“When the fire’s in your own backyard, per se, I don’t want to say it’s more important — all fires are important — but I have a lot more ownership in it locally,” Weer said. “There are people out here who have lost a family cabin and I’m friends with those folks, so that hits harder.”

While proud of the efforts of her husband and other firefighters, Weer’s wife, Maria, is still concerned for their safety.

“I do worry about their

safety, but I know that they train to be as safe as possible,” she said.

She also emphasized the support offered by the community.

“We’re thankful for the community support. People always reaching out to see if I need help with carpools and the like,” she said.

“People are supportive of the firefighters, but they’re also supportive of those of us at home.”

Weer emphasized that firefighters in Wallowa County have a good relationship with their colleagues elsewhere.

“We have a really good working relationship with our ODF (Oregon Department of Forestry) partners in Wallowa County,” he said. “We’re kind of landlocked up here so we rely heavily on each other for mutual aid.”



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Smoke fills a valley along Sloan Point Road on Thursday, July 22, 2021, from the Elbow Creek Fire near Promise in northern Wallowa County.

CREWS GAINING GROUND ON ELBOW CREEK FIRE

WALLOWA COUNTY — The Elbow Creek Fire has surpassed 20,000 acres, but crews fighting the blaze are starting to get an upper hand. During a virtual community update Thursday, July 22, Operations Staff Chief Eric Perkins said “things are looking good right now” in some of the areas that have given firefighters a challenge this week. The most recent briefing on July 23 had the fire listed at 20,810 acres and 20% contained. The size of the team battling the fire is now 878, with resources from eight other states helping Oregon firefighters. Perkins said that there was a lot of smoke rising from the northwest portion of the fire near Elbow Creek July 22, but it’s mostly from inside the fire perimeter. “We’re actually getting a handle on it right now,” he said. “We’ve been working on the lines down toward the Grande Ronde River. We’ve been working in the Elbow Creek trying to get that fire in position where we can contain it and control it.” Perkins said fire progression had been “pretty much stopped” in the area of Sickfoot Creek at the southern edge of the blaze. Crews were hoping to transition to mop-up work there July 23, a press release said. Fire progression had also been slowed in the Grossman

Creek area and along the Grande Ronde, he said. “We’ve been hitting this area (Grande Ronde River) all day (July 22) with aircraft and backing it up with dozers,” Perkins said. “It’s moving slower than it has been.”

Incident Commander Link Smith said July 22 he was impressed with the size the fire has been held to. “Most of this fire is in really good shape,” he said, though he cautioned that “we’re not out of the woods yet. We’re in a really tough spot here in Elbow Creek.” Mop-up continues to the north and east, and Deputy IC Les Hallman said with the fire moving away from structures and those structures being secured, some task forces would be released. “Two of our task forces will be leaving (July 23),” he said.

Wallowa County Emergency Management late Friday morning also lowered evacuation notices for the second day in a row. Troy, which Thursday was lowered from Level 3 to Level 2, is now at a Level 1 “Get Ready.” Promise and Eden Bench, which were last at Level 3, have dropped to the Level 2 “Get Set.” Additionally, the Level 1 notice in Flora has been lifted.

—Wallowa County Chieftain



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Derik Drake holds a sign Tuesday, July 20, 2021, urging people to sign a petition in support of his quest to reopen HWY 30 Cannabis in La Grande. Drake had purchased the business but due to technicalities from city Ordinance 3228, was unable to resume operations since it qualified as a new dispensary.

PETITION

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Drake taking over at the same location is banned by Ordinance 3228, since he would be opening a new dispensary by technical terms.

“So even though we’d be in the same building and doing the exact same thing that she was and staying medical, they’re not letting us enter,” he said.

After the state legalized recreational marijuana in 2014, Oregon saw a major shift from medical marijuana dispensaries to recreational dispensaries. Prior to ending its licensing and becoming a CBD and accessories store, HWY 30 stood as one of the few remaining medical dispensaries in the state for Drake to sell to.

“I just see it as a healing tool and a helpful thing that people need and can be educated about,” he said. “Even if you don’t support it, we’re keeping it off the streets. We’re regulating it and trying to do a positive thing for the community.”

According to La Grande Community Development Director Mike Boquist, HWY 30 and the Oregon Health Authority agreed upon not renewing the dispensary’s license.

As a result, all existing city permitting and grandfather rights expired when the license was not renewed.

“I don’t think they real-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Derik Drake, left, watches as Kristen Morlock signs a petition to repeal Ordinance 3228, a city law that prevents new medical marijuana dispensaries from opening, on Tuesday, July 20, 2021.

ized at the time that selling the property to a different dispensary to go in there was going to be a whole new permit and that it was going to be a problem,” Boquist said. “I think it just comes down to what the rules say and following that.”

If Drake gathers the required 1,315 signatures, the initiative to partially repeal Ordinance 3228 will likely make its way onto the November ballot for La Grande residents to vote on. The La Grande City Council could potentially move to approve the initiative prior to the November election or let it ride on the results of a vote in November.

When recreational marijuana was legalized, residents in La Grande voted in majority to ban its sale in the city. Since then, ini-

tiatives have been put into place by HWY 30 and city council members to lift the ban, which have never come to fruition.

While Drake is only looking to bring medicinal marijuana back into the community, there has been a lack of support in recent years as seen by HWY 30’s failed attempt to repeal the ordinance in March 2020.

“We know that La Grande is kind of conservative and that they don’t want a bunch more dispensaries in,” Drake said. “We’re just trying to allow (only) one location to open back up.”

As of Tuesday, July 20, Drake and his team had acquired nearly 1,000 signatures, with one week remaining to submit the required number of signatures.

PIPES

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leadership position given to the lead violin player of an orchestra.

Pipes stepped down from the Grande Ronde Symphony Orchestra after playing for 26 years, when she and her husband, Taylor Roby Pipes, and the couple began spending winters in Arizona in the 1970s. Still she retained ties to the Grande Ronde Symphony Orchestra. The links were so strong that symphony member Patty Sandoz, of La Grande, would convert video of the Grande Symphony Orchestra’s concerts into DVDs so Pipes could watch them.

Sandoz was delighted to do this for Pipes.

“I treasured my friendship with her,” she said.

Pipes’ love of music remained stronger than ever after she left the symphony, even after she became a centenarian. Sandoz noted that in 2018 Pipes was reteaching herself to play on a piano-type keyboard she had just acquired.

Pipes spent her golden years learning about not only music but also technology.

“Many seniors are scared or overwhelmed by technology, but not my mom,” Conklin said. “She embraced it.”

Pipes was introduced to computers at age 72 and took to them quickly. Soon emailing was one of her favorite means of communication, and she found herself recording songs she played on the piano. The recordings were enhanced with musical accompaniment created by Pipes with a synthesizer-piano.

A perfectionist and tenacious

Pipes did not have the benefit of computer technology when she started her career as a bookkeeper in La Grande more than 70 years ago after graduating from a business school in Quincy, Illinois.

Pipes was a bookkeeper for many years, working for companies including the Paul Bunyan Co., Montgomery Ward and Fountain Wholesale. Pipes found working as a bookkeeper fulfilling.



Patty Sandoz/Contributed Photo

Anita Pipes enjoys her garden in Walla Walla, Washington. Pipes moved in 2004 from La Grande to Walla Walla, where she lived until 2020.

“She loved it,” Conklin said.

Bookkeeping was a good fit for her since she enjoyed the challenge of accounting and meeting its high standards for accuracy.

“She was a real perfectionist and tenacious. These are the type of people who do well at bookkeeping,” Conklin said.

Pipes kept close tabs of the budget of not only the businesses she worked for but also her household. Conklin described her parents as “thrifty” individuals who never took on debt if at all possible.

“They almost always paid in cash,” she said. “If they used a credit card they would not buy anything that could not be paid off at the end of the month. If they did not have the money to buy something they didn’t buy it.”

Conklin said her parents were anything but frugal when helping those in need.

“They were quiet philanthropists. They were very generous. They would see someone who needed help and would figure out a way to help them,” she said. “It was totally unsolicited. They were not afraid to reach out.”

Pipes had few health problems during her life and was able to walk under her own power until she was about 103 when she started using a walker.

“The only reason she used it was for balance,” Conklin said.

Pipes was prone to falling later in her life but the only serious injury she sustained was a fractured wrist.

“She had bones of steel,” Conklin said.

A lifelong love of the outdoors

Conklin does not know why her mother was so healthy, but she believes a life of exercise may have been a factor.

“She always walked. We had a car but she nearly always walked. If we needed to go to town to get some yeast she would say, ‘Let’s walk.’ Walking was her lifestyle,” Conklin said.

Fishing is another activity Pipes enjoyed.

All of her fishing was done with her husband, who died in 2003.

“They fished all over the Northwest,” Conklin said. “It was a joy. It was a sport both them of them could enjoy together.”

Conklin said her parents did much of their fishing in the high lakes of the Elkhorns, many of which they hiked to. The Elkhorns meant so much to Pipes that her family will later spread her ashes there.

Pipes, who lived in the La Grande area for 87 years, moved to Walla Walla, Washington, in September 2004 and to Kennewick in 2020. Sandoz, who often visited Pipes in Washington, feels blessed to have known her.

“She was truly a remarkable and inspirational woman,” Sandoz said.