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# Chetco Fire meeting more relaxed

Annette McGee Rasch  
IVN Senior Contributing Writer

Recent clear skies have helped soothe Illinois Valley residents weary from wildfire smoke - thus the community information meeting held in the high school cafeteria Sunday, Sept. 10, drew 170 people who were far more relaxed than the hundreds of nervous souls who'd crammed into the same space a week earlier.

Members of the Chetco East Zone fire management team, Illinois Valley Fire Chief Dennis Hoke, and County Commissioner Lily Morgan presented current fire information, discussed management strategies and facilitated a lengthy question and answer session with the community.

"We look at where the fire is at, where it has grown and we respond where we need to," explained East Zone Incident Commander Brian Gales.

At this paper's print time, the fire was estimated to be 184,267 acres and is 8 percent contained. While still one of the nation's largest, the fire had only grown a small

amount in recent days and was "mostly smoldering, creeping and backing. Aerial observers report minimal fire activity on the eastern flank, with very little open flame," Gales explained, though he added that with three-to-five days of drying, the fire might "take a small run" but said he doesn't think the fire can produce "a wall of fire coming at the fire line."

Gales said his crews are tying together sections of old-Biscuit Fire dozer-built containment lines between the fire and Highway 199 and added that the fire is still between 8 and 12 miles away from those lines. Regarding potential burn out operations, Gales added that, "we're not going to do that unless we absolutely need to."

Still, Gales cautioned that the Chetco Fire must be taken seriously as the potential for serious fire behavior remains, which is why 320 firefighters are camped out at Lake Selmac for the duration and the Oregon National Guard has sent in troops to help out. A Level 1 evacuation notice for residents living west of High-

way 199, from Hayes Hill to the California border remains in place; and residents of the Oak Flat area up Illinois River Road remain under a Level 3 evacuation order.

Illinois Valley District Fire Chief (IVFD) Dennis Hoke said his crew has been doing "structural triage" - where properties in the Level 1 evacuation zone are evaluated based on whether they can be successfully defended from wildfire. There are four possible categories, and those considered undefendable are red tagged.

"Some places have no address, or the driveways are in poor condition," Hoke said. "If we can't get our apparatus in there, a property will be marked as undefendable. Or if a place has a cedar shake roof, a wood shed right next to the house and trees touching the roof, we can't save that." And, while doing structural triage in O'Brien, one IVFD crew was shot at on Naue Way last week. "That's property will 'red-tagged' as undefendable," Hoke dead-panned.

SEE FIRE ON A-12

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## SALE ...

Continued from A-1

Although some of the project involves thinning and restoration, which is not objectionable by some environmental activist's standards, many areas will be logged down to 30 percent canopy retention. Any stand that is logged down to 29 percent or less is considered, by the BLM's internal definition, to be clear cut. For example, if a stand is logged down to 29 percent or less it is considered to be clear cut. Essentially, the BLM is allowing buyers to cut within 1 percent of their definition. Ream's ultimate concern with this practice is that it generates an extreme fire hazard because the biggest, oldest and most fire resistant trees are taken out and, as an additional consequence, the increased sunlight and airflow dries out the ecosystem. Compounding the issue, he added that many of the units to be heavily logged are relatively close to communities, thereby creating a potential danger to lives and property.

Ream theorizes that the deal is being rushed forward at an expedited pace because

the government's fiscal year ends Sept. 30. Essentially, he alleged, the BLM wants to make the books look healthier at the last minute. "They told us that they were interested in taking comments from the public but during the time that was happening they were out marking the trees."

Ream was surprised by the lack of communication and felt it was a big step backward in the BLM's usual diplomacy. In the past, the BLM has abided by a system called the Applegate Adaptive Management Area Process. The process opens up communications with the affected community and provides the framework to create a plan which is acceptable for both parties. Ream felt that the BLM suddenly, and without cause, decided to abandon it.

During the environmental assessment period, there was a substantial amount of formal complaints filed against the sale by public administrators and the BLM is required to adequately address them before awarding the timber. Despite this, politicians have thus far remained mostly silent. To demand their attention, Ream asks citizens to contact Senator Merkley, U.S. Rep. DeFazio and Senator Wyden with a list of their concerns in order to force their hand into the situation.



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