

BENEFITS

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Nebo and Sturgill fires are “doing a lot of good in terms of cleaning up fuels.”

According to the national forest’s leadership team, they are closely monitoring the conditions of the Nebo Fire, and firefighters are preparing containment features on nearby road and trail systems to protect adjacent structures, including Big Sheep Camp, Lick Creek Guard Station and Indian Crossing Campground.

Total containment of both fires is expected to occur in late October.

“Keeping them in the wilderness is the main objective at this point,” Burks said.

Burks understands the concern that arises when it comes to wildfires, but there’s a public education component to acknowledge as well. Putting out every forest fire would lead to an unhealthy ecosystem, he said.

“These are fire-adaptive ecosystems, and if we suppress every fire, we’re just going to have bigger and worse fires,” he said. “We’re just kicking the can down the road.”

Burks explained that a healthy forest contains mature, tall trees without much ground fuel — lower layer growth such as roots, downed trees, branches,



The Sturgill Fire, sparked by lightning on Monday, Aug. 22, 2022, is burning near the North Minam River in the Eagle Cap Wilderness northeast of Baker City.

U.S. Forest Service/Contributed Photo

logs and undergrowth. This healthy condition would normally be a result of yearly fires that keep forests “actively clean.”

Due to continued suppression efforts, Burks said, small trees and undergrowth have gotten out of control, making it hard to see through the forest and providing

ample fuel for fires. This is where naturally occurring wildfires — like the Sturgill and Nebo fires — can come in handy. By allowing these blazes to burn, “fire breaks” are created that can help mitigate future fires.

“You’ll see some intense burning out of these two fires, but after-

ward you have this area that is more free and open from all that fuel,” he said.

Firefighters are working to maintain adjacent private property and inholdings within the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest — including Red’s Horse Ranch and Minam River Lodge. The expected fire increase has prompted

several trail closures until further notice.

Fire suppression

The Double Creek Fire, Burks noted, is a different story. He called the blaze an “active fire suppression incident” and noted that full suppression efforts are underway, including air tankers, helicopters, rappel

SEPT. 1 DOUBLE CREEK FIRE EVACUATION NOTICES

The Wallowa County Sheriff issued a change in the evacuation levels for the Double Creek Fire area beginning Thursday, Sept. 1. The new levels are:

- Level 3, “Go Now” evacuation for the Hat Point Road. The Hat Point Road is also closed due to the fire activity.
- Level 2, “Get Set” for the Imnaha River Road, from Rippleton Creek to the Imnaha Grange, including Freezeout Road.
- Level 1, “Be Ready” for the Imnaha River Road, from the town of Imnaha to Rippleton Creek.
- Level 1, “Be Ready” for the Imnaha River Road, from the Imnaha Grange to the Palette Ranch, including Imnaha River Woods.

crews and firefighters.

This fire was first detected on Aug. 30 along Hat Point Road near Grizzly Ridge. The 1,500-acre blaze, which was also likely sparked by lightning, carries more concern because of its proximity to residences.

As of Thursday, Sept. 1, the fire was at zero percent containment. Almost 130 personnel are working to protect private property and resources threatened by the fire.

“It is growing and it’ll probably grow today,” Burkes noted during a Sept. 1 interview. “But we’re working with our partners to put that one out.”

EVACUATE

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Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, said there are multiple bulldozers, fire trucks and aircraft battling the blaze. From the town of Imnaha, smoke is easily visible up the Imnaha River canyon, but the town itself does not appear threatened.

“The main focus is keeping folks safe,” Anderson said.

Wallowa County Commissioner Todd Nash said he and his fellow commissioners are keeping informed of the progress of fighting the fire. He

said it appears the blaze is being contained.

“These fires in the wilderness (are) making quite a lot of smoke,” he said, “but so far they’re staying within bounds Forest Service hoped they would.”

He noted that fires are not unusual for the region.

“They call them the Blue Mountains because when the wagon trains came through, people looked over their shoulders and the country always looked blue because it was always on fire,” he said.

Part of the problem with fires in recent years, Nash said, is forest management.

“That’s in an allot-

ment that should’ve been grazed,” the rancher said. “It’s unfortunate that there’s all that grass that should’ve been grazed that’s helping to carry that fire right now.”

But, he said, fire is part of the natural process in the wilderness.

“The positive thing about the fires is that they consume some of the fuel,” he said.

Nash said he was aware of bits of ash that fell on Enterprise Aug. 31 as a large cloud of smoke came up to the southeast from the Sturgill and Nebo fires.

“There were big chunks of black material with the ash,” he said.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Smoke is easily visible Thursday, Sept. 1, 2022, alongside the Imnaha Highway near Imnaha, although the fire is miles away from town.

ECONOMY

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optimistic “baseline” forecast, economists say Oregon will see \$600 million more in the current two-year budget cycle than they anticipated just three months ago, an increase largely driven by personal income taxes. That would result in Oregonians receiving a record \$3.46 billion back in the form of the kicker, the unique Oregon policy that returns personal income taxes if they come in at least 2% higher than initial forecasts.

“The numbers to date have not weakened whatsoever,” McMullen told lawmakers of corporate taxes. “But this is terrifying. Along with capital gains, this is our most volatile part of the revenue forecast.”

The more optimistic scenario is less bullish in future years when it predicts revenue growth will be much slower than expected in May. Economists now say each of the next three two-year budget cycles could see revenues more than \$600 million lower than projected earlier.

Just as likely, economists said, is the possibility that Oregon will enter into a “mild recession” toward the end of 2023. The risk, Lehner said, is that surging wages driven by an unsustainably hot labor market will continue to drive inflation, which could prompt the federal government to further increase interest rates, triggering a downturn and a big increase in the state’s low unemployment rate.

“We need to see the labor market cool,” Lehner said.

If Oregon does enter into a recession, economists say Oregon will still see roughly \$50 million more



Salem Statesman Journal, File

Oregon state economists on Wednesday, Aug. 31, 2022, delivered their most serious warning in years — the state’s surging revenue growth is about to end.

than previously expected in the budget cycle that runs through June 2023. But they say revenues for the next two biennial budgets come in at \$1.2 billion and \$1.4 billion lower than previous estimates.

“Should this unfold, it would mean large program cuts,” McMullen said. “It would be unavoidable.”

The question for lawmakers, who will craft a new two-year budget in next year’s legislative session, is how to incorporate the competing forecasts. McMullen and Lehner suggested they operate under the more optimistic version for now, reasoning that unnecessarily chopping state services is not ideal.

“We kind of have to wait until we see the white of the recession’s eyes before we put in these kinds of drastic revenue reductions,” McMullen said.

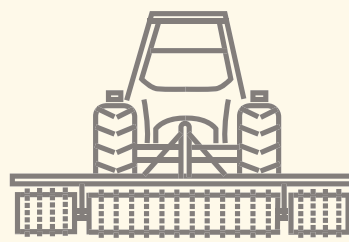
But underestimating a potential revenue cliff brings its own risks. Longtime State Sen. Lee Beyer said the looming scenario reminded him of 2002 when lawmakers met in five special sessions to continuously revise the budget amid a tanking economy.

“From past experience, I think it’s time that people

who will be there need to take a cautionary look at it,” said Beyer, who is retiring when his term expires at the end of the year.

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