

Officials warn that fire season could be extreme

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Contributing Writer

Fire officials are worried about the outlook for this year's fire season due to abnormally low rainfalls since January. While the Illinois Valley Fire District hasn't seen any action yet, other districts in the region are busy responding to wildfires caused by recent lightening strikes hitting prematurely dried-out vegetation.

Were it not for an above average amount of rainfall from last November though December, the situation could be worse, but as it stands, unless the region receives significant rainfall soon, it's shaping up to be an active fire year.

"We're asking people to be extra careful when they burn off their brush piles," said Kamron Ismaili, Division Chief with the I.V. Fire District. "Especially when there's any wind, people need to be diligent."

Ismaili advises residents to closely monitor weather forecasts and postpone burns if gusty winds are predicted. He added that burning should only be done in the mornings and if the wind kicks up, as it often does in the afternoons, the fire should be immediately extinguished and the coals should be well-soaked.

Anyone intending to do any burning needs to get it done soon, as officials anticipate an early start to the fire season. The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) makes the determination by assessing moisture content in small fuels. When grasses begin to turn brown, the ban on back-yard burning won't be far off.

"I wouldn't be surprised if ODF starts the fire season in mid-May," Ismaili said. "Though if we get significant rainfall for several days, that could push the fire season back out into June."

See Fire on A-2



Terry Taylor checks the status of sausages in the smoker Tuesday, May 9.

(Photo by Dan Mancuso, Illinois Valley News)

Taylor's Sausage adds second shift, 30 new jobs

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Contributing Writer

Taylor's Sausage gained approval from the United States Department of Agriculture this past Wednesday to add a second shift at its factory. That means that Cave Junction's largest employer will be able to add 30 new jobs to the valley's workforce before the year is done.

"This is fantastic," said Terry Taylor, one of the business' owners. "Now we can offer jobs to out-of-work Rough & Ready (R&R) mill employees."

Taylor's Sausage makes a number of popular sausage products and demand outpaced production in 2012. Taylor needed to expand to satisfy a growing customer base in Canada, but ran into roadblocks when the USDA was reluctant to grant the meat plant a second-shift inspector at a cost effective rate.

The business currently has one inspector for forty hours per week, which is required while meat is cut, processed, spiced and packaged. Taylor's request for a second inspector for a second shift was initially denied. The USDA said the company first needed to demonstrate that it had accrued "too many overtime hours."

"On top of overtime for employees, we would have had to shell out an additional \$90 an hour just for the inspector," Taylor said. "Those extra costs would have cut too deep into our pricing."

Taylor started writing letters and making phone calls to the USDA almost daily, but was told that his request couldn't be "reassessed until July." Frustrated by being unable to fill customer orders, then feeling an even greater sense of urgency after learning of the R&R mill closure, Taylor finally made a call to Josephine County Commissioner Simon Hare. Hare then requested help from U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley and Congressmen Peter DeFazio and Greg Walden.

"Chris Conroy, from DeFazio's office, went right to work on this. We also heard back from Walden's and Merkley's offices," Taylor said. "We weren't getting very far with the USDA in Eugene, so we got a hold of the Western District office in Denver, and put in an appeal. The very next day we got the green light. We had a lot of people putting pressure on them."

Taylor's Sausage currently employs 100 people in Cave Junction, with 70 at the meat plant and 30 at Taylor's Country Store. The plant currently runs a shift from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The new shift

will run from 4:30 p.m. to 1 a.m. and will add the 30 new jobs. Taylor said the company will explore adding a third shift in 2014 and he anticipates more construction to expand the plant.

"We've got this great sales guy in Canada, Glen Sweeney, and he's a real go-getter," Taylor said. "He already has 20 different companies that want to sell our products, and that's for 600 stores." Sweeney and his wife will spend the summer in a fifth wheel touring Canada to locate even more new customers and there's plans to explore the market in Texas as well.

The products being marketed in Canada are Taylor's "Landjaeger" which is a flattened and fermented sausage snack that imparts a sharp and sour flavor that people love; and the other fast-mover is "Trailbusters," a soft jerky beef product marinated with sugars. These products are dried so they don't require refrigeration.

"The beauty of these items is that there's not really that much product," Taylor said. "We're exporting our labor far more than the product itself. And it's a clean process, there's only some wood smoke involved."

See Taylors on A-10

It's a Tie! I.V.H.S. Academic Masters Team Wins Big!

By
Judy Hoyle
IVN Contributing Writer

The I.V.H.S. Academic Masters finalists won the first place team trophy on Wednesday, May 1st, tying with Grants Pass High School. Over the past 12 years, G.P.H.S. has won the annual event 10 times while their school enrollment has hovered around 2,000 students. But for the first time, I.V.H.S. with a student enrollment of 350, fielded two first place winners and three third place winners to tie with the much larger school for the Team Trophy.

"We're very proud of the team and the work they put into the competition," states I.V.H.S. Principal Casey Alderson. "It's nice to be able to recognize kids for academic prowess. We may be smaller in size but we have just as much academic talent as other county schools."

The students worked toward the competition for months, competing first within I.V. High for the honor of representing the school against the other 3 public high schools. Total scores included written tests to become finalists together with results of the final contest which took place this year at North Valley High School.

I.V.H.S. Senior Natalie Wellen won first place in Science with a presentation on the effects antioxidants and free radicals have on the human body. No stranger to competition, Wellen also played volleyball and basketball throughout her high school career and was a member of the Cougars' varsity teams this

year. Math is her favorite subject in school and she plans to make a career of it as a university professor and theoretical mathematician.

Junior Solomon Zook was also a first place winner in Social Studies with his presentation on community-based mental healthcare, as well as suggestions for possible improvements. Zook is planning to study information technologies when he goes to college and currently enjoys playing all types of games with his friends.

Wellen and Zook each took home \$1,200. \$500 third place prizes went to Junior Brian Bemis in Math, Sophomore Hazel Randall in English and Senior Daniel Vega. Vega played a saxophone solo titled "Aria" by Eugene Bozza for the Music category. He plans to major in music composition at Portland State University with an eye toward linking music with psychology; and enjoys writing and listening to music.

During the competition, Brian Bemis was tasked with designing and constructing a box with no top, from a flat piece of poster board, with the goal of creating the most volume possible. Bemis enjoys reading and attending Boy Scout events and plans to earn a degree in engineering or physics.

Hazel Randall's presentation was an essay on "The Victim" by Saul Bellow, which discussed how human nature was reflected in the main characters. She plans to study physics, psychology and art in college and hopes to be in a band. Currently, her favorite activities include listening to music, swimming, singing and drawing.

Decision time for the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Levy

By
Annette McGee Rasch
IVN Contributing Writer

Ballot Measure 17.49, the three-year local option Criminal Justice and Public Safety levy intended to prop up Josephine County's failing law enforcement and crime prevention infrastructure is now in the hands of the voters. County residents have until May 21 to mail in their ballots.

While similar public safety measures failed in recent years, last November's general election indicated that 74 percent of county voters believe that "the current level of service provided by the county criminal justice system does not meet the needs of the community." Levy supporters say the current measure has a good chance now that voters have watched crime rates increase while living with a severely reduced law enforcement capability for more than a year.

As several extensions to phased-out federal forest-land payments continued to bring funds into county coffers in

recent years, many residents, mostly opposed to the levy, expressed the belief that, once again, the federal government would bail the county out. That was despite warnings from county and state legislators. The final payment to Josephine County, over \$4 million, came through in 2012.

For almost 70 years, Josephine County's criminal justice system was heavily subsidized and county residents became accustomed to low property taxes. The current rate of 58 cents per \$1,000 of assessed property value is one of the lowest in the state and the nation. Levy supporters say that rate is unrealistic and urge county residents to accept their responsibility to pay for the most basic of critical services that include a consistent and reliable criminal justice system.

The levy would raise taxes to a rate of \$1.48 per \$1000 of assessed property value. 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. The total amount raised annually by the county would be \$9,553,000.

If passed, while services will not return to levels experienced before the cut-backs, there would be a measure of sustainability restored to the criminal justice system while permanent solutions are pursued. County officials describe the levy as a "bridge to the future."

Over the past several months, officials, business owners and residents have logged countless miles attending community meetings and events, trying to convince voters that now is the time to raise property taxes to prevent criminality from taking deeper root in the county.

Critics of the levy say that taxation is not the solution during times of economic challenge, that deregulation is the best way to grow the economy. Some propose selling off county assets to pay for services; or modifying the county budget to shift more funds into the criminal justice system's budget.

See Levy on A-10