

# Opinion / Local

## Bravery and heartache

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“It was fun watching Noodle run the dozer. He really made a believer out of those guys,” Justus said of the extraordinary efforts demonstrated by Perkins.

Justus describes the sites and sounds of the approaching fire as an awe inspiring experience. “The fire sounded like a jet engine as it came toward us,” he said.

Justus and others spent two days working cows down out of the timber in the Beaver Creek area.

“I think we lost some cows but I don’t how many yet,” he said. “I could hear them bawling up in the timber.”

Justus said that gathering cattle this time of year is a difficult task because the cows are used to staying

up in the higher elevation timber lands to graze. Complicating matters further was the inability to ride in on horseback to some areas of the Dooley Mountain toward Black Mountain due to a large buildup of forest under-story that has turned tinder dry by the drought conditions.

Justus reported that most of the grazing resources have been burned up from Highway 7 to the freeway, all the way to the Burnt River Road and up Beaver Creek Road.

When Dry Creek area resident Dan Lees saw charred sage-brush thrown into the air and bouncing off the side of his house he figured he was in for a battle. And battle he did, single-handedly saving his residence from becoming

fuel for the Windy Ridge Fire burning south of Baker City. Lees had been issued an evacuation notice but decided to stay and save his home.

“I’m too old to start over,” Lees said during an interview August 17. “I kept expecting the Calvary to show up but it turned into a one-man show.”

Lees, who in his past has about seven experiences as a wildfire fight , figures the wind was whipping about 35 mph as the fire approached.

He said he saw the fire coming toward him at about 15 to 20 mph and spanning about a half-mile wide.

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## — LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

### Vote no on mayor recall, yes on others

To the Editor:

We are truly blessed in this country that there is no penalty for ignorance or being uninformed. Otherwise our jails would be full.

Of late there have been letters and blogs bombarding the citizens of Sumpter with lies. Uninformed individuals choose to take worn out gossip as gospel, instead of attending meetings. Many of these letters and blogs are being written by people who have never attended Council, Planning Commission or workshop meetings since I have been Mayor. All they can rely on is the gossip distributed by their cronies.

Last Tuesday’s Council meeting was attended by a group of people, including an employee of the City, wearing matching T-shirts with assault rifles imprinted on the back with “tight knit redneck group” written below. These ten or so individuals came to harass and threaten those they disagree with. Shameful when our own City employees participate in this type of mob mentality and write on Facebook how they wish they could have smashed in some teeth.

I don’t dispute anyone’s right to attempt a recall or have free speech, but to blatantly lie to those from whom you are attempting to gain signatures is disgusting. There are even rumors that some are trying to gain votes against me by offering financial gain. That goes well beyond the pale.

There is much misinformation surrounding the lawsuit. If the lawsuit causes the City to go broke, we will deal with the aftermath—with a new and better Council! And by the way, if too many of the Council are recalled to make a quorum, the County will appoint one (or more) Councilors to form a quorum, and the Council can then fill the other vacancies by appointment. Don’t let the rumors frighten you. Baker County is not going to take us over.

I could spend weeks commenting on the false or truly trivial allegations of the Brownes, the Pattons, the Lukers and others. However, why dignify their school ground childishness by commenting further?

I want only one thing, and many of you have never experienced it in Sumpter: honesty in our City government. Please vote no on my recall and yes to recall Oakley and Myers-Woolf. Together we can do what needs to be done.

**Melissa Findly,**  
Mayor, Sumpter

### Thank you for evacuation help

To the Editor:

Because of the multiple wildfires in our area we were evacuated from our home, like so many of you were. Friends called with offers to move our belongings to safety. We decided to wait until “Level 3” was called. Three sheriff’s deputies came to our rural home on Friday to alert us that indeed our area was now Level 3 and it was “Go Time.” Steve (Cindy) and Greg McLean (Four Seasons Insulation), came almost immediately and towed our fishing boat. Hoss and Pat Reynolds (Arros Electric), were right behind them to tow a second boat. Judy Endicott (Vic was out of town working on an environmental spill clean up), and Gilbert “Gib”

Marvin, came in Vic’s pickup truck and helped pack fragile and sentimental items from the house. Vic and Judy volunteered to store our possessions for as long as we need to keep them out of harm’s way.

After this quick and amazingly efficient evacuation, all of them and more offered us open-ended accommodations. We decided not to inconvenience friends any more than we already had and stayed in a hotel for the night.

The following day we came back to check on the house and the fire level was lowered to “Level 2” and could stay the night. We were treated to cold showers that evening and thought, “Great, what next? A broken water heater!” We called Ed Staub & Sons Monday morning for advice on our propane heater. Jack, from Ed Staub’s was there in under an hour to diagnose the problem. Jack was correct in his suspicions that our propane had been shut off at the tank. Bingo! Hot water. Apparently an official agency (not sure who) makes sure to follow up at evacuee’s homes to shut off gas lines to help protect the property.

We want to thank all of the willing and caring friends and community members for their support. Also, if you are evacuated from your home, take a moment to turn off your gas supply and help to avoid even worse consequences that could endanger your lives, property and the lives of the great folks trying to help you.

**Terry and Tammy Girt**  
Baker City

### My personal experiences in Sumpter

To the Editor:

With all the negative publicity Sumpter has received on the front page of the local newspapers of late, I am compelled to tell you my story of living in Sumpter

Many people have asked me my impressions of Sumpter after eight years of being retired here. I always tell them that we have met more kind, caring people here than any place else we have ever lived. We have many, many positive-thinking friends who have enriched our lives and the lives of others around them. Many of these people are, for example, volunteers who have helped to build our beautiful Volunteer Park, which was constructed entirely with free labor provided by the supportive citizens of Sumpter. Other examples of people giving of their time and resources in order to make our small town an even better place to live are too numerous to list.

On the downside, I also tell people that we have met some of the most negative, vindictive people here who I can ever remember meeting. They never step up to help with projects that benefit the community, yet they are the first to criticize and complain about people who do. We have all known people like that during our lifetime. They are less than 10% of the population, but because of their inclination to sue people with whom they disagree, they still are quite successful at making life uncomfortable for folks who just want to live in peace with their neighbors.

Please do not let a few bad apples spoil your opinion of Sumpter. The vast majority of us are very decent, down-to-earth, honest folks whom you would love to be around.

**Lila Young**  
Sumpter

— GUEST OPINION —

## Time to act on Resilient Forest Act

By US Rep. Greg Walden

Around Oregon and throughout the West, another fire season is well underway. Overstocked, diseased, and bug-infested forests are at risk of the massive and catastrophic wildfire that clog our air with smoke and threaten our streams. All this while our mills are starving for a reliable supply of timber and people need jobs. It’s clear the status quo isn’t working for our forests, our communities, or our environment. We can do better.

The U.S. House has passed a bipartisan bill—the Resilient Federal Forests Act—that would help reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and bring a - tive management back to our federal forests. Through active management, we can clean up our forests, prevent these unnaturally large fires, protect our air, and put people back to work in our forested communities.

Our bill puts into place much needed reforms to federal forest policy. For example, the bill repeals the arbitrary and outdated prohibition on harvesting trees over 21 inches in diameter on national forests in eastern Oregon. “Temporarily” put in place in 1997, this rule still hasn’t been removed 20 years later! This flawed, one-size-fits-all rule illustrate just how broken federal forest management has become. The restriction greatly limits forest managers’ ability to address site specific needs of the forest on the ground and has only served to further tie up projects in endless appeals and litigation.

Our plan also gives the Forest Service greater flexibility to move quickly on projects to reduce the threat of fire around our rural communities, streamlining projects developed through local counties’ community wildfire protection plans.

Right now, after a fire, the Forest Service is able to reforest less than three percent of areas burned. This plan would accelerate the removal of timber after a fire (to help pay for replanting), and requires a large percent of the area impacted be reforested within five years. Just like we do after other natural disasters, we ought to clean up and rebuild after wildfires. As we saw earlier this



Submitted Photo

Greg Walden represents Oregon’s Second Congressional District, which covers 20 counties in southern, central, and eastern Oregon.

summer on the Buckskin Fire in southern Oregon, failing to clean up only leads to future fires in old burn scars full of fallen trees and snag that prove difficult and too dangerous for firefighters

This bill also cuts costs and streamlines rules for timber production on legislation pertaining to Oregon’s unique O&C Lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently unveiled new management plans for these lands that would fall short of the needs of local communities for a reliable supply of timber to fund essential local services like schools, roads, and law enforcement. The bill tells the BLM to go back to the drawing board, and propose new plans to actually provide sustainable timber production for Oregon’s rural communities as required by law.

Finally, the endless cycle of “fire bowing”—forcing the federal government to use wildfire prevention funds to pay for fighting fire—is ended under this bill. It fixes how we pay to fight fire by allowing the Forest Service to apply for FEMA disaster funds to pay for firefighting. This treats wildfire as the natural disasters they are, similar to hurricanes or tornados.

The Resilient Federal Forests Act will improve the health of our forests and our rural economies. During the last session of Congress, the House twice passed bipartisan legislation I worked on to reform federal forest policy.

The Senate failed to take up forestry legislation.

However, with new leadership in that body I’m hopeful that the Senate will take meaningful action on forestry legislation. We cannot let this opportunity pass us by again. Our forested communities have already waited too long. Now is the time to act.

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