

Local

Rail Fire raises frustrations

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The next priority would be to salvage whatever possible in the area, and to address issues with fences, springs, etc. Another important priority is to help to ensure there are tools in place to help the forest managers, he said. He said he'll continue to stress these and other points.

Burnt River Irrigation District Manager Wes Morgan saw the Rail Fire area from the air on Monday with Incident Commander Shawn Sheldon, and he echoes Bennett's thoughts about where to place blame for the delay in treatment. "I know it sure wasn't on local personnel; (Whitman District Ranger) Jeff Tomac has been more than trying to get things done. The blame goes way, way higher than that, to people who don't even have a clue...From his (Tomac's) standpoint, things have to be prioritized, and he was working very hard to get this project done..." As with some other projects, Morgan said, it just didn't happen soon enough.

Morgan said it's frustrating to see local Forest Service personnel unable to fully do their jobs, because of issues with the budget, priorities, and policies and regulations, which he said Tomac and others have discussed, also voicing their own frustration.

Speaking about the effects of the fire, he said, though it's too early to tell, "I think there's going to be enough, hopefully, natural filtration, and enough vegetation left, that I think we will get some filtering. I don't know; it will be interesting to see how much it changes the way that water comes out of that South Fork, because, in the past, it's been pretty steady. We never did have any big floods come out of that South Fork...Time will tell..."

Morgan said that the BAER team (Burned Area Emergency Response

team) a specially trained group of hydrologists, soil scientists, engineers, biologists, vegetation specialists, archaeologists and others) is expected to analyze the fire area within a week, he believes, and he predicts that there will be some reseeding, as well as vegetation treatments, among other items. He said he'll be working closely with the BAER team.

"If this fire had just stayed away another year, I think there would have been a difference, because there were big plans... Visiting with Jeff (Tomac), I know he was really saddened, that we had to wait this long. We were very optimistic that he had really been pushing hard, to get some things done, and we had a meeting with him early this spring, about the things they had planned to do, and the things they could get started right away. This fire pretty well wiped that out, pretty disappointing, not only to us, but to him, too, and the people who had planned to get in there, and mitigate that issue," he said.

Morgan said he understands that local Forest Service personnel have to work around issues not necessarily within their control, and that they ultimately have to "ride for the brand," as he put it, that they have to answer to upper management. "Jeff is sincere about getting things done; he's not one to sugar coat things, and blow smoke..." he said. Morgan had high praise for the various rural fire departments, and the Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) fire suppression teams, and he said, "I'll put these guys up against anybody, and I'll defend them to the grave, when I hear people say, 'Well, they just want these fires to burn, so they can make money...' That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard."

Morgan said a major concern is general is

beetle-infested ponderosa pine, an issue the Irrigation District has worked to address, including some logging activity within the last year, in lower elevations, but some projects to address issues with lodge pole just haven't been implemented in time to avoid wildfire. He noticed one little patch of lodge pole not yet burned in the Rail Fire area, and he said that Tomac commented about the "treatment plan, shrinking into one little dot, in the northwest corner," that it was disappointing, and that he wasn't able to get there quickly enough with treatment, before the fire.

Burnt River Irrigation District Chair Lynn Shumway said, "I was really, really pleased, and hopeful, that the Forest Service was going to get a chance to go in there, and get a chance to do the (thinning) work, before this happened..." He said he'd heard that the fire behaved in a controlled burn manner, through previously treated areas, and "...if they had been able to get the whole area treated like they did that, it would have been just fantastic."

Shumway thought the Forest Service had a good plan for treatment, but there are so many obstacles, like environmental challenges. "Their hands are tied, and they can't just go in, and do what needs to be done...There has been a lot of frustration...We, as a District, want very much to be involved in the rehabilitation, getting involved with the Forest Service, as much as we can..." He said that, in the Ironside Mountain area, he noted great success with the growth of winter wheat, which he hopes to see planted in the Rail Fire area, along with native grasses, to help address erosion issues.

He said he liked the Forest Service's thinning plan, to treat 30,000 acres, but the fire, unfortunately, happened before that plan could be implemented. "We need to be able to speed these things (projects) up, to get them on the

fast track. We need to be able to get them done in a timely fashion. It's frustrating," he said. Removing the thousands of acres of dead and dying, beetle-killed lodge pole would have been advantageous before the fire, he said.

Shumway's concerned, as well as others in the area, about the effects of the fire, on the watershed, including uncertainty about this next winter's snow pack melting too soon, affecting next year's irrigation supply, which he suspects could happen. This could be partly caused by the black surface, heated by the sun, resulting in the early melting, he said.

"It's really frustrating to see how the environmental policies of the environmental groups have kept the Forest Service from getting in, and doing what needs to be done...I know there are people in the Forest Service who know what needs to be done, but, their hands are tied...I don't blame the local people for all the delays; I don't think that's the problem," he said.

"When you get in a drought situation, like we've been in, for the last three or four years, beetle activity increases. When the pine gets stressed, it's more vulnerable to beetle attack. They're not growing, and they don't have enough moisture to pitch the beetles out, and the beetles just kill the tree," he said.

Shumway spoke about private ground in Bridgeport, where he manages forest land, but he said the process there that involved thinning in the last couple of years to address beetle kill issues was easier to implement, because of the lack of obstacles, such as lawsuits from environmentalists. "If we need to do some more, we'll do that," he said, speaking about the ongoing management of the private land.

"Anything we can do to improve the policies," regarding the management of public lands, would be beneficial, Shumway said.

MIP arrests

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Those arrests to date during 2016 include:

- 16 year old male in a vehicle on Windmill Lane
- 15 year old male in a vehicle on Windmill Lane
- 16 year old male in Central Park
- 18 year old male in Central Park
- 13 year old male in Central Park
- 15 year old female at the High School
- 15 year old female at the High School
- 16 year old female at the High School
- 15 year old male at the High School
- 10 year old female at South Baker

Five arrests in an entire year has been a fair average in the past. Five of those arrests this year occurred just last week.

"Our state has failed our youth, our very future, by legalizing marijuana and making it more available. We have fought for years the battle against alcohol consumption by minors and now we have to add marijuana use to that war. My hope is that Baker City will continue to prevent dispensaries from operating in the city and at least keep that next level of availability out of our community and away from our youth," Lohner concluded.

Woodrats



Submitted Photo.

Patty Trost of Unity was pleased to finally trap this destructive rat inside her chicken coop.

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At the Devils Canyon Ranch, the woodrats chewed up the wiring inside two of the owners' ATVs and one trailer in spite of a number of cats and two dogs on patrol against them.

Employees at Clark Auto Electric in Baker City say they regularly repair woodrat damage to vehicle wiring.

There's even a report from one ATVing family who parked their brand new truck in a Forest Service-managed recreation area only to return to a truck that wouldn't start and \$3,000 in truck and trailer repairs.

Biologist Brian Ratliff of ODFW says that while preventing the damage on public lands is pretty much impossible, traps can be very effective against the woodrat on private property.

Ratliff said, "These are probably the type known as the Bushy Tailed Woodrat." He said a Desert Woodrat or two wouldn't be outside the realm of possibility. "You can use regular traps, or live traps, or have cats."

The packrat's distinctive odor often gives away their nesting places.

As for poison? "I don't recommend it," said Ratliff. He explained that the woodrat, which is often called a packrat in this area for good reason, will carry away poison, so the only type that is effective must be either nailed or screwed down. "But it's not species-specific," he said. "If a cat or a dog or a coyote or a bird gets into this, it will kill them. If they eat the dead rat, it could kill them."

Headed across the bottom of Baker County to the west in Unity, Patty Trost agrees with Ratliff's assessment of traps. She is using a trap with a layer of chicken feed inside a pipe to clear out her rat issue. "The rodents are worse here than I've ever seen. We have had more ground squirrels, mice, gophers, moles—and now packrats," she said.

On her bait-buying trip to the feed store in John Day, Trost said employees there called the woodrat problem "horrible" this year.

Trost's mother, Doris Jenson, is now battling that problem in Unity as well.

Back more north in the County, one Keating resident said his dog was up to a rat kill-count of eight on his property.

Then, about 10 miles outside of Baker City on Pine Creek, Jim and Peggie Longwell are using peanut butter inside an oversided trap to exterminate the rodents on their place. "We know for sure where there is one, there are more," Peggie said.

The Longwells say the rats consumed a full-sized wool blanket from inside their garage, in addition to making a nest inside the wiring in their pickup truck.

Bushy Tailed Woodrats grow between 11 and 18 inches in length as adults—albeit half of that length is pure tail. Males are considerably larger than females, but both genders weigh in usually between one and two pounds.

Ratliff says the local woodrat population, like that of most rodents, can cycle from year to year depending upon food and water supply, and the severity of the previous winter.

Woodrats are primarily nocturnal and remain active throughout the year.

Oregon Ag Director resigns

Katy Coba, a fifth generation wheat farmer from Pendleton, Oregon has resigned as the Director of Agriculture for Governor Kate Brown after thirteen and a half years in this position. She has served for Governor's Kulongoski, Kitzhaber and Brown during her reign. Coba has accepted a position with Governor Brown pending Oregon Senate confirmation in September as the Chief Operating Officer and Director of the Depart-

ment of Administrative Services.

Katy Coba is the longest service agricultural director in the United States who started working in state government in 1985. Prior to accepting the Oregon Department of Agricultural Director position, Coba was a Special Assistant to the position. She also served in Governor Kitzhaber's first administration as Chief Policy Advisor, Economic Development and International

Trade Policy Advisor, and Director of Executive Appointments as listed by a press release from the Governor's office.

"I had the pleasure of serving on the Board of Agriculture for four years under Katy Coba," Jerome Rosa, the Executive Director for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association stated.

"Katy had great marketing abilities, organizing many trade missions benefiting commodities in Oregon. She was always

accessible with an open door policy that we greatly appreciated," Rosa added.

Lisa Charpilloz Hanson, the Department of Agriculture's Deputy Director, will serve as the interim director starting October 1st according to a news release by the Capital Press.

Katy Coba will be sorely missed, said a press release from the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, which also said she will be very successful in her new position.

Military installs million-dollar-solar array near Pendleton

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden and Oregon Senator Bill Hansell joined the Oregon Military Department in officially dedicating the new 150-kilowatt solar panel array at the Oregon Army National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility (AASF #2) at the airport in Pendleton, Oregon, August 4.

The Oregon Military Department partnered with

Energy Trust of Oregon, the federal government and Pacific Power to bring the project to completion, working toward the larger goal of making the Oregon National Guard net zero by 2020.

The project also benefits the state of Oregon as it works toward complying with Executive Order 13693, which sets multiple clean energy milestones

including the state have 30 percent of its electricity produced by renewable sources.

Senator Ron Wyden, in his remarks stated that the project was a success on a number of levels.

"I know we are calling this Net Zero, but I call it a net win for the state of Oregon," Wyden said, remarking how it not only helps with energy security

goals but the panels being built in Oregon means more jobs for fellow Oregonians.

The array consists of 475 315-watt panels. To date the solar panels have already created 166,644 KWh of power equaling 13,496 gallons of gasoline, 119 tons of CO₂, 2,999 trees saved or 951 60 watt light bulbs.