

FIRE

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Double Creek Fire, cleared brush and increased defensible space around homes along the Freezeout and Imnaha roads.

Firefighters secured a private inholding (Section 36) along Grizzly Ridge between Buck Point and Pumpkin Creek. Dozers cleared vegetation along the power line in the Imnaha River corridor. All the known hunting parties were safely evacuated from the area.

According to a release from the governor's office, the declaration allows the Office of the State Fire Marshal to take unified command immediately. Wallowa County Sheriff Joel Fish has issued Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1 evacuation orders for homes near the fire.

Firefighters on Sept. 5 were scouting for additional options on the northern and southern portions of the fire. Crews will mop up and patrol around structures along Freezeout Road and north

along the Upper Imnaha Road. Firing operations will continue along the Upper Imnaha Road to secure the fire backing down drainages to the east. State Fire Marshal task forces will continue to assist with structure protection along the Imnaha Road and ensuring the protection of life and property in the community of Imnaha.

Brown's declaration cleared the way for the State Fire Marshal to mobilize firefighters and equipment to assist local resources battling the fire and further support a coordinated response.

Local mutual aid and federal resources are on scene working to slow the fire's progress. An OSFM Incident Management Team assumed unified command Sept. 3 with federal partners. OSFM will bring in four additional task forces through the Oregon Fire Mutual Aid System from Lane, Clatsop, Washington and Yamhill counties to assist in the response.

The Double Creek Fire is a "full suppression" blaze, which

means officials are trying to douse it as soon as possible.

The Wallowa County Sheriff's Office on Sept. 4 modified the evacuation levels for the Double Creek Fire. A Level 3 "Go Now" is in effect for the town of Imnaha and south to Freezeout Road. The Upper Imnaha Road, Hat Point Road and Wallowa Mountain Loop Road (Forest Service Road 39) are closed. A Level 2 "Get Set" is in effect for the area from the town of Imnaha north to Fence Creek, including the lands east toward Lightning Creek. A Level 1 "Be Ready" is in effect from Freezeout south to the Palette Ranch and Imnaha River Woods.

Eagle Cap Wilderness fires

The Sturgill and Nebo fires in the Eagle Cap Wilderness, by contrast, are "managed" fires. That means officials are using a variety of tactics, monitoring the fires in some areas but taking actions, such as having helicopters drop water and dispatching firefighters on the ground, to try to limit the fires' spread in cer-

tain directions.

The Sturgill Fire has burned 12,703 acres and is zero percent contained, according to the Sept. 5 update. There are 31 personnel assigned to fight the fire, which is burning 15 miles southwest of Enterprise.

Firefighters worked Sept. 4 on structure protection for residences in the area. The Wildland Fire Modules will continue to implement structure protection for private inholdings along the Minam River on Sept. 5. Smokejumpers will assist with structure protection efforts.

The Nebo Fire, which is burning 21 miles southeast of Enterprise near Mount Nebo, has burned 7,277 acres and is zero percent contained. There are 50 personnel assigned to fight the fire.

Firefighters spent Sept. 4 building a control line along the Wallowa Mountain Loop Road (Forest Service Road 39) to the 200 Road. On Sept. 5, additional resources will be assigned to assist with fireline construction and initiate firing operations

along the Wallowa Mountain Loop (Forest Service Road 39) and 200 roads.

Crews and heavy equipment will be used to keep the fire west of the road. Firefighters will also implement structure protection for Forest Service infrastructure, including the Lick Creek Campground, as the fire continues to move to the north and east.

Both the Sturgill and Nebo fires have surpassed the 2019 Granite Gulch Fire as the biggest in the Eagle Cap Wilderness since the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest instituted a policy allowing lightning fires to burn naturally. The Granite Gulch Fire burned about 5,500 acres in August and September 2019.

There are two other fires burning in the Eagle Caps, also sparked by lightning Aug. 22 or 23. The Goat Mountain Fire 1 is not active, according to fire managers. The Goat Mountain 2 Fire is about 95 acres, but, unlike the Sturgill and Nebo fires, it did not grow substantially over the weekend.

AR-15

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The AR-15 has been called "America's Rifle" by the National Rifle Association. It's been dubbed "Baby Killer" by gun-control advocates for its use in mass murders of elementary school children in Connecticut and Texas.

The total number of "AR-15 style" rifles in the United States is difficult to tabulate.

An estimate of 20 million is on the website of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, a firearms and ammunition industry trade group. It refers to the AR-15 variants as a "modern sports shooting rifle."

"They're popular for home defense, recreational target shooting and hunting," the foundation website says.

Colt firearms bought the patents for the AR-15 in 1959 from ArmaLite — the "AR" stands for "ArmaLite Rifle." The design was the inspiration of the M-16 rifle, the standard American military rifle since the Vietnam War.

The patent for the AR-15 ran out in 1977, allowing



The Associated Press, File

Three variants of the AR-15 semiautomatic rifle are shown by the California Department of Justice at a 2012 news conference.

companies to build generic knockoffs. But Colt retained the AR-15 trademark, so each of the more than two dozen gunmakers who have built copycat variants has had to come up with its own name. Police call the alphabet soup of brands, names and numbers "AR-15 style."

The gun has proven so popular that no one can buy a new one. With the market flooded with competition, Colt announced in 2020 that it would no longer make the AR-15. But it held onto the name.

The AR-15 is not a

"machine gun."

While the M-16 is capable of firing automatically — discharging all bullets with a single pull of the trigger — the AR-15 is semi-automatic. One bullet is fired with each pull of the trigger, but it also feeds the next round into the chamber. The system allows for a higher rate of fire than earlier bolt- or lever-action rifles.

Congress effectively banned new sales of the AR-15 in 1994, but allowed the ban to lapse in 2004. Having emerged from the prohibition, the AR-15 became a symbol for many

gun rights groups. It's often seen during "open carry" gun rights rallies in Salem and elsewhere around the nation. It's been the prize in Republican rifle raffles — known as "rif-rafs" — in Portland and elsewhere.

Despite its popularity and high political profile, the AR-15 is a niche market in the American gun collection.

The United States has a population of 333 million people, who collectively own 400 million guns. The AR-15 accounts for less than 5% of the total. Most guns that Americans own are pistols. Pistols are also used much more frequently than rifles or shotguns in crimes.

But the AR-15 rifle has played an outsized role in the highest profile mass shootings, starting in 2007 when a gunman killed six people and himself in an apartment building in Crandon, Wisconsin. In May 2022, a gunman using an AR-15 "style" rifle killed 19 children and two adults at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

In the 15 years in between the two mass shootings, the places and death toll changed, but a version

of the AR-15 was there. The roll call of mass murders includes:

- 2012: Sandy Hook Elementary School, Connecticut: 27 killed
- 2015: San Bernardino, California: 14 killed at a Christmas party for health care workers
- 2016: Orlando, Florida: 49 killed at The Pulse nightclub
- 2016: Sutherland Springs, Texas: 26 killed at a church
- 2017: Las Vegas: 58 killed at an outdoor country music concert, shot by a gunman firing from a high-rise hotel room
- 2018: Parkland, Florida: 17 killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School
- 2022: Buffalo, N.Y., 10 black people killed by a white gunman at a grocery store

The COVID-19 pandemic has fueled demand for the rifle. Since 2020, an estimated 2.8 million semi-automatic military-style rifles have been sold, part of a pandemic-driven surge in gun purchases, according to Forbes magazine.

Mass shootings have also surged over the same

period. There have been 450 mass shootings in the United States so far in 2022, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a nonprofit that since 2014 has tracked shootings and gun deaths. The incidents are on track to break the record of 692 mass shootings recorded last year. A pistol is most often used, but the use of firearms of all types are on the rise.

The Gun Violence Archive defines a mass shooting as one where four or more people are shot or killed, not including the shooter. Other organizations define a mass shooting as four people killed, not including the gunman.

Oregon voters will be asked in November to vote on Measure 114, a gun-control initiative that backers say would require a gun safety course before the sale of a firearm, and ban ammunition magazines that hold more than 10 rounds.

Police say that the Bend shooter had four 30-round magazines with him when he died. A preliminary investigation shows that the "AR-15 style" rifle and other firearms were legally purchased.

CELEBRATE

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Celebrate La Grande is supported through sponsors, donations and discounts from businesses and organizations.

Lastly, the celebration needed to include entertainment for children. Hot dogs, ice cream and activities for kids have been staples of the block party since the beginning. La Grande Parks and Recreation now organizes all the kid-friendly fun.

Along with a planning committee, Larsen-Hill and Franks organized Celebrate La Grande for years. Franks stepped back

from leadership within the committee around seven years ago, according to Larsen-Hill. A few years later, she started looking for someone to organize the event.

"There are really good, young folks taking over," Larsen-Hill said.

Dana Wright and Jeff Crews are the new leaders within the planning committee — but neither is a new face to Celebrate La Grande. Both Wright and Crews were involved in the committee under Larsen-Hill.

New location, same celebration

The block party has a new location this year — Riverside Park. The decision to move from downtown La Grande to the

park was made for logistic reasons, said Crews. The park provides plenty of shade, a lot of grassy areas for kids to run around and already has a fun playground. The commercial kitchen in the pavilion also means an easier time for food safety and health inspection.

There are a few worries about the location for both the old and new leadership. Crews said he's worried about the parking situation at Riverside Park, but that Parks and Rec Director Stu Spence has assured him the park can handle around 800 to 1,000 people.

For Larsen-Hill, her apprehension has to do with attendance. Riverside Park isn't as central of a location as downtown and she

worries that not as many people will make it out.

There will not be fire truck rides this year given the tight nature of the roads and parking lot at Riverside Park, something Crews wants to bring back in the future.

A lot of things about Celebrate La Grande will remain the same. According to Crews, the committee is ensuring that certain "Di-isms" remain a staple to the block party, such as her famous sauerkraut. He recommends everyone give it a try, even those who are not normally a fan of pickled cabbage.

Whether you enjoy kraut or not, Crews said, "It's just great to get people back together."

WALK

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The handcarts, loaded with 5-gallon water jugs and personal items in 5-gallon buckets, were pulled by up to four people and pushed from behind by up to four people. Moving a handcart filled with supplies is not easy.

"You don't realize how hard it is until you are actually doing it," Carpenter said.

The La Grande student believes the people pushing in the back have it the hardest because they must generate much of the momentum.

"The people in front have people pushing them," she said.

Carpenter said the trek was exhausting under the hot sun, but she noted the pioneers had to travel considerably farther and often under much harsher condi-

tions. The rugged circumstances, Carpenter said, did not rattle many of the pioneers, according to historic accounts.

"I don't see how they could endure so much and still be so resilient and happy," she said.

The group had to cross the Sweetwater River in Wyoming as part of the trek. Alyson Glabe, a student at La Grande Middle School, said the stream crossing was delightful because the

cool water was low and the weather was hot.

"It was invigorating," she said.

Carpenter noted that the crossing of the Sweetwater River was much more difficult for many pioneers who had to cross at different times of the year when the river was higher and had blocks of ice.

Greg Baxter, one of the accompanying adults from the La Grande Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, which encompasses Union, Wallowa, Baker and Grant counties, said the trek was a transformative experience for many of the participants in terms of building confidence.

"I heard one boy say, 'Now I know I can do hard things and achieve good things,'" Baxter said.

The trek, which has been conducted every five years by the La Grande Stake since 2007, also had a familial feel because each handcart represented a family unit in a fictional sense with adults playing parental roles. Baxter said many times the members of the handcart parties do not know each other at first but

become good friends as the journey progressed.

Baxter said many of the youths had relatives who made the journey into the Salt Lake Valley by wagon or handcart in the 1800s. Their ancestors were often on their minds.

"In a spiritual sense they felt they were walking with their forefathers," he said.

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