

MOSIER CREEK FIRE

Mosier Creek Fire ‘Not going anywhere’

■ By Mark Gibson
Columbia Gorge News

The Mosier Creek Fire is fully lined and “isn’t going anywhere,” Oregon Department of Forestry representatives reported during the agencies first virtual community fire meeting of the 2020 fire season Saturday evening.

“We’ve had a very favorable outcome,” said Scott Stutzman, leader of the Oregon Fire Marshal’s blue team. Eight task forces, with 142 firefighters and support staff from throughout Oregon were deployed on the fire, in support of the Mosier Fire Department and Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue. Oregon Department of Forestry, U.S. Forest Service and Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area crews were also working the fire, which was at 974 acres Saturday evening.

The fire is all trailed, and worked for the first 100 feet in. An airplane with a thermal camera is mapping the fire daily, and a detection camera has been set up with a full view of the fire area.

“We’ll be running a full day shift and a full night shift for some time. We still have plenty of good air support.”

“This fire is pretty much out,” said Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue Chief Bob Palmer.

Palmer said the department was working another fire out at Interstate 84, also near Mosier, when there was a report of a fire on Carolle road, Palmer said. “About 15 minutes later, saw a large column of smoke coming up and we knew this was a more serious event than we thought initially.

“There were certainly some structures threatened, I was in contact with the sheriff, who was already involved, and was already setting up evacuations.

“Things were becoming

very serious,” he said. Work began to set up a unified command, and preparation made to declare a conflagration with the state. “Everyone is working very hard to keep this fire within a specific perimeter, it could have had a lot more impact than it is,” Palmer said. “Mother nature is a very formidable opponent and doesn’t give up easily. We have been able to keep the impact low.

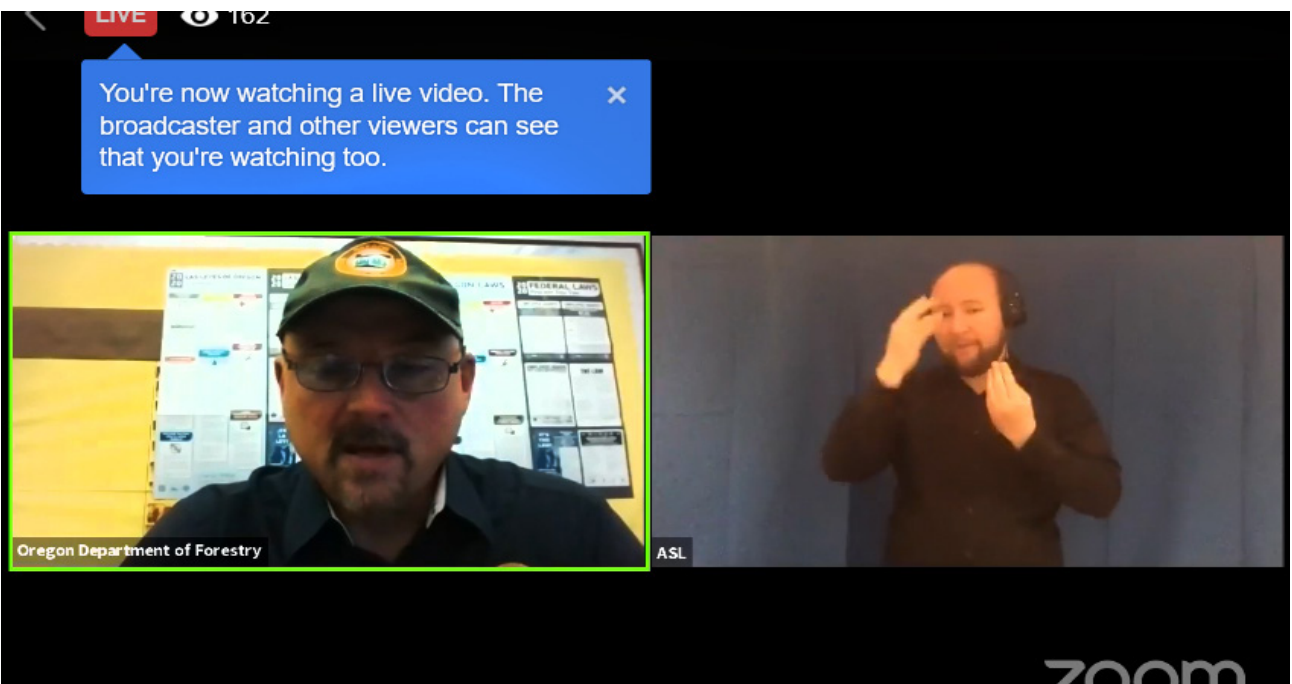
“I am very appreciative of the citizens up there, who were very helpful in evacuating. There was not a lot of panic, they knew what they had to do. I commend everybody for their vigilance.

“This fire is pretty much out, it’s still being attended to and there are still areas of concern, but its under control,” Palmer said. “But the wildfire season is not over yet.”

Nadine McCrindle of the American Red Cross said additional families arrived in search of shelter on Saturday, and just over 30 individuals are in shelter at the Shilo Inn in The Dalles. “We have established team of case workers, to help those who have lost their homes,” she said, adding that you don’t have to stay at the shelter to receive help.

McCrindle said donations of physical things are just too risky due to the COVID pandemic, and financial donations are better, and will be used to help provide food, shelter and relief supplies. “Our help is available to all, we don’t ask for paperwork or documentation,” she emphasized. The local Red Cross team in The Dalles can be reached at 503-318-6506.

Mosier Fire Department Chief Mark Renault said he was thankful for all the support his department received in fighting the fire. “With everyone’s support, with all the volunteers, we had



Oregon Department of Forestry held its first "community virtual fire meeting" Saturday to present information on the Mosier Creek Fire. Spanish translation and American Sign Language was provided. Below, a Fire Boss based out of Dallesport attacks the fire. Mark B. Gibson photos

about 80 firefighters on the line overnight (Wednesday) until we had state resources on the line.” He encouraged residents in the district to contact the department regarding ways to reduce fire risk to their homes, including creating a 30-foot perimeter around the home and keeping accessory structures away from the home.

Scott Hege, a Wasco County commissioner, said the county was very appreciative of the local, state and federal response. “I live on top of Sevenmile Hill, and had a great seat to watch this fire. This was the first time I’ve gotten an evacuation notice,” he said. “If we choose to live out in rural areas, we need to take wildfire danger seriously and make sure we are prepared,” he added. Hege noted that a number of structures were lost, including two homes, and noted that the county had designed its planning requirements to assist homeowners in rebuilding. “We will help from a planning standpoint as much as possible.” He said those planning to rebuild should talk to county planners now about what they can and cannot do in terms of rebuilding.

“... Do as much as you can beforehand to make your property defensible. Its certainly possible.”

Mariana Ruzz-Temple of the Oregon State Fire Marshal office said, “Fires can be devastating in this area, we are feeling good about this fire, we feel good about the fire behavior and the number of firefighters we have working the fire.” She added that area residents will probably see firefighters in the area through August. “We all need to remain vigilant, human-caused fires are up 10 percent this year.”

Joe Hessel, one of two incident commanders with Oregon Department of Forestry, said he was one of two incident commanders on this incident, working with Scott Magers. “We are working together in unified

command, with two teams joined together. Its a very successful model, and we are seeing the effects of that,” he said. “Our mission is simple and clean, to protect and minimize damage to resources, and damage to structures, infrastructure and other facilities.”

Hessel added the department was also working to needed protections regarding the pandemic. “Our firefighters are working in a very traditional manner on the fire, but camp life and support is focused on best practices in regards to COVID, he said. “We have a COVID module, specifically assigned to deal with COVID mitigation and exposure, and it’s helping us be successful on the firefighter front,” he said.

“This incident was devastating, but it turned out a lot better than it could have been,” said co-commander Scott Magers. “I want to say thank you and acknowledge the actions of Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue, local Oregon Department of Forestry



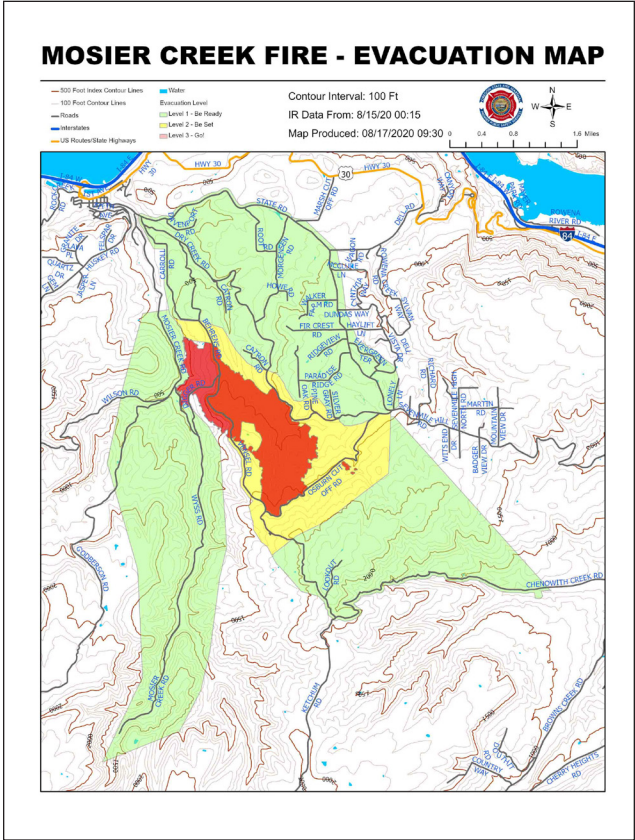
crews and the Mosier Fire Department.

“This fire had a lot of potential to do a lot of damage. Its a great honor to work with them. This is Oregonians helping Oregonians, and we are very proud of that. The fire, the covid response, keeping the community safe, that was the priority. We are honored to have had the opportunity to help this community.”

He noted the fire is not out, it is lined. That means there are roads, dozer trails or hand lines all the way around the fire. “There are interior things burning. We don’t expect growth, but it is possible. We are staffed very heavy, its not going to grow.”

He noted air support remains available as well. “Things are looking good.”

Sheriff Lane Magill said patrols were increased in the fire area because of people driving through to view the fire, and some roads are closed to non-fire access. Residents living in some areas will be stopped, and depending on their address will be able to go in and return, or go in and stay for a time before returning. “If you’re not escorted, deputies will hold onto your drivers license until you return so your whereabouts are known at all times,” Magill said.



Mosier Creek Fire evacuation map, as updated for Monday, Aug. 17. Contributed graphic DOF

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Columbia Gorge News

LABOR DAY HOLIDAY CHANGES

Due to the Labor Day Holiday, The Columbia Gorge News will need to adjust delivery that week. The delivery for subscribers will move to Thursday, September 10.

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All other deadlines will remain the same:

Display Advertising Reservation Due 5p.m. Wednesday, Sept., 2
Legal Public Notices, Classified Advertising and Obituaries 4p.m. Friday, Sept., 4

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