

## Fire causes evacuation notices



(Photo by Judy Hoyle, Illinois Valley News)

Concerned Valley residents attended a community meeting Sunday, Sept. 4, at I.V. High School.

## Valley surrounded by fires, get the right information

**Annette McGee Rasch**  
IVN Senior Contributing Writer

On any given day the “extreme smoke conditions” plaguing the Illinois Valley might be attributed to any of the 35 wildfires surrounding the area, but the fire on everyone’s mind, the Chetco Bar Fire, the nation’s largest - which has kept Curry County residents on the run since July - has now crept too close to the Illinois Valley for comfort.

On Monday, Sept. 5, this fire made a big run south and east, chewing through 4.5 miles of brush in the old Biscuit Fire burn scar, prompting a Level 3 “leave now” evacuation order for residents of the Oak Flat area, up Illinois River Road, near Selma. Also, a Level 1 evacuation notice for residents living west of Highway 199, from Hayes Hill to the California border, was issued.

“There’s good news and bad news,” Chetco Bar Fire Incident Commander Noel Livingston told a crowd of about 400 people at the Illinois Valley High School last Sunday night, Sept. 4. “We’re in far better shape than with the 2002 Biscuit Fire. Spotting is less likely.” That means there’s less potential for wind-carried sparks or embers to start new fires. “This fire will be much easier to stop on this side - it’s not like on the west side of the fire where it’s burning through

mature forest near Brookings. Over here, we’re dealing with lighter brushy fuels that grew up since 2002.”

Still, Livingston explained that with record level dryness, “the Biscuit fire scar is not acting like a fire break. Everything is on fire except the rock. The fire may very well spread to old Biscuit Fire lines. We’re hoping to get some help from Mother Nature. We’re hoping for rain, and we don’t want the wind to come out of the west.” He also explained that when smoke columns reached 20,000 feet last weekend, ash began raining down throughout the region, but since this ash already took a trip through the upper atmosphere, it’s not flammable.

Now for the bad news: “We’re not going to get more help. We’re going to have to do this with the people we have now - resources are maxed out everywhere,” Livingston said. “When you get 58 large uncontained fires nationally, the competition for resources is terrible,” added Terry Kracko, Chetco Bar Fire Public Information Officer. “And, some people who might have been out here working on this fire are in Texas for Hurricane Harvey.”

Currently, there’s about 1,600 firefighters working the Chetco Bar Fire and Kracko hopes they’ll be able to stay. “Crews are trying to contain the fire, and near the Illinois Valley, that means rehabilitating old Biscuit fire and

dozer lines, and very likely, unless the weather cooperates, there will be burn out operations.”

The Oregon National Guard has been activated to help out, but Livingston said those troops don’t have enough training to be safely sent into the rugged wilderness. He explained that his top priority is to save lives; secondly, to protect communities; and finally, to preserve natural resources.

When this paper went to print the fire was about 170,000 acres in size - and the smoke in the area “put a cap” on the fire. That, combined with lower predicted temperatures may help give firefighters the time they need to get fire lines back in good shape, according to Kracko.

Several people grumbled about the fire “being allowed to grow so large” saying it should have been suppressed when it was small. Livingston said a fire crew initially rappelled in, “but by the next day they realized they were not successful so we had to change to an indirect strategy.” That crew had called in for an “extraction,” in part, because the area is extremely difficult to move around in, with many near vertical cliffs and too much potential to get trapped.

SEE CHETCO ON A-9

## Official Sources of Wildfire Information

- Joint Information Center: swojic.blogspot.com or call 541-608-1243.
- ChetcoBar Fire information: Inciweb.nwgc.gov/incident/5385 or call 541-479-1177.
- Information about all fires in SW Oregon: Inciweb.nwgc.gov.
- Information about the Eclipse Complex Fires in California: Inciweb.nwgc.gov/incident/5511/.
- Illinois Valley Fire District: 541-592-2225 and get current information on facebook.com/ivfire/
- Learn more about reducing wildfire risk on your property: Firewise.org
- Sign up for Emergency Alerts from Josephine County - At your home, workplace or children’s schools here: www.co.josephine.or.us/alert. Or call 541-474-5300. Email jhall@co.josephine.or.us for more information.
- Southern Oregon Emergency Aid (SOEA), Animal evacuation group, call 541-226-1124; email soeaeavacteam@gmail.com; or facebook.com/groups/southernoregonemergencyaid/.
- If you can’t find help elsewhere for animals, contact JoCoanimalevacuation@gmail.com or call 541-4745390.
- Learn about smoke conditions for each area: Oregonsmoke.blogspot.com.

In the event of wide-scale evacuations, these five locations are the Illinois Valley

Assembly Points for access to shelters:

Cave Junction: Shop Smart parking lot • Holland Loop Area: Bridgeview Church • Selma: Ray’s Food Place parking lot  
Lake Selmac: Trout Pavillion • O’ Brien: O’ Brien country Store parking lot

## R.R. 5 pot ban ruffles feathers

**Jason McMillen**  
IVN Contributing Writer

Tensions ran high at the Aug. 28 Rural Planning Commission meeting which was held primarily to take public commentary regarding the new, and potentially devastating, proposed text amendments to the Rural Planning Code and Order No. 2017-034 regarding cannabis production on Rural Residential (RR) land. The building was packed with people beyond the fire marshal’s maximum occupancy and all those who wished to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions had to fill out a testimony card or be denied their chance. Over the course of the meeting grandfathering existing operations, new setback lines and changes to county code were discussed.

The meeting kicked off with a speech from Commissioner Simon Hare who thanked the board for their unpaid community service. He then accused Christine Gardiner, a board member, for having a personal bias regarding the proposed changes. Hare alleged that Gardiner had written a letter to the county commissioners expressing her opinion on the matter prior to the meeting and demanded that she either defend or recuse herself.

“You’re the only commissioner that I’ve ever received a letter from prior to a designated hearing on a subject that I’ve asked you, all of you, to do an objective job in reviewing,” Simon said, further adding that he was acting as liaison to the planning department and not as chairman of the board. Gardiner responded by saying that the only thing she’s guilty of is having a strong opinion and held that she can still be capable of an “honest analysis of our situation” in spite of it.

After the exchange Julie Schmelzer, community development director of Josephine County, stepped up to the podium to outline the proposed changes. Most importantly, and because of new state law, all Oregon Health Authority (OHA) growers shall notify the Oregon Liquor Control Commission (OLCC) by Dec. 1 if they will remain with the Oregon Medical Marijuana Program (OMMP) or will be moving to the OLCC. Anyone who wishes to grow more than 12 plants on RR property must transfer to the OLCC, a very important fact that interacts with the county’s new changes because their once lucrative operations will, with high likelihood, be either retroactively banned or greatly reduced in size.

In total, Josephine County currently has 33 OLCC licensed producers on RR property and as of May 2017, they have had a total of zero complaints filed against them. Regardless, the county government cites 700 formal complaints against cannabis operations of all types and that 64 percent of voters voted for banning RR farming in Measure 17-81’s advisory question. The advisory question was on the ballot in the most recent special election. “With 700 complaints that tells me there’s a problem somewhere else,” Schmelzer said, “It’s either with illegal growers or other growers. We don’t know. We just know that the public has spoken and that we need to look at more than just the OLCC growers.”

Operations which want to be grandfathered in after the changes must be in perfect compliance with county code and either have a Land Use Compatibility Statement (LUCS) or have an application on file that’s actively being processed. To verify that all codes, even ones that have nothing to do with cannabis are being met, grandfathered operations must submit to a yearly compliance inspection. If they are found in violation of any code, cannabis related or not, it would be a reason to have their grandfathered status revoked permanently.

Things that require permits are, but aren’t limited to, greenhouses, connex boxes, water tanks, houses, decks, garages, sheds, fences, campers, security systems, electrical, plumbing, land clearing, deforestation, grading and floodplains.

Schmelzer also noted that grandfathering is not attached to the land and therefore cannot come under new ownership or license and continue operations. “We’re trying to give a fair warning that if this grandfathering proposal would go through, these are the types of items you need to be in compliance with,” Schmelzer said.