

Fire danger notification 'doomed from the beginning'

Public outcry over wildfire law implementation prompts legislators, Oregon Dept. of Forestry to seek solutions

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Extreme public outcry regarding recently announced wildfire protection regulations and potential fines affecting home owners has prompted district legislators and Oregon Dept. of Forestry (ODF) officials to discuss possible solutions.

Whether implementation of the regulations is in abeyance until at least later this year is unclear, but revisions appear in the offing.

Early in July approximately 19,000 Josephine County residents were notified that their properties were classified as high risk

for wildfire. A July 18 public hearing at the county fairgrounds in Grants Pass was canceled due to an overflow crowd, but not before citizens could vehemently express their unhappiness about the regulations.

ODF Fire Prevention Specialist Brian Ballou acknowledges that mistakes were made in the public notification process. The notices to property owners were sent a week later than had been planned originally, he said, because the information was originally printed on postcards. The U.S. Postal Service wouldn't send the postcards because

the paper used for them was slightly too thin to meet postal regulations, Ballou said.

"That mailing was doomed from the beginning," Ballou said. "People who were getting notices in the mail had two or three days to finish their written testimony. Had they gotten it a week earlier as we had planned, I don't think it would have been such a hot-button item."

Tom Atzet is a member of the Josephine County Forest Land-Urban Interface Classification Committee. That body was responsible

for determining which properties in the county would be considered "extreme" fire danger, and has held public meetings for more than a year.

Even though those monthly meetings were advertised and open to the public, they were sparsely attended, Atzet said.

Upon receiving the classification notices last month, residents were stunned to learn that they could be liable for up to \$100,000 in fines for fire suppression if a fire originates on their property.

The original legislation

that prompted the regulations was Senate Bill 360, the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act of 1997, which passed through the Oregon Senate on a 23-1 vote and the state House of Representatives on a 52-0. It allows the state to assess suppression costs up to \$100,000 for fires originating on properties classified as high-risk.

A 1990 wildfire outside of Bend had resulted in the loss of 22 homes; another blaze hit that area six years later, and there was a similar conflagration in Medford. Ballou said that those fires

were fresh in the minds of legislators when they passed SB 360.

"It was primarily on the strength of those three fires that the Legislature took the recommendation from ODF and state fire marshal to go ahead and make this a law," he said.

Ballou said that the \$100,000 figure had been recommended to legislators by the insurance industry. The number represented the average amount of home owner's insurance carried by property owners at the time.

"That way, the Legisla-
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Petition seeks O&C overview by county

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
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A petition requesting that the Josephine County Board of Commissioners adopt a plan for the use of local timber resources was presented to the board during its Wednesday morning, July 25 regular session.

The petition was presented in Anne Basker Auditorium in Grants Pass by Jim Frick, a broker with Century 21 Harris & Taylor. Frick serves as chairman for Southern Oregon Resource Alliance (SORA), a non-profit citizens group that Frick explained is devoted to the sustainability of forests and the local economy.

Frick reminded the commissioners that the federal government owns most of the land in Josephine County. As such, he said, a local resource management plan should include an obligation for good stewardship and recreation.

State and federal agencies could work with the county in order to implement a plan, Frick said. And a citizen resource advisory committee could be appointed to aid in that coordination, he added.

The federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

is scheduled to release its Western Oregon Plan Revision (WOPR) on Thursday, Aug. 9. That revision was due to the 2003 settlement of a lawsuit brought by the American Forest Resource Council. The suit alleged that the Northwest Forest Plan violated the O&C Lands Act of 1937 and numerous other laws.

Any decisions resulting from WOPR would directly affect the county and its finances, Frick said, so immediate action must be taken to preserve local interests.

"We want this done expeditiously," Frick said.

While making his request, Frick held up a newspaper and read recent headlines regarding perceived lawlessness in Cave Junction and surrounding the recent Humbug Fire near the town of Applegate. Those conditions will continue if current management practices stay in place, Frick contends.

County board Chairman Jim Raffenburg said that the WOPR will be discussed during the Thursday, Aug. 9 meeting of the Josephine County Long Term Funding Citizens Task Force at 1:30 p.m. at Anne Basker
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Legion installs E. Buell

She leads Oregon American Legion Auxiliary

Cave Junction resident Ellie Buell has been installed as 2007-08 president of the American Legion Auxiliary, Dept. of Oregon.

She is the first person from Cave Junction to become a department president. And she is the fifth from Southwestern Oregon during the past 78 years to gain the honor.



Ellie Buell

well, she will travel throughout Oregon visiting units and posts.

Besides Buell's state-level distinction, three others from Glenn Morrison Auxiliary have attained state positions. Michele Colbert is sergeant-at-arms; Laurel Warden is Community Service chairman; and Tina Haemmerlein is legislative chairman.

Additionally, the Unit 70 Auxiliary was awarded two trophies during the state convention in Astoria. It received the award for Best VA&R Report/Membership 1-99 (Warden was chairman); and Best All-Around Poppy Program for the State (Buell and Colbert were co-chairmen). Also, the Poppy Program entry advances to national-level competition.

*Illinois Valley's Senior Little League team captured a state title. See page 9.
*Blackberry Festival Aug. 10-12. See pages 5 and 14.
*Cave Junction problem with vagrancy. See page 13.
*Indian tribe challenges Takilma land sale. See page 3.



PARTIAL DEMOLITION is under way preparatory to rebuilding the portion of Pizza Pit pulverized July 1 when a motorhome towing a car crashed into it. Work

began slowly as asbestos-laden material had to be removed. Restaurant owner Bob Humphries means to reopen as soon as possible. (Photo by I.V. News)

DeFazio fights Homeland Security for data access

Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) has renewed his request for classified documents about the government's plans for ensuring continuity of government in the aftermath of a catastrophic national emergency.

As a member of the House Homeland Security Committee, DeFazio is authorized to review classified and sensitive information in a secure room in the Capital Hill complex. This is the first time in 20 years in Congress that DeFazio has been denied access to classified information.

DeFazio, a senior member of the House Homeland Security Committee, made the formal request with the

Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson and Oversight Subcommittee Chairman Chris Carney.

The letter was sent to Frances Townsend, the assistant to the Secretary for Homeland Security & Counterterrorism. It requests the classified annexes to Homeland Security Presidential Directive-20 (HSPD-20), also known as the National Security Presidential Directive-51.

The directive lays out the government's post-catastrophe plan. The letter requests the information by Thursday, Aug. 2.

Earlier this month, after initially approving access to the annexes, the White

House reversed course and refused DeFazio's verbal request for the information.

"I can't see any reason or justification to deny a member of Congress the right to review how the Administration intends to conduct the government of the United States after a catastrophic national emergency," DeFazio said. "I thought this was a routine request, but this makes you wonder."

If the White House again refuses to provide the requested documents, DeFazio and the committee leaders will consider what additional actions may be necessary.

JoCo job scene in mixed bag

Some 300 payroll jobs were added in Josephine County during June, but figures nonetheless show a net decline of 110 jobs from June 2006, said Oregon Employment Dept. (OED).

The agency listed 26,570 persons under

"Total Nonfarm Payroll Employment" during June vs. 26,680 during June 2006. The jobless rate in June equated to 6.7 percent; it was 6.5 percent during June a year ago; 6.1 percent during May this year.
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KERBY EVENING OF ART was conducted Friday, July 27 at seven locations. The free program included (left) Larry Cavalier, a singer and pianist, at Kerbyville Farm; and numerous displays at the Southern Oregon Guild Gallery & Artists Center at the Kerby Belt Bldg. Additional photos on page 14. (Photos by Illinois Valley News)