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Chief's Corner

by Dennis Hoke, Illinois Valley Fire District Chief

Wildfire season is just around the corner, are YOU ready? Anyone who has experienced a wildfire knows it can overcome a structure in a matter of seconds. Now is the time to increase your home's, and possibly your family's, safety and survival by preparing your property for wildfire season.

Creating Wildfire-Defensible Zones

Two factors have emerged as the primary determinants of a home's ability to survive wildfire-- the home's roofing material and the quality of the "defensible space" surrounding it.

Use only fire-resistive roofing materials (Class C or better rating), not wood or shake shingles.

Create and maintain "defensible space" around your structures. This is an area where vegetation is cleared and reduced to slow the spread of wildfire toward the structure. It also reduces the chance of a structure fire moving from the building to the surrounding forest. Defensible space provides room for firefighters to do their jobs. Your house is more likely to withstand a wildfire if grasses, brush, trees and other common forest fuels are managed to reduce a fire's intensity.

The Illinois Valley Fire District can help you design a defensible space plan for your property. We will take into account several factors: size and shape of buildings, materials used in their construction, the slope of the ground on which the structures are built, surrounding topography, and sizes and types of vegetation on your property. We also have information about financial assistance programs to help you with these projects. Call us at 541-592-2225 to arrange a consultation or stop by our office at 681 Caves Highway, Monday through Friday 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM.

Man takes cash in bank heist

(Photo by Dan Mancuso, *Illinois Valley News*)

An unknown amount of cash was stolen by a single man during the Friday, April 5 robbery at Sterling Bank in Cave Junction.

By Dan Mancuso
IVN Staff

Sterling Bank on Highway 199 in downtown Cave Junction was robbed about 5:45 pm this past Friday, April 5.

Cave Junction branch employees refused to comment and said any information about the robbery would have to come from the bank's corporate offices in Washington state.

In a telephone interview with Cara Coon, a Sterling Bank representative in Spokane, Wash., she confirmed that the bank had been robbed at about 5:45 pm. Asked if the person was armed, she replied that she was "not able to comment any further due to the ongoing investigation."

According to Kerby resident, Monty Simons, he was listening to his scanner Friday evening and heard Oregon State Police say that they were looking for a man in bluejeans, a grey, hooded sweat shirt and a hat. The person was believed to be between 50 and 60 years old with a thin mustache and facial hair.

Detective Sgt. Fitzgerald of the Oregon State Police was not available for comment as of this paper's deadline.

According to eyewitnesses, at approximately 6:25 pm Friday, three Oregon State Police cruisers arrived at the Cave Junction branch of Sterling Bank on Hwy. 199. Two troopers went into the bank where earlier, a silent alarm had been tripped. The third trooper appeared to be working a grid in the areas around the bank.

Criminal Justice and Public Safety Levy edges closer to decision time

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Contributing Writer

As the May 21 election nears, Josephine County residents are taking a closer look at Ballot Measure 17.49, a three-year local option criminal justice and public safety levy designed to bolster the county's criminal justice system.

Federal forestland payments to Josephine County (of which 67 percent is federal land) have dwindled over the past five years and county officials say they don't expect the federal funding to come back any time soon.

While the last public safety levy failed in the November 2012 general election, over 4 percent of county voters said that the current level of service provided by the

county criminal justice system does not meet the needs of the community.

Both the Josephine County Commissioners and the Josephine County Chamber of Commerce are urging residents to vote in favor of the levy by saying that "an adequately funded and staffed criminal justice system is imperative for a healthy and growing local economy."

The levy would add $1.48 per assessed $1,000 of property value to the 58 cents per $1,000 that residents currently pay, bringing the total to $2.06 per $1,000. If passed, then 58 cents per $1000 would apply toward general county government operating expenses that include assessment, taxation and general functions of county government, while the $1.48 increase would fund just the criminal justice system and would raise $9,150,741 for the fiscal year of 2013, which runs from July 1 through June 30.

While services would not be restored to levels that existed prior to budget reductions in recent years, services would be increased from current levels, providing what officials refer to as a "bridge to the future," until permanent funding solutions can be found. The levy would affect all parts of the criminal justice and public safety system.

The levy's passage would raise inmate capacity in the adult jail and increase Sheriff's Office patrols and improve deputy response times. The sheriff's civil services, including evidence and records, would increase office hours; court security would be enhanced; funding would be provided for school security programs; major crime investigations would be reinstated; the number of criminal cases prosecuted by the district attorney's office would rise and the juvenile justice and detention program would be better budgeted. The animal protection program would also gain more funding, but that would not include funding for shelter operations or animal adoptions, but only cover issues of animal abuse, neglect or any other instance of violation of law involving an animal.

According to numbers provided by the Josephine Board of County Commissioners, at $ 1.48 per $1,000, for every $100,000 of assessed value, the tax will amount to $12. 33 per month or $148 per year. The approximate tax increase for a home with a value of $150,000 would be about $18.50 a month or $222 per year.

County residents can go to www.co.josephine.or.us to access a link (which appears in red on the home page) that calculates how the proposed levy will affect specific properties.

Federal hearing set to discuss long-term O&C lands solution

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Contributing Writer

After Oregon Representatives Peter DeFazio (D), Greg Walden (R) and Kurt Schrader (D) requested a "substantive and open discussion about long-term solutions for the statutorily unique Oregon and California (O&C) Railroad lands," the House Natural Resources Committee in Washington, D.C., scheduled a hearing on April 11 to examine bipartisan solutions for the O&C lands.

"Some counties in western Oregon are on the brink of bankruptcy and are considering insolvency or turning over their responsibilities to the state," said DeFazio. "If Congress fails to act, these counties will dissolve. We need to work toward a long-term solution, and we need to do it today. There is no excuse for inaction or delay."

Last February, the three congressmen proposed the "O&C Trust, Conservation and Jobs Act," saying it is "a realistic, bipartisan legislative proposal to help solve the O&C problems" and is intended to "create jobs, provide revenues to failing Oregon counties, help sustain the local manufacturing base, save the federal government hundreds of millions of dollars, and protect water, fish, and old growth."

The O&C lands include about 2,600,000 acres located in a checkerboard fashion across eighteen western Oregon counties. Originally granted to the Oregon & California Railroad to build a railroad between Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco, California, the land was re-conveyed to the United States government by act of Congress in 1916. The O&C lands have been administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service since 1946.

In compensation for being unable to collect property taxes on federal O&C lands, funds amassed from the sale of forest products on these lands were divided between the U.S. Treasury, the administering federal agency and the county where the revenue was generated. Since 1916, from 25 to 50 percent of timber revenues from O&C lands streamed into the 18 counties, and many, like Josephine County, became dependent on this money to pay for schools, roads and law enforcement.

Fiscal troubles for O&C counties began in the 1990's when timber revenues dwindled as logging declined due to federal regulations and lawsuits. In response, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act (SRS) in 2000 and started funding the counties directly from the federal budget. SRA was designed to provide transition payments over a six-year period, giving counties time to find alternative sources of revenue and Congress the latitude to explore ways to increase timber production without violating federal laws.

While the SRS payments to counties were extended through 2012, no more such funds are expected. Josephine County received its last installment of $4.6 million in 2012 and banked more than $3 million of that to hedge against anticipated budget shortfalls.

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