

Illinois Valley News

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Fire season approaches rapidly

Burning discouraged as hot, dry conditions make outlook grim without rain

Annette McGee Rasch
IVN senior contributing writer

Time is short to burn off brush and debris piles before the season's burn ban is declared by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). As early as May 1, ODF could forbid any further outdoor burning on all state, private, county, city, and Bureau of Land Management forestlands in Josephine County - until the fall rains return.

The outlook for the 2021 wildfire season has both residents and firefighters concerned.

"Escaped debris burns are spreading faster than people anticipate for this time of the year," said Natalie Weber, ODF's Southwest Oregon District public information officer. "Fire agencies from across southern Oregon are responding to multiple escaped burns in the past few weeks. Warmer weather, winds and a lack of rain are contributing to increased fire activity and risk."

Weber noted that citations are being issued to those responsible for these escaped burns.

"Where we're at right now is fairly typical," Weber said. "We always see pre-season fire. It's really weather dependent. We've had seasons where we had an early start with fire, but then late spring rain meant we had a mild fire season."

Declaration of this year's fire season "will come down to the forecast in the next few weeks," she said. "If we continue to see the warmer weather and don't get any more rain, it could happen soon. We're constantly evaluating. We can never have enough rain in this region because we're so fire-prone."

Recent years have seen many weather and fire records broken and 2021 could be another year for the books.

SEE SEASON ON A-8



(Photo by Laura Mancuso for the Illinois Valley News)

Erickson Air Crane lands at the Illinois Valley Airport during a training day Saturday, April 17 to prepare for wildfires.

Making defensible space at home

Annette McGee Rasch
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While it'll soon be too late to burn off debris, it's never too late to create more defensible space around homes, to reduce vulnerability in the event a wildfire encroaches.

Too often, wildfires are started by human folly before spreading to their neighbors (or into the forest).

Oregon Department of Forestry fire safety materials instruct how once a fire is started, it simply follows the fuel, so whether that is to trees or houses comes down to what the residents of any particular area

do to minimize that threat.

ODF also points out that the more residents do to make their homes defensible, the easier it is for firefighters to protect it.

To create defensible space within a 30- to 50-foot perimeter of the home, all dead sticks, leaves and pine needles should be removed. Needles should be cleaned off the roof and from under the eaves, and rain gutters kept free of needles and leaves. Within 100 feet of homes, tall grass and low-lying brush underneath trees that can act as ladder fuels should be eliminated.

SEE SPACE ON A-8

Fraud and other charges leveled at Laurel Cemetery

Association ousts management as financial transactions referred to state

Dan Mancuso
IVN staff

In the past, the Historic Laurel Cemetery Association meetings were as quiet as a ghost. But recently, association members have been concerned about alleged mismanagement of funds for personal use, squatting in the chapel and desecration of historical markers.

The April 18 meeting was standing-room only with a dozen attendees standing outside looking to get answers from the current management:

Lyn Poitz and Karen Delarme. Association member

Roy Barto gave a financial breakdown and mentioned multiple cases of fraud that he has reported to the state of Oregon. One includes a purchase of food using an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card known in Oregon as an Oregon Trail card. The receipt was then reimbursed with cemetery funds, which is food stamp fraud. Violators may be facing up to one year in jail and a substantial fine.

SEE LAUREL ON A-9



(Photo by Laura Mancuso for the Illinois Valley News)

Suzanne Vautier with the Cultural and Ecological Enhancement Network (CEEN) takes a look at a manzanita shrub during a wildflower hike Saturday, April 17. SEE MORE PHOTOS ON A-10

REGGAE ON THE EAST FORK



(Photos by Laura Mancuso for the Illinois Valley News)

Some of the Valley's favorite musicians, Alcyon Massive (left) and Rosie Wittman (above) opened up for Indubious and Mike Love at the Earth People's Park on Highway 199 and the East Fork of the Illinois River Saturday, April 17.

JoCo to aid Curry County in operations

CJ Schatza
IVN copy editor

A neighborly endeavor was the first order of business at the April 14 business session of the Board of Josephine County Commissioners.

According to JoCo Public Health Director Michael Weber, the government

of Curry County, home of the port of Brookings and Josephine's neighbor to the west, has been experiencing staffing shortages which have led to decreased capability to run important programs.

One of these programs is environmental health, which includes water and restaurant inspections.

SEE COUNTY ON A-8

Housing squeeze still acute this spring

Last multifamily housing project in Valley was in 1978

Jason McMillen
IVN contributing writer

It's safe to say that the housing crunch in the Illinois Valley is just as bad as in Grants Pass and elsewhere in Oregon — but it's probably more realistic to say that it's worse, and there's no signs of progress under the current economic conditions and COVID-19 shutdowns.

According to records provided

by the city of Cave Junction, the last time multifamily residential housing, better known to most as apartments, was built in the area was 1978. Even then, it was only two complexes — for a total of 52 units.

That's Valley Village Apartments on Schumacher Street and Siskiyou Village on Lister Street, both built within a year of one another. Grants Pass has had just under 100 units added since 2006, with many more middle-family style developments, which include duplexes and triplexes.

According to information provided by I.V. Real Estate - a business that manages a lion's share

of the area's rental units, including rental houses - average monthly rent prices for vacated units has more than doubled in the last 10 years.

Since 2019, current tenants saw a further 17% increase in rent, a trend likely only capped by Oregon Senate Bill 608, which reduced year over year rent increases to a maximum of 10% in 2020, depending year to year on a variety of economic factors.

Rent was said to be lower on average than Grants Pass, but not by a large margin. It's hard to say, because there's nothing available to rent.

SEE HOUSING ON A-6

Local doctors, health officials hold vaccine Q&A

Laura Mancuso
IVN staff

Twenty-two participants attended the COVID-19 Vaccination Question & Answer Virtual Forum that was held April 11 on Zoom and hosted by Jerry Allen from the Josephine County Democratic Party Healthcare Caucus. The invited speakers were Dr. Kathy Mechling, family medicine specialist in Selma; Dr. Bruce Murray, internal medicine specialist and JoCo public health adviser; and Dr. Barbara Villona, international emergency physician. Allen said the forum was about

"providing information to people so they can consider becoming vaccinated."

The following are some questions asked at the forum and their answers by the doctors:

If you are on immunosuppressant medication for arthritis should you get the COVID-19 vaccine (CV)?

Mechling advised talking to your physician about getting the vaccine. She explained that some doctors recommend getting the vaccine and then skipping a dose of your medication, but it really

SEE VACCINE ON A-9