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"In 2007 after the flood the State Emergency Management team that deploys us came here to Vernonia for almost three weeks," says Davis. It's a big deal for me that Vernonia has personally benefited when we had resources from all over the state here. We had firefighters from all over the state come here and man our station so our firefighters could go home and take care of their own families and properties. That's personally why I am happy to go on these assignments, because I've personally benefitted from them, and I know the importance of it. And we saw it firsthand when we rolled in to some of those small towns in California where their own fire department is either overwhelmed or personally effected and had to be evacuated themselves."

Davis says he has been deployed to about eight different wildfires during his years as a firefighter, working on fires in Baker City, in The Dalles on several occasions, Troy, Oregon, and now California. Steinweg has been deployed to Warm Springs, and also spent time working for the Oregon Department of Forestry where he fought wildfires in Baker City, Vale, and Caynonville, Oregon.

Steinweg says a lot of thought and planning goes into deciding who to send and which resources can go when a request comes from the state for a de-

ployment. "We did have questions from our community this summer when fire danger was so high here and we had resources out of District," says Steinweg. "We always have a game plan for how we are going to fight a local fire if we send resources away. We don't take something out of District if it's going to hurt the community."

Davis adds that a lot of thought and planning happens between all the County agencies when assembling a strike team for deployment. "Typically they might send a tender from Mist, a



smaller engine from Vernonia, and some bigger engines from Scappoose, and Columbia River because they don't want to deplete any one agency of personnel or resources. They try to balance it among the agencies." Steinweg adds that Vernonia will contact other regional agen-

cies, like Banks or Mist and let them know they are short handed and which apparatus they might need in the event of a local fire.

Davis and Steinweg say the makeup of a strike team can depend on a number of factors, including who is available, their past experience and familiarity with particular apparatus assigned to the deployment, and the need to get experience in a particular role on a strike team. Davis explained that, like structural firefighting, wildland firefighting and management requires the personnel to show hands-on understanding and proficiency in certain skills under the guidance of a trainer before they can assume certain roles on a team. As an example, Davis says that at a wildland fire in The Dalles, he served

as the Engine Boss on a Vernonia fire engine, while Vernonia Chief Smith served as the engine operator while completing tasks that would allow him to serve as Engine Boss. "Vernonia didn't have anyone qualified to serve as Engine Boss at that time, so I was placed on the Vernonia engine to sign off on the skills Chief Smith needed for certification," explains Davis. "That's actually very common. In California this December Captain Steinweg was riding with a Lieutenant from Columbia River and had a chance to train and gain experience towards certification in other wildland applications. Once you get activated the County has to assemble a team based on who has qualifications for what, and our rank at our home agency can shift based on the training and experience fighting wildfires of each individual."

"It's a great training experience because we don't normally see those kinds of wildland situations around



here," says Steinweg.

"As a resident of Vernonia it's important to me that we get people like Will and Chief Smith and some of our volunteers out working on these wildfires because there is really no other way to get that training and experience," adds Davis. "If we ever do have that type of fire activity around here you have someone who has seen it before and has some kind of experience, which will make things go so much smoother here."

Davis notes that VRFPD could send personnel and pay for them to receive training in fighting wildland fires. Instead, when local firefighters are deployed on wildfires, Oregon Emergency Management foots the bill for invaluable hands-on training.

Steinweg points to the 30 acre fire just outside Clatskanie last summer as an example. "We just don't see that many fires like that in Columbia County, but there certainly is the potential for it to happen," says Steinweg.

"When we do, the officers and firefighters that show up and do a good job handling it are ones that have been on these strike teams and have seen it before, and instead of being faced with something they've never seen before, they know what to do and can develop a plan to handle it," adds Davis.

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