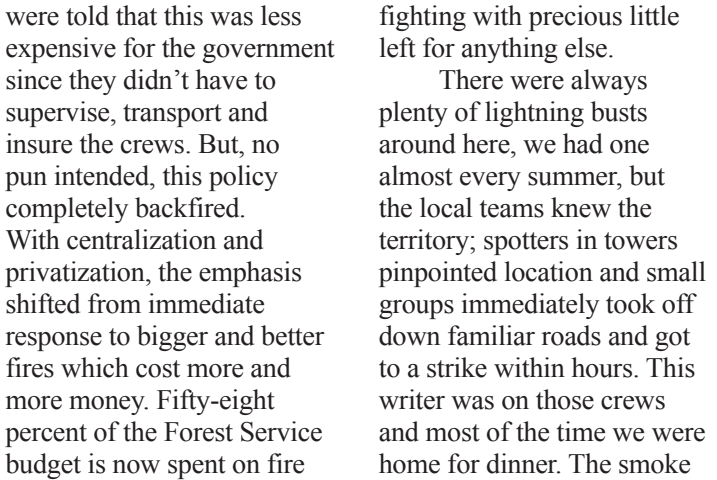


by Robert Hirning

There are basically two types of fires in Southern Oregon. One type are rapid moving, often human caused blazes, sometimes wind driven, that occur on the valley floor or at low elevations. On private and BLM lands, fire protection is the responsibility of State Forestry and I.V. Rural responds to structure fires. Both are cracker-jack outfits and do a tremendous job of immediate response. Consider the “Smoking Duck” fire; an incredible ignition source that was kept from spreading by a rapidly deployed, dedicated force, made up largely of volunteers. Also the “Four Corners Fire” that broke out a couple of years ago in the worst possible fire conditions but was stopped in its tracks with herculean efforts by State crews, along with volunteers,

So, what happened? Basically, in the 1980s the Forest Service “privatized” fire fighting, using contract companies who employed their own workers. We



were told that this was less expensive for the government since they didn't have to supervise, transport and insure the crews. But, no pun intended, this policy completely backfired. With centralization and privatization, the emphasis shifted from immediate response to bigger and better fires which cost more and more money. Fifty-eight percent of the Forest Service budget is now spent on fire

fighting with precious little left for anything else.

There were always plenty of lightning busts around here, we had one almost every summer, but the local teams knew the territory; spotters in towers pinpointed location and small groups immediately took off down familiar roads and got to a strike within hours. This writer was on those crews and most of the time we were home for dinner. The smoke

None of this had to happen, and here is where the arrogance comes in. Fire Managers in Washington DC and the Regional Offices, have decided that the public should come to expect this as the new norm. They told us that somehow fire is “good for the forest” and we should expect bigger and better fires. This is complete baloney. Yes, there was a time when ancient old growth forests dominated the land, when only a few people inhabited the back country. Fires burned slowly and on the ground, say back a hundred years ago. Today the forests are largely even aged second growth stands, with a honeycomb of deteriorating logging roads, brush covered clear-cuts and landings that burn explosively. The fires of this July have already taken out hundreds of acres of tomorrow’s timber crop; much of it planted forty years ago by local crews who well remember how much work went into the reforestation

In conclusion, the public should demand a rapid response to lightning strikes from the Forest Service. It can be done and has been done. Allowing little fires to become huge conflagrations, burning tens of thousands of acres and threatening whole subdivisions, is a terrible danger to the environment, to property and to public health. It is a devastating blow to the tourism business in Southern Oregon and finally a huge waste of taxpayer dollars.

Continued from A-7

*Bryce Phillip Smoker, 23, was detained in JoCo Jail following his arrest in the 100 block of N. Redwood Hwy. at 4:39 p.m. Smoker had two felony warrants from JCSO, due to his failure to appear for unauthorized use of a vehicle and PCS-meth.

*JCSO apprehended a fugitive at Kerby Mart at 11:55 p.m. Joseph

*JCSO topped their winning streak for the day with the arrest of Christopher Roy near Hwy. 199 and Rockydale Road at 2:45 p.m.

*Energetic folks in the
100 block of S. Sawyer Avenue

*A gal was picking blueberries near Lakeshore Drive and Redwood Hwy. at 5:38 p.m. She left her car in gear, and it rolled off the road into the ditch. Her dog was in the truck, but it survived.

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