

# Timberland owners close access to private lands for fire season

WESTERN OREGON, May 11, 2020 – A number of private timberland owners and managers in Western Oregon have agreed to close their land to public access starting Monday, May 18.

Due to drought conditions, and above-average temperatures, agencies are predicting a bad fire season in Oregon. Oregon has already experienced three times as many fires as normal this year, and Oregon

Department of Forestry's SW Oregon District already started their fire season May 1, which was the earliest start since 1968. It is anticipated that other fire districts will declare the official start of their respective fire seasons early as well.

State parks and all national forests in Oregon have closed recreation sites including trails, campgrounds, day-use areas and boat launches due to the current

coronavirus pandemic. Federal, state and local officials are urging people to "do the right thing" by staying home, but as millions of acres of public lands in Oregon have been closed to recreation, the public's use of private lands has increased dramatically.

Whereas public lands often have infrastructure to help keep people safe like trails for people to hike on, or fire rings in campgrounds to contain campfires, private

timberlands do not have the infrastructure to handle the surge in public visits safely.

Since about 70% of Oregon's wildfires are started by people, the spike in public visits to private land has the potential to be dangerous for both the public visitors as well as the timberlands.

To compound the issue, wildland firefighting will be less efficient with social distancing and other COVID-19 restrictions.

Seneca CEO Todd Payne said, "It's not only dry and shaping up to be a bad fire season, but because of COVID-19, fire fighters and community members face even greater harm."

With a combined timberland acreage of around 600,000 acres, Seneca, Lone Rock Resources, Giustina Resources, Campbell Global, and Giustina Land & Timber Company will close public access to their lands in Ben-

ton, Coos, Curry, Douglas, Jackson, Josephine, Lane, Linn, and Polk counties starting Monday, May 18, 2020.

"It is an unusual situation driven by conditions beyond our control, but we are looking at every opportunity to limit danger to the public, firefighters, and the forests," said Brennan Garrelts with Lone Rock Resources.

## MINE ... Continued from A-3

When Meredith was granted access to the teleconference, he thanked the board for the opportunity to comment on the permit. "We only have three remaining concerns or recommendations," he said. These included a clause specifying that no sale or production of minerals can be carried out during the exploration phase of the agreement with AMR. Meredith recommended that this be changed to a low level of processing so that AMR is not restricted in the event that such processing becomes necessary. In addition, as Streeter said, the timber insurance remained a concern. "Logging insurance is really overkill that, we checked with our insurance agent, and while they didn't specifically offer logging insurance or this type of insurance, they checked around with some other agents and they said these plans start out at a minimum of ten thousand dollars per year. We want the property, and the county is certainly going to want the property to be properly insured and properly protected, but since we're not logging the property and our disturbance is, even in a full-blown exploration permit program like what we do, the disturbance on the property is almost night and day versus a logging operation." Meredith proposed having property insurance rather than loggers broad form coverage.

On the insurance, Streeter rebutted, "It's not just attributed to logging, as mentioned by Mr. Meredith. It covers a very vast range of activities associated with operations on forest lands. And it's not just damages to the county, it's if the operators

cause damage to neighboring properties, things of that nature, so if you want my opinion, unless the county can find an acceptable alternative, I would say leave it as it is." He also opposed Meredith's recommendation to allow any on-site mineral processing as part of the permit.

It was ultimately decided to move forward with the permit with the insurance matter unresolved. Meredith said, "We would intend to circle back with our insurance agents and figure out if we can find a policy that is acceptable to the county, that isn't specifically designed for logging works, but we want to make sure it covers all the things that it needs to cover and ultimately the county would be the final authority on what is sufficient or not."

The motion to approve the mineral exploration permit carried 3-0. Commissioners Dan DeYoung and Lily Morgan thanked Hicks, Streeter, the mining advisory committee and all who were involved in negotiating the permit. "We are a mineral rich community," Morgan commented. "We want to utilize those minerals and protect our community, and so finding that balance and getting everything on track."

Board Chairman Darin Fowler added, "I know we took awhile to consider this application because we haven't seen one for awhile, and so we wanted to make sure everyone was comfortable with what was going forward. I'm looking forward to seeing the mining plan and the exploration come

to its natural end and I hope we find something. I think that critical minerals found in our county would change the conversation with our Federal and state governments because critical minerals have recently become very much a part of the discussion of where we rely on those minerals coming from around the world; whether those sources could be found within our own boundaries. And we know Josephine County has a history and a rich cache of minerals that we haven't really been exploring for quite awhile now."

Following the conclusion of the public hearing, overtime compensation took the spotlight. The county's human resources director, JJ Scofield, kicked the discussion off with a recap. "Three weeks ago, the board considered a policy change on an existing policy that allows for extra compensation for employees who are putting in extra hours during an emergency when funding is available," he said. "The policy, I believe was written in 2008, has only been used one time since then but there's some inherent issues with the way it's written, which is why we are recommending a change." Scofield went on to examine the options in front of the board, which included: 1) Eliminate the policy and if the board chooses to compensate employees who put forth extra effort do so through a different policy; and 2) Expand the policy which will allow it to be used more significantly.

Fowler had voiced his preference for the first option at the first meeting this matter

was addressed at, while Morgan favored the second. DeYoung said he needed more time to see the merits of either side, and so the board decided to issue a continuance of the matter to the May 6 WBS.

"I would like to recommend that we do the second option," Morgan reiterated, "but then internally encourage a process of not having overtime generally; that we discourage overtime whenever possible... If they're not working the overtime, if they're not claiming the overtime, it's not an issue if it's such a situation that it's needed and there's so many people in that situation it would be nice to have it available."

"I think we need to be very cautious with how we move this forward," DeYoung said, "because we are going to be, every day that comes along, there's going to be some national emergency or or local emergency that we're gonna have to deal with."

Morgan responded to DeYoung by saying, "I just want to clarify that these are actual declared emergencies

that have to go through a legal process and signed and declared. It's not just any emergency that comes up... So I just want to be clear that this is actual, formally declared emergencies."

Fowler weighed in by saying, "I would be in favor of the language in draft No. 1 that just starts crossing out at exempt employees and crosses it all the way out to the end. That's where I'm going to land; that we just get rid of this part of this paragraph and suggest to salary employees that working 70 hours a week is not healthy."

In the end, Fowler got his way when DeYoung backed

his motion to approve the elimination of the overtime compensation policy, and when it came time to vote, Morgan was the sole commissioner against it, allowing it to pass 2-1. "I don't agree with this decision but I understand where you're coming from and I support your decision to do that," Morgan said. "It may be something you revisit down the way."

Go to the county's official YouTube channel to watch this WBS as well as past sessions. If you have comments you would like to have read during the next WBS, submit them to [bcc@josephinecounty.gov](mailto:bcc@josephinecounty.gov).

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