

Champions that lost



(Courtesy photo from Lisa Sherier for the Illinois Valley News)

Monday, Sept. 4 the Labor Day Softball Tournament's first place champions R.I.P. sponsored by Annie Pinois (center) in memory of her son and husband. The players from R.I.P. are from Cave Junction, Grants Pass and Medford.

Shifting seasons; shifting strategies on the Checto

"... But what is unusual is when a column starts up at 3 a.m. in the morning! And that happened!"

Karen Ripley, U.S. Forest Service

Annette McGee Rasch

IVN Senior Contributing Writer

You know you're on the West Coast when rain dances are all the rage! But say what you will - everyone was thrilled when rain and cooler temperatures came along last Sept. 7 and tamped down the two-month old Checto Bar Fire.

And now, with summer turning to fall, strategy on the fire lines seems to be shifting as well. When conditions were hot and dry - with the fire growing at uncomfortable rates - burn out operations: the strategy of setting fire ahead of an advancing wildfire to deprive it of fuel as it comes closer to the fire lines to protect communities seemed almost inevitable.

"Now, we're getting closer to mid-October, when we typically see a fire-season ending rain event," said East Zone public information officer Karen Ripley. "The wildfire is still miles away, and we won't add fire to the landscape until the wildfire approaches - and if the weather moderates, we may not have to. The final fire footprint would be smaller.

"Our priorities are to connect the old Biscuit fire lines until we have a secure containment perimeter," Ripley said. "As time continues, and as work continues on the fire lines, if fire approaches, then we can more safely and strategically meet it with direct fire lines tight up against the fire. And, where fire has approached, we look for natural barriers we can tie into. This also helps reduce the size of potential burn out operations."

Typically, each night, relative humidity levels rise and fire behaviors drop - but during some periods when the Checto fire had blown up, there was no overnight recovery. Temperatures stayed higher and humidity levels stayed low at night, so the fire continued to burn on a 24-hour cycle.

"And that is very very unusual," Ripley said. "Fires subside at night. And then you see fire columns develop

in the afternoon. During the height of the heat wave, this fire spouted 20,000 foot columns of smoke, which isn't unusual. But what is unusual is when a column starts up at 3 a.m. in the morning! And that happened!"

Ripley went on to explain that "as we move into the fall this won't happen anymore. Day lengths are shorter and overnight humidity recovery is well established. Every day we get closer to mid-October, where we'll get a fire season ending event."

Meteorologists have also noted unusual aspects of this fire season, for example, from Aug. 31 to Sept. 4, the relative humidity never got above 36 percent.

"That's perhaps the driest period on the fire - that's five 24-hour periods of extreme record level dryness," said Shad Keene, National Oceanic Atmospheric Association meteorologist. "To anyone who has lived in the region for a while, obviously, the seasonal dryness is not unusual. But it's the magnitude and duration of dryness is what's uncommon."

"Especially the southern part of the state, we get a thermal trough pattern, with the offshore northeast winds, and that brings the hot dry winds rolling off the lands," Keene explained. "And on the Checto fire, this weather trend was enhanced by the Checto effect, where hot dry winds from the Kalmiopsis blow down the Checto river canyon toward the ocean."

Meteorologists and fire behavior analysts say this was a big factor in the Checto fire becoming such a large fire.

"Since the initial the blow up that occurred that second week of August, thankfully we've only had a few Checto-effect events, so the town was sort of braced for those, and during those times the air quality was unlike anything I'd ever experienced," said Brookings fishing guide Mark Sherwood, "On those days, the smoke was so thick, you'd find yourself holding your breath, very unusual."

County to hold 'Weekly Business Session' in C.J. tonight

Sept. 13, 2017, 5: 30 p.m. Cave Junction City Hall, 222 Lister Street, Cave Junction.

If special physical or language accommodations are needed for this public session, please notify the commissioners' office at 541-474-5221, but normally they need at least 48-hours prior to session. TDD (Hearing-Impaired) 1- 800-735-2900.

Sheriff's Office nabs 2 pot thieves

According to a press release from Josephine County Sheriff's Office (JOCO) Donald Leiter and Trevor Landers were arrested for robbery I, theft I, burglary II and criminal mischief I in connection to a marijuana grow theft.

Around 4:30 a.m. Sept. 11, two male subjects cut a fence located in the 1000 block of Applegate Avenue in rural Grants Pass, to gain entry to the property, then broke into a large metal building containing marijuana. The men filled two large leaf bags full of processed marijuana and then left on foot.

On-site security was alerted and when they responded they found the men on the west bank of the Rogue River.

After a brief confrontation, one of the males threatened an employee with a firearm and then both subjects crossed the river escaping to the north bank. The Josephine County Sheriff's Office conducted an extensive search with assistance from the Oregon State Police, Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service Deputies, the release stated.

The initial search recovered evidence and possible direction of travel. The subjects appeared split up to avoid capture the release stated.

Due to multiple deputies and resources in the area, both were located and arrested after tips were received from the community about suspicious males walking in the area. Donald Leiter was arrested walking south on Leonard Road and Trevor Landers was arrested walking south on Lower River Road.

Pickett West people's forum and protest

Jason McMillen

IVN Contributing Writer

The massive and hastily assembled Pickett West Timber Sale's first auction, which will be held at the Grants Pass Interagency Office Sept. 14 at 9 a.m. will result in the potential logging of 287 acres of old-growth forest, a classification of forest that's particularly important to environmental activists because of its ecological importance and resistance to fire. Generally speaking, and according to Oregon Wild, sections of forests have to be untouched by any major unnatural changes for more than 100 years to be considered old-growth.

The Pickett West Timber Sale, according to KS Wild's program director Tim Ream, is a low elevation timber harvest that is located very close and throughout several communities, most especially in the Illinois Valley and Applegate area. "It goes through and it looks for many of the last best places, on public land, where old growth forests have not been cut," Ream said. The series of auctions can result in the logging of thousands of acres both young and old but he could not say with certainty the exact amount. However, Ream held that roughly half of the timber stands up for auction range from 160 to 240 years old, well within the minimum age requirements to be considered old growth.

KS Wild, the Deer Creek Association and the Applegate Neighborhood Network recently held a well-attended people's forum to discuss ways of raising community awareness about the upcoming sale as well as to formulate plans of action with regard to putting pressure on the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The three organizations are scheduled to attend a public protest outside of the auction building on the morning of Sept. 14. Anyone who wants to voice their concerns peacefully is encouraged to attend.

"This is not something that we're going to just allow to happen without putting up a fight," Ream declared.

Natalie M. Wetenhall focuses on new genre of cannabis business law

STORY ON A-5

SEE SALE ON A-8