

Preventing another 'Biscuit'
Low snow pack could lead to destructive fire season

Fire experts that say a low snow pack thus far this winter may lead to another catastrophic fire season: just a year after Oregon suffered through the worst series of fires in recent memory.

More than 2,000 fires burned nearly a million acres of Oregon forestland in 2002, including the 500,000-acre Biscuit Fire that nearly caused evacuation of the entire Illinois Valley, according to Oregon Dept. of Forestry (ODF).

Property owners in rural or remote forest areas should begin taking responsibility now -- before the growing season -- for reducing fire risk, even if they have fire protection, advises Stephen Fitzgerald, a forester with the Oregon State University Extension Service.

Involved with forest fire issues for the past 12 years, Fitzgerald is the author of the book, "Fire In Oregon's Forests: Risks, Effects, and Treatment Options," recently published by the Oregon Forest Resources Institute.

Rural and remote homes are at higher risk for fire than city dwellings, said Fitzgerald. "Although you may have rural fire protection provided by a local fire protection district, don't live under the illusion that firefighters will be able to extinguish a wildfire before it gets to your home and property," warned Fitzgerald. "In the event of a large wildfire, firefighters may not enter property that has hazardous fuel conditions, placing themselves and fire-fighting equipment at risk."

Late winter and early spring is a great time to take action and reduce fuels and other fire hazards around homes and property, he said.

To lessen the risk of wildfire, Fitzgerald offers a few simple steps to protect home and property in wooded and rural areas. Most of these tasks can be completed in just one weekend.

*Create a "greenbelt" (i.e., lawn) 10- to 30-foot wide around your home.

*Landscape with fire-resistant plants in irrigated and non-irrigated portions of your landscape.

*Clean and remove conifer needles and other debris from your roof and gutters annually.

*Prune trees up to eight to 10 feet to eliminate "fuel ladders." You can vary the pruning height so that trees are more natural appearing.

*Reduce the number of native shrubs under trees and in non-irrigated portions of your property.

*Thin trees so there is about 10 feet between tree crowns; clean up thinning debris. Consider removing trees up against your house or with branches overhanging the roof, or at least prune branches up so they are not in contact with the side of the house or roof.

*Keep firewood stacked 30 feet away and uphill from your home.

*Replace a wood shake roof with a fire-resistant roof as soon as possible or feasible.

One challenge home owners face when cleaning up their property is what to do with all the debris. Options include burning small piles, chipping the material or bringing the debris to your local landfill. Contact local fire departments for burning regulations before you strike a match, advises Fitzgerald.

Portable chippers can be rented to grind up woody debris. The chipped material can then be spread out on the soil surface beneath your trees, used as landscape mulch or spread on a garden path.

Some county landfills offer "free days" for bring in yard debris. The landfill then chips the material to make large batches of mulch used by public works departments and others. Check with local county landfills to see if they offer such a program.

Think fire prevention when planning a new home in a forested area, advises Fitzgerald. Use fire-resistant siding and non-combustible composition, tile or metal roofing materials. Limit the amount of deck area because hot embers can ignite wooden decks.

Build on a level portion of your property when possible (fire burns faster on slopes). Install alternative water (e.g. cistern or pond) sources for firefighters because electric power often fails or is shut off during a fire making your well and outside faucets useless.

Create adequate access to your property for fire-fighting equipment to enter and exit easily. Check with local fire protection districts for entrance/exit standards. Don't forget to display reflective address numbers where your driveway meets the street. Most fire agencies, including Illinois Valley Fire District, have reflective address signs available.

For more information contact the nearest rural fire protection district office.

Area field offices of ODF and county offices of OSU Extension Service can also help provide additional information.

Proposed law would hinder access to government info.

A proposed Oregon law might boost protections against terrorism, but also could cut off citizens from vital information about what their government is doing, the state chapter of the nation's largest journalism organization warned.

House Bill 2425, now moving through the state Legislature, would allow officials to close meetings and records involving the security of communication systems, fuel supplies and other resources.

"We understand that special security measures have to be taken in this post-9/11 environment," said Jim Murez, president of the Greater Oregon chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ). "And it's true that many details of protective measures can't safely be made public."

"But the language of this bill is so broad and sweeping that it would let officials hide information about their biggest decisions -- information to which all Oregonians should have access."

For example, said Murez, a local government trying to avoid public or press scrutiny might be able to use the law to hide plans for a proposed city hall and the costs taxpayers would incur for it. Any new exemption, he said, needs to be narrowly drawn and weighed against the strong public interest in openness.

The text of the bill says it would permit non-disclosure of "information about review or approval of programs relating to the security of" electric power, gas, hazardous substances, sewage water and communications.

Murez said that this could exclude citizens from even broad discussions of resources that need protection, giving officials too much freedom to conduct public business "in the dark."

A hearing on the bill that would restrict access to government meetings and records under the threat of terrorism was held in the state Capitol last week by the House Judiciary Committee. Representatives of Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association (ONPA) and SPJ testified.

The bill, HB2425, originally proposed to remove any

government meeting discussing security from the Open Meetings Law. This meant that a meeting where security was being discussed would not be announced, have no agenda, and keep no minutes. The purpose was specifically to protect the security plans of private utility companies while they were being reviewed by the Public Utilities Commission.

The bill also made some specific records dealing with security plans totally out of reach of the public, under section 192.502.

Just as the hearing started, a revised draft was submitted to the committee that changed the worst parts of the bill, as seen through the eyes of newspapers. The new draft put meetings back into the Open Meetings law, in the section where security discussions would be held in executive (closed to the public) session. It was felt that this would give public oversight to government actions without making sensitive security information public.

The new draft also moved some of the records into 192.501 where a balancing test is required before a record can be denied. This, too, was determined to be the best place for security records. It preserves the required secrecy of security plans while making them potentially available when the public interest requires disclosure.

The biggest issue with the Open Meetings question was whether a reporter should be able to sit in a meeting where sensitive security information was being discussed, as allowed by the Open Meetings Law.

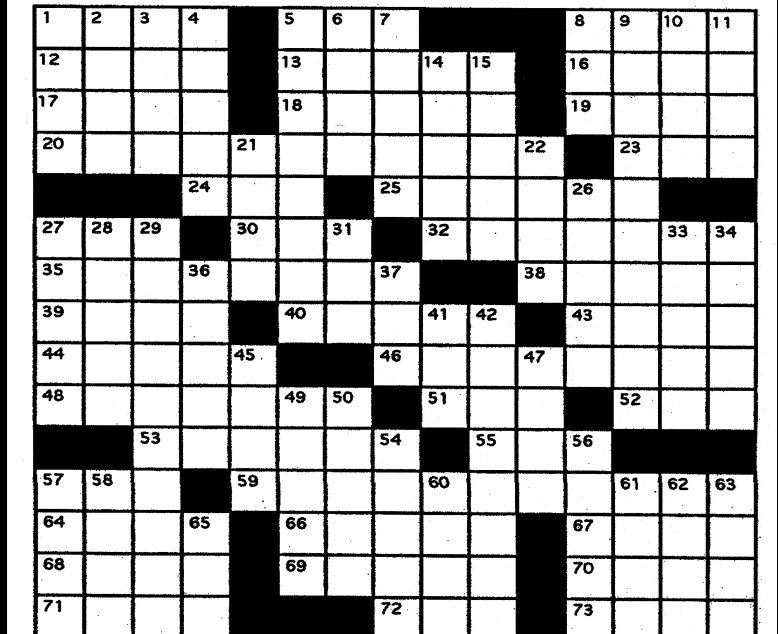
Some felt that a reporter would have no sanctions if that information was published, and untold damage would result.

Rep. Shetterly said he supported having a reporter in executive sessions because his experience showed that reporters respect the law and actually help keep the government body on the subject in executive sessions.

The actual wording of some of the phrases has not yet been agreed upon, but the principle has been established.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

- ACROSS 1 Splendor 5 Org. for neurologists and oncologists 8 Part of a staircase 12 Of the U.S. 13 Measures the circumference of 16 Son of a folk singer 17 Agcy. founded by DDE in 1958 18 Panel sewn into a garment 19 Unhealthy looking 20 Opposite of modern 23 Ping-Pong table's center 24 Harem room 25 Books 27 Black cuckoo 30 Suffix denoting origin 32 Backs out of a deal 35 Showing no intelligence 38 Transparent wrap 39 Lowdown 40 Engraved pillar: var. 43 100 centavos 44 Weather forecast 46 One who produces formal wedding invitations 48 Runts 51 Present 52 Way to go: abbr. 53 Cloth named for a city 55 Feminine one: Sp. 57 TV maker 59 Paid 64 Highly spiced stew 66 Common verb 67 Shine's partner, in phrase 68 Pick over 69 Scoop 70 Saudi Arabia's neighbor 71 Openers 72 Melancholy 73 Gender: abbr. DOWN 1 Be out of breath 2 Sharif 3 Tableland 4 Spain's national museum 5 Stirs up 6 Prefix for bus or bike 7 Criminal offense 8 Pinhead 9 Sin 10 French pronoun 11 Shakespeare, for one 14 Pavarotti or Caruso 15 Barrel piece 21 Singer Billy 22 Part of the eye 26 Jumps 27 Askew 28 Final part of a baseball game, usually 29 Casually 31 Suffix for mild or wild 33 Abates 34 Nasal sound 36 Ill-fated Andrea 37 5th word of the Star-Spangled Banner 41 Connected letters 42 Teemed 45 DCL quadrupled 47 Has 49 Room about futively 50 Pacific island group 54 Idaho exports 56 1st entry in Names for Boys 57 Hudson, for one 58 Hint 60 Fitz-gerald 61 Magazine title 62 Famous twin 63 Car blemish 65 Pacino and Unser



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Quotes
"Imprisoned in every fat man a thin one is wildly signaling to be let out." - Cyril Connolly
" 'Classic.' A book which people praise and don't read." - Mark Twain
"(My father) taught me two things about bills: always query them and never pay till you have no alternative." - Miles Kington
"The English can be explained by their Anglo-Saxon heritage and the influence of the Methodists. But I prefer to explain them in terms of tea, roast beef and rain. A people is first what it eats, drinks and gets pelted with." - Pierre Daninos
"The lunches of 57 years had caused his chest to slip down into the mezzanine floor." - P.G. Wodehouse

SUNDAY MORNING/AFTERNOON APRIL 6, 2003
Table with columns for time slots (6:00, 6:30, 7:00, 7:30, 8:00, 8:30, 9:00, 9:30, 10:00, 10:30, 11:00, 11:30, 12:00, 12:30, 1:00, 1:30, 2:00, 2:30, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 4:30, 5:00, 5:30) and rows for various TV programs and movies.