



**ASSAULT AWARENESS TREE** - The Illinois Valley Safe House Alliance sponsored a tree-planting to honor all women, men, children and elders who have suffered sexual assault, as part of events during April, which was Sexual Assault Awareness Month. Approximately 25 volunteers helped plant the Eastern Flowering Red Bud tree at the I.V. Family Resource Center in Cave Junction on Thursday, April 22. (Photo by I.V. Safe House Alliance)

## Huge wildfires to continue, say experts, unless polarized views change quickly

Experts say that massive forest and wildland fires will be a permanent fixture of the American West unless the public and policy leaders work past extremist positions and social paralysis.

They must move toward enlightened land management policies, and more than triple funding for applied, problem-solving research that could give managers better tools to work with and more proof of their effectiveness.

These and other conclusions emerged from a recent meeting at Oregon State University (OSU) of approximately 100 agency managers, fire experts and other leaders, trying to bring together academic researchers and field managers to learn from recent experiences and make plans for the next five years.

The conference was the first of three of its type in the nation being held this year, under auspices of the National Fire Plan and Joint Fire Science Program. It followed the 2002 fire season, one of the worst in U.S. history.

The season included the 500,000-acre Biscuit Fire in Illinois Valley and surrounding area -- largest in the country last year and which cost some \$160 million to control, said to be the most money ever spent on a single fire in the United States.

Debates are still raging over fuel reduction strategies, salvage logging, forest health and ecology issues, wildlife concerns, use of controlled fire and many other topics.

Hal Salwasser, dean of the OSU College of Forestry and leadoff speaker, said that the National Fire Plan, with endorsement by the Western Governor's Association, provides a solid blueprint for dealing with many problems.

But it was indicated that it is being hindered by social discord and conflicts between

extremists on both sides -- those who would take immediate swift actions and those who argue for doing little or nothing.

"We've seen aggressive proposals for bold actions, and we've seen active political and legal resistance by agents of inaction who pretend the problems don't exist," Salwasser said. "And we're relegating to the sidelines the visionaries who advocate integrated, adaptive approaches to problem solving."

This conflict is further hindered by an inadequate knowledge base to guide enlightened land management policies and provide conclusive evidence they would work, Salwasser said.

**'But the issue is so large, the fire potential so vast that we have to carefully evaluate what we've done in the past...' said Shindler.**

He called for more than tripling the current federal appropriation for forest and rangeland health and wildland fire research, which is now only 1.6 percent of the management budget for these issues. That could provide about \$88 million more for research across the nation.

"A 1.6 percent investment in building the intelligence needed to improve performance is pathetic," Salwasser said. "The price we pay for underfunding research and development is inefficient and ineffective use of management resources, and vulnerability to agents of inaction who will stymie projects due to lack of science."

Bruce Shindler, an associate professor of forest resources at OSU and one of the coordinators of the conference, said that fire management "has to become everyone's responsibility...fire scientists, managers and citi-

zens." Effective fire prevention and fuel reduction programs can be implemented only if all the partners understand the issues involved and reach agreement on how to proceed.

"We're not starting at square one on these issues; there's much that researchers and fire managers already know," Shindler said. "But the issue is so large, the fire potential so vast that we have to carefully evaluate what we've done in the past, what works, what doesn't work, and then work closely with the public to help them understand the costs and benefits of the alternatives."

Shindler said that forest and wildland fire is such a critical issue that people may be responsive to well-reasoned changes and new land management concepts. And there are a few success stories right in Oregon that point to this, he said, including innovative and collaborative programs in the Metolius Basin of central Oregon and the Applegate Community Fire Plan in S.W. Oregon.

Among the other conclusions and key research needs identified at the conference:

\*More information is needed about fuel reduction programs and better methods to implement them.

\*Research results need to be moved more quickly to field application, possibly using the "Extension" concept developed at land-grant universities.

\*Studies should determine the effectiveness of different restoration treatments after fire has moved through an area, and which approaches yield the desired ecological, economic and social values.

\*On a landscape scale, identifying what approaches most effectively reduce the potential for severe wildfire.

\*More studies are needed on such topics as the effects of smoke exposure on human health, the consequences of continued fire suppression policies, the potential for catastrophic events, and other topics.

\*Adaptive management needs to be encouraged, so that work can be done while research is still under way.

\*The public must be engaged at many points in the development of policies, to build trust and understanding despite the inevitable elements of risk and uncertainty.

## OSU extension faces cutbacks in workforce

The Corvallis-based Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service, which delivers educational information across Oregon, is wrestling with the possibility of a sizeable workforce reduction.

It would leave the outreach arm of OSU approximately 40 percent smaller by 2005 than it was at the start of the current 2001-03 state funding biennium.

The organization's Josephine County office is at the county fairgrounds in Grants Pass.

"The main reasons are an anticipated reduction in state funding because state revenues are down sharply, and increased mandated operating costs," said Lyla Houglum, Extension dean and director.

"Our state budget for the 2003-05 biennium may not be finalized until late summer, but we need to be proactive and plan for anticipated cuts," said Houglum. "All indications are that Extension may be smaller, and that therefore many educational services that Oregonians value won't be available."

The Extension Service's outside-the-classroom educational efforts focus on areas such as agriculture, forestry, fishing, families, community development and 4-H youth development. Extension is supported primarily by state, federal and county funds and has offices in every county in the state.

An Extension staffing plan under development is aimed at outlining how the organization would do its work if its funding dropped to the governor's proposed budget minus 10 percent.

Some forecast that this will be roughly Extension's state funding level for the 2003-05 biennium, which starts July 1.

The first draft of the proposed staffing plan was developed with input from individual Oregonians and representatives of industries and organizations around the state.

There may be more regional programming, Houglum said, but Extension plans to maintain an office in every county that provides adequate fiscal support for a county Extension office.

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## School funds dependent on bills being considered

The state budget outlined by the Joint Ways and Means Committee co-chairmen calls for a 2003-05 State School Fund of \$4.78 billion, roughly equal to the \$4.8 billion set by the 1999 Legislature.

The proposal shows the potential of another \$162.4 million for K-12 schools if six bills under consideration to change Public Employees Retirement System are enacted.

This budget assumes a K-12 employer contribution rate in 2003-04 of 12.69 percent rather than the 18.58 percent rate to begin on July 1, 2003. The current rate is 12.73 percent.

The co-chairmen's budget suggests that if no K-12 salary or benefit increases occur in the next two years, school districts could save another \$559 million.

Co-chairmen Sen. Kurt Schrader (D-Canby) and Rep. Randy Miller (R-West Linn) called this "live-within-available-resources" budget a

starting point for state budget talks to span the next several months.

This K-12 appropriation is woefully inadequate to fund schools over the next two years and will mean many more staff layoffs, larger class sizes and fewer electives and interscholastic activities for students," said OSBA Director of Legislative Services John Marshall.

"The proposed funding level also will likely stifle our economic recovery," he said. "We're hopeful this plan will spark a serious revenue discussion."

The PERS savings suggested in the plan are "unrealized," Marshall added. Also, K-12 salary and benefit cost reductions are unrealistic given the constraints of the collective bargaining law on employee contracts.

The co-chairmen's budget proposal is available from the homepage under "What's New" at [www.osba.org](http://www.osba.org).

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