

Opinion / Local

— EDITORIAL —

New norm? We don't think so.

The past two weeks have been an emotional roller coaster for us, as for most Baker County residents—and for residents all across eastern Oregon. Two out of the three generations that make up our editorial board were under evacuation notices—one with the Cornet fire physically at the top of her driveway, another with the Windy Ridge just over the Burnt River Canyon wall from their home, a fifth wheel loaded with irreplaceable items, ready to leave at a moment's notice.

Our Facebook feed became a primary source of information for those worried and seeking wildfire information. We had a reach of 200,000 people during that week. Emails, calls and private messages came in by the hundreds. In some cases, we were unable to learn for at least 24 hours if those we knew personally had escaped safely and with their homes intact. With resources stretched, no one had the answers.

When the answers began to come, we went from worry and anxiety, to gratitude and then more worry for the firefighter who arrived to protect our homes and land. We thought of the private landowners who fought on their own to protect their family ranches and timber, and worried about them, too.

But then, as the immediate threat began to subside, the anger came, particularly after the oft-repeated statement from USFS Chief Tom Tidwell and other higher ups in that agency that extreme fires are the “new norm” and we needed to prepare for and accept the fact.

Well, no. No, we don't.

Imagine the reaction if a Board of Directors of a private corporation failed miserably in their duties that the company teetered near bankruptcy. Imagine the reaction if the shareholders were told, “Hey, it's the new norm!”

Catastrophic wildfires don't need to happen to the degree we're seeing.

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” This quote from Albert Einstein has been in our minds.

For decades the management of public lands by federal agencies in the western United States has been the accepted line of thought. That thinking has created the federal policies that have, in turn, created one horrific, mismanaged fuel load.

We are clearly dealing with a failed system that has resulted in severe economic

loss, and yet we're expected to trust the very people who created the problem to address and solve it, using the same big-government line of thinking as always?

We attended many of the town hall meetings held across our county over the past two weeks, and while there was applause and gratitude for local emergency management and of course for the firefighters, OD, and in some cases locally based federal employees, that attitude absolutely did not extend to the upper echelon of the USFS, the BLM or their policies for the forests. We heard more voices than we can count sitting around us in these audiences discussing the poor state of the public forests near their homes.

“We can't even walk through that forest,” one couple told us of the area now burning in the Eagle Complex. “The fallen timber is so heavy, you can't walk. You can't ride a horse through there. You can't get an ATV through it. It's a firetrap.

We ran an article back in February about the beetle kill across Dooley Mountain, and the lack of logging creating a fuel overload through that forest. A local forestry expert warned of a catastrophic fire in that area, based on those conditions. Ironically, the Cornet Fire began near where that forester took our reporter so that he could photograph the state of the forest there.

These conditions, combined with the right heat, wind and drought, created the perfect storm of wildfires we're seeing now. Federal policies literally added fuel to the fire. In addition, policies that have resulted in road closures have made the fires even more difficult and expensive to fight, as crews worked to bust down the berms over roads so that they could even access the areas engulfed.

The public has been screaming for years against road closures and for the proper care of our forests in the form of logging. Those cries have fallen on deaf ears, or on ears that practice selective hearing only when the threat of lawsuits by environmental groups are concerned. And just look at the results. Look at the layers of loss. Homes burned. Ranchers have lost livestock. Wildlife lost their fall and winter food supply—and lives. Those who privately own timber have lost the possibility of profit as the market now faces a glut of charred, salvaged wood. Outdoor enthusiasts who have a habit of coming to our area to hike, fish, hunt, and camp will go elsewhere. Who wants to pitch a tent among rows of blackened toothpicks and soot? Those with respiratory problems have fallen ill due to the smoke ...

By the time our surrounding forests heal from the results of federal mismanagement, two generations of our editorial board will likely be gone. Our third generation will be elderly.

It's time we all start considering alternatives to our forest management choices—but new thinking will be required.

—The Baker County Press Editorial Board

Eagle Complex fire takes DuMars cabin



Carmelita Holland / The Baker County Press

Firefighters Mike, Jessica and Mike found a hot spot over their lunch break just right for cooking burritos.

BY CARMELITA HOLLAND
News@TheBakerCountyPress.com

Fire crews continue to battle the Eagle Complex fire, with only 7% containment this week.

Forshey Spike Camp station on Forshey Meadows at the forest boundary about fifteen miles north of Richland saw one-man tents clustered on each side and back into the timber, with heavy machinery parked near the Eagle Creek road waiting to be put into service. Two helicopters have been working out of the area.

“We have 204 firefighters here working in twenty person hand crews,” said Martin Apachito, from New Mexico, in charge of the spike camp. “The main fire station is on the highway (203) between Medical Springs and Catherine Creek Summit.”

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest has a main system road, number 77, extending from Catherine Creek Summit, to and down West Eagle Creek

to the Tamarac Park area, where three lightning strikes ignited the Eagle Complex Fire on August 10. Road 77 continues down main Eagle Creek, at the foot of four canyons with fires still burning in them, to the mouth of East Eagle, where the same fire is burning in Sullivan Creek and expected to spread into the headwaters of Little Eagle Creek, endangering the lives of hundreds of head of grazing permittee cattle.

At cabin number ten, belonging to Carmelita Holland, tubs of water are being used to combat blazes still rising on August 25.

Over the weekend, three members of a crew from Joseph, Oregon—“Mike, Jessica and Mike”—who are assigned to stay in the area and dig a wide fire trail around the Holland cabin where flames are popping up by the dozens everywhere, chose one flaming hot spot to toast burritos for lunch.

“The trick,” said Mike

number one, “is to guess how long to leave your burrito in the hot spot before you lose it.” The burritos are heavily wrapped in tin foil.

Sadly, the cabin belonging to Pam and Bob DuMars burned on Friday, August 21.

Forest Service Assistant Fire Manager Officer Tom Strietzel from Michigan said, “The hillside above the DuMars cabin became a flaming tinderbox and burning wood came rolling down the steep hillside into the side of the cabin. There was no room around the cabin to work.”

There is actually no cabin in East Eagle Creek safe at this time with wild fires north, south, east and west of them.

There will be a report next week from Mike Lattin who, with his Eagle Telephone Crew have been fighting fire continually.

The last word from Lattin was, “The fire is spotting ahead a thousand feet at a time.”

Letter to the Editor Policy: The Baker County Press reserves the right not to publish letters containing factual falsehoods or incoherent narrative. Letters promoting or detracting from specific for-profit businesses will not be published. Word limit is 375 words per letter. Letters are limited to one every other week per author. Letters should be submitted to Editor@TheBakerCountyPress.com.

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— LETTERS TO THE EDITOR —

Gloria shines at local Veterans Services

To the Editor:

We have been in contact with Rick Gloria since he was appointed to the position of Baker County Veteran Services Officer on many occasions.

The care and treatment we have received has been efficient, expedient and courteous. He calls back with the information we were waiting for in a timely manner. When he has information and it is after working hours he will still call and update us. He does not waste time in calling when there is nothing to report. His computer skills are superb.

Baker County is fortunate to have Rick as an employee. He is extremely knowledgeable in his position, which helps get the veteran the end result that he is waiting for. He goes out of his way to find the information that is requested.

Veterans, we are very lucky to have Rick in our community to help with our needs.

Gene and Patricia Reed
Baker City

Thanks for coverage during fir

To the Editor:

I was a resident for 13 years and have much loved family who were born and raised there who remain. I feel so proud of how you all pull together when adversity strikes.

I think your paper keeps and continues to keep everyone up to date on these fires is fantastic. You are awesome. The dedication to your readers and community really is something you should be so proud of! Thank you for being amazing. Kudos!

Patricia Butler
Eureka, California

Broad tax reform needed

To the Editor:

I feel fortunate to live in a part of Oregon that allows my family and me to enjoy all of the resources, beauty and quality of life that our state can offer.

Naturally, living in such an area doesn't come without its challenges. Our community relies heavily on agriculture and tourism for jobs and economic growth. These are industries that have historically been very susceptible to outside forces.

The current talk in Washington about raising taxes on the energy industry could have a very negative impact on businesses like these.

As a small-business owner, I understand just how important the overall public policy and economic climate are to the success of any business. But it's not just local businesses that would be at risk with higher energy taxes.

Many Central Oregonians drive considerable distances for everyday needs like groceries and health care services. That would become more expensive if the energy industry pays higher taxes that then get passed on to consumers — as they always do.

Instead of singling out one industry for a targeted tax increase, we should be looking at broad-based tax reform that closes loopholes and cleans up a tax code that hasn't had a serious house-cleaning since 1986.

If Washington politicians continue to insist on rigging the tax code rather than reforming it, we will be in for a world of hurt here in Oregon. However, if we make taxes fairer and simpler, we can spur economic growth and job creation. That's what we need.

Ken Taylor
Prineville

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