

After the Bootleg: Ranchers add up losses from massive fire

By CRAIG REED
For the Capital Press

BEATTY, Ore. — “It’s going to look like hell for the next 200 years!”

That was Michael Mastagni’s assessment after a trip over some of the blackened landscape on his Five Mile Ranch/3M Livestock property.

The Bootleg Fire had burned 413,717 acres as of Aug. 12, including 3,000 acres of the Five Mile Ranch’s timber and grazing ground and thousands of acres of the ranch’s grazing permit land in the Fremont Winema National Forest.

The fire came within 300 yards of a barn at the ranch’s headquarters where there are two houses and several outbuildings and pieces of equipment.

“We just have to stick one foot in front of another and keep soldiering on,” Mastagni said. “The scar is going to be two to three generations in recovery.”

Suzanne Gallagher, co-owner of the Whiskey Creek Ranch, also saw that ranch’s grazing permit land in the national forest blackened. She said most ranchers are resilient over time, but at the present the situation is devastating.

“You can’t believe how gruesome cows and calves are that have been burned,” she said with sadness in her voice. “It’s horrible.”

Gallagher and Mastagni each had 140 cow-calf pairs out on their respective 40,000-acre grazing permits. Each rancher estimated a loss of 30



Craig Reed/For the Capital Press

Michael Mastagni of Five Mile Ranch/3M Livestock near Beatty, Ore., looks over his ranch property that was blackened by the Bootleg Fire. Mastagni says grazing ground, timber and cattle were lost to the fire.

to 40 head to the fire. Some of the animals suffered from burned hooves or hides and had to be shot and put out of their misery by ranch employees. Since all of the cattle out on the permit ground haven’t been accounted for, there could be additional losses.

‘Like a freight train’

Gallagher said there was a scary unknown to the situation.

“We were seeing boiling smoke, but no flames,” she explained. “But I asked my husband, ‘What is that noise?’ He said, ‘That’s the fire.’ It sounded like a freight train. It was way off in the distance, but it was coming fast. I was terrified and devastated, not knowing about our cattle.”

Eric Duarte of Duarte Livestock said his ranch also had to put some animals down due to burned hooves. He had 650 pairs out on an 80,000-acre permit.

“We spent a better part of 10 days pushing cattle out of

the fire’s way with horses and dogs,” Duarte said. “It’s hard to fathom the loss until we gather the livestock. We were able to push cows south to the lower end of the permit and away from the fire, but we just don’t know how many we lost.”

Several other ranch operations also lost livestock in the fire and are still unsure of their losses.

Gallagher, Duarte and Mastagni were not surprised that a major fire raced across the pine forest landscape. Duarte said fire was “inevitable,” because of years of beetles killing trees and turning them into dry fuel. Hot, dry weather also made the land ripe for fire.

“It was just a matter of when and how big a fire was going to get,” he said.

More management

The ranchers said they wish there would be more forest management in order to prevent or help slow



Courtesy of Michael Mastagni

Five Mile Ranch/3M Livestock cattle are trailed off the ranch’s grazing permit after the Bootleg Fire. While many cattle escaped the catastrophic fire, some were lost or badly burned and had to be put out of their misery.

down fires such as the Bootleg before they become catastrophic.

Their suggestions included more select thinning, more prescribed burns, a quicker and more aggressive response to fires before they blow up, more salvage logging to eliminate future fire fuels and getting livestock back on the burned ground because they’ll eat young shoots of some weeds before those plants have a chance to take over.

Gallagher and Mastagni each said several spots in their permit areas had been prescribed burns in the past and although the Bootleg Fire had gone through them, it was at a lower intensity, giving the ground a better chance at a quick recovery.

“There is work in progress to change some rules, but it’s slow,” Mastagni said. “Ranchers have competing philosophies with some agencies. We want to open up the timber with trees 30 feet apart so we’re better able to grow grass.”

Duarte agreed there needs to be more forest management, but added he understands environmental pressure can prevent or slow up some management decisions.

“The forest needs to be logged, it needs to be cleaned up, it needs to be grazed,” the rancher said. “That will all help. We’ll still have fires, but just not as big.”

“On fires in the past, loggers would jump on them and get some of them out,” he added. “Now they get sued when they do that.”

Both Mastagni and Gallagher have brought most of their cattle off their permit ground and back to their home fields. But now those animals are grazing on grass that was intended for fall pasture or a late summer hay crop.

One of Gallagher’s pastures wasn’t available for use because it has been used for the past month as a helicopter base with eight to nine choppers working from there on the Bootleg Fire.

“My grandkids do think I’m the coolest grandmother in the neighborhood because I got helicopters in my yard,” Gallagher said, injecting some humor in the conversation.

Feed question

The ranchers explained they’ll have to figure out the feed issue later,

whether it’s feeding more of their hay, having to buy hay or culling their herds. Feeding hay in the fall will leave them with less hay for the winter months, possibly none.

They explained buying hay will be a problem due to a lack of supply and a high cost. Mastagni said he believed hay could jump to \$240 a ton, up from \$180 a ton a year ago. He said hay quality for the high price would also be a concern.

Although they have plenty of issues to deal with in the present, the ranchers explained there is a definite uncertainty about the availability of their grazing permits during the summer months of next year. They said there is the possibility the U.S. Forest Service won’t allow cattle back in the burned areas for a year or two, or the number of pairs allowed would be greatly decreased.

Gallagher said any loss of the permit ground is devastating, but she was also saddened by the burning of “such beautiful country.” But she expressed optimism about the future and about the land healing in time.

“You have to keep positive thoughts,” she said. “Pray for rain and snow. We need a real winter. We haven’t had one for a while.”

Mastagni said there are a couple of options for the ranches impacted by the fire.

“You can wither and die, or you can struggle through a tough year and press on,” he said.



PROUD TO SUPPORT Members & Families of FFA

Albany - Eugene - Roseburg - Woodburn - Cornelius - Oregon City - Gresham - The Dalles - White City
Redmond - Klamath Falls, OR • Yakima - East Wenatchee - Auburn - Mount Vernon, Marysville, Sequim, WA



www.CoastalFarm.com

Proud Sponsor of FFA



THE TRACTOR STORE
(541) 342-5464
5450 W. 11th, Eugene, OR
5238153-1

4-H & FFA Members receive
10% OFF
on select categories. See store for details



5013 River Rd., N. Keizer • 3111 Ocean Blvd., SE, Coos Bay
5223967-1

Proud Supporter of



Doerfler Farms
12333 Silver Falls Hwy SE
Aumsville, OR 97325
Phone: (503) 769-2205
5223436-



Meet the National FFA's new CEO

National FFA Organization

Meet the new National FFA CEO, Scott Stump. As you'll learn, his passion for agricultural education, career and technical education, and, of course, FFA, shines through his values and experiences.

Q: Let's step back to your childhood. What were you interested in and how were you exposed to FFA?

A: I grew up in an agriculture education family. My dad taught agriculture for 37 years in northeastern Indiana, and my mom was my 4-H advisor. I was never pressured to follow the path, but agriculture was a big part of our family culture growing up. We were all involved and took advantage of all the wonderful opportunities our education and experiences had to offer.

Q: How did your upbringing lead you to a career in agricultural education?

A: Interestingly, I tried to get away from agriculture education. When I started at Purdue University in the fall of 1985, I initially followed a biochemical and agricultural engineering degree path. I thoroughly loved my biochemistry classes and was fascinated by the emerging technology at the time. But then I spent a year as an Indiana FFA state officer traveling to classrooms across the state. It was in those classrooms that I found my purpose – helping people grow and building systems that build people.

Q: What are the things you are most proud of accomplishing in your role with the United States Department of Education?


A: In my role as assistant secretary of career, technical and adult education, I worked to provide a funding stream for career, technical and agriculture education programs. That funding allows for professional development opportunities for educators and equipment updates in agriculture education classrooms so students can access the latest technology, for example. We also ensured that state and local programs had the flexibility to allocate funds in ways that best fit state and local needs.

Q: What drew you to pursue a leadership position with the National FFA Organization?

A: I've seen FFA from many vantage points as a member, teacher, state leader, national FFA staff member and as a parent. I know firsthand the positive difference FFA can make in the lives of our members. My experiences have prepared me to guide FFA into years of growth, and when the opportunity with FFA opened, it seemed like I was being called to serve in a different way.

Q: What most excites you about the future of FFA?

A: We're in a time of change and flux, and that always leads to opportunities. In the disruption we've experienced in the last year, we've learned how technology is a tool to help reach those students we haven't reached before – providing access to more students across the country to grow them as leaders and set them up for career success. I'm excited to dig in with the board, staff, state leaders, sponsors and stakeholders to identify the shared opportunities for growth to guide our path forward. We know we have opportunities to grow in underrepresented or marginalized communities where agriculture education has not been previously offered. Because we're in an industry that's calling us to do more and build a skilled workforce, we get to be part of preparing this generation to step into roles and join agribusiness employers or step out boldly as entrepreneurs and run their own businesses.



**National FFA CEO
Scott Stump**

Don't replace your
metal roof, restore it.

JOHNSON
ROOF COATINGS™
503-428-3778
www.johnsonroofcoatings.com
ccb#220906 5238988-1

Call today to schedule
a free inspection!

**Pacific
Hometown
Insurance Inc.**

Auto • Home • Farm
Commercial • Health

615 Holly St., Junction City
541-998-2383
155 N. 3rd St., Harrisburg
541-995-6397
24957 Hwy. 126, Veneta
541-606-4616
Proud Supporter of FFA
5246357-1

IOKA
MARKETING

503-873-6498
877-FOR-IOKA
www.iokamarketing.com
Silverton, Oregon

Proud
Supporter
of FFA
5220335-1



503-932-0766
klopfensteinag.com | Silverton, OR

TREE & BRUSH REMOVAL



TREE PLANTING



DRIP LINE INSTALLATION



5236171-1