

Firewood bill aimed at reducing illegal cutting

by MICHAEL P. JONES
Post Correspondent

Persons cutting firewood after Nov. 1 can look forward to more red tape and scrutiny, due to a bill passed this session by the Oregon Legislature. Reason for its passage is timber thievery.

House Bill 3022 requires the hauler of firewood to possess a signed permit documenting where a person's firewood was cut if transported over Oregon roads.

Public wood cutting permits, which are already required for public land, will suffice if the wood is cut on National Forest land. However, if the wood comes from private land, the permit must include the following information to be valid: the date of the permit; the name, address and telephone number of the landowner granting the permit; and the signature of both the landowner and the hauler.

The permit must also specify the type of wood to be cut and a description (the tax lot identification number) of the land the firewood was taken from.

According to John McCormick, a special agent with the U.S. Forest Ser-

vice, who is stationed at the supervisor's office at the Mt. Hood National Forest, illegal firewood cutting has run rampant, both on public and private land.

James Forney, of the Criminal Division of the Oregon State Police, agrees, but is optimistic that the new bill will allow his office to at least begin to deal with the problems caused by the thefts.

"At least you have something now that gives you someplace to go," said Forney. "You may not stop it, but it (the bill) gives you a starting point." Forney said that in recent years his office has been handling more and more complaints from timber companies, as well as from private landowners, who have had trees cut down and sold for firewood.

Beginning Nov. 1, if haulers are stopped, they will have to produce a permit. If not, they could be fined up to \$500, imprisoned up to six months, or both.

McCormick said that the Forest Service is now actively pursuing prosecution of timber thieves. He said that on National Forest land they have become "so overwhelmed by the illegal cutting of firewood for commercial use that

they are literally forced to do something."

McCormick said that this year there are four to five times as many people illegally cutting firewood, and that the U.S. Attorney's office is cooperating fully. He said that citations and felony convictions are being handed out, with hopes of curtailing the problem.

McCormick said that the timber thieves are getting smarter and quicker in their cutting activities. He said that this has posed a problem, especially when coupled with the fact that the Forest Service has had to cut back on manpower. He said that it has affected their ability to cover the isolated areas that the thieves work out of.

McCormick did say that the manpower problem is slowly being equalized by the Forest Service's aggressive attitude towards the violators, as well as their stepped-up weekend patrols.

"Legally you only have to prove a theft of over \$100 to get a felony conviction for cutting illegally in the National Forest," said McCormick, "but usually we want to go higher to get a good prosecution."

He said that it usually takes 500 board

feet to make up a cord of wood. Illegally cut, this cord of wood could cost violators up to \$100 per thousand board feet.

But if the wood is cut illegally in a timber sale area, they can be charged as much as \$1,700 to \$1,800 per thousand board feet.

"Naturally, if you cut a cord of wood out of an expensive timber sale," said McCormick, "it doesn't take much to drive the cost up."

McCormick said the Forest Service is evaluating each case separately, and is looking at "willful trespass" compared with "innocent trespass" in making a decision about how to proceed against the cutter.

He said that if the cutter has a small pickup, a small chain saw and simple tools, and it is their first offense and they are not a commercial cutter, they will only be charged "double the stumpage."

"However, if it's a two-ton truck with cables and a winch, and a five-man crew," said McCormick, "they will be charged triple stumpage."

"A good organized crew of five or six can take out six to eight cords of wood in two hours. If you've got some good cutter working, and people splitting, loading and stacking, it doesn't take much time to get in and get out of the woods."

He said that the timber thieves are well organized, and that before they head out into the forests with their crew and equipment, that they usually send out a sedan "to scout locations." He said that log decks and down timber are the primary targets.

"Commercial cutters illegally cutting in the National Forests are removing the volume of wood make available to the public," said McCormick. "Too many people are coming back empty handed after spending money for gas to drive all the way into the mountains, only to find the area has been picked over by illegal cutters."

McCormick said that the Forest Service is soliciting cooperation from the public to "remove these illegal cutters from the forests." He said that something must be done soon because the number of illegal cutters is steadily increasing.

"There are over 280 telephone numbers in the Portland metropolitan area that are advertising firewood for sale," McCormick said. "A good portion of these are selling illegal wood. With the supply being siphoned off by these cutters, it's going to hurt everyone in the end."

McCormick praised the various timber companies and loggers for their cooperation. He said that by them being in the woods as much as they are, that they are the best source of leads. He said that they have been assisting his office in identifying illegal cutters.

Robin Wiley, the forest coordinator with the Estacada Ranger District, said that there is no way of knowing how many people are illegally cutting, nor how much wood was being cut illegally. But he did say that if they did it long enough, the Forest Service would surely find out.

Wiley said that this past fall over 10,000 new free-use firewood permits were issued by his district. In one weekend, over 2,500 were issued.

He said that although the patrols and added security measures should help to eliminate some of the illegal cutters, that the problem would not be reduced until the first snow falls.

Until that time, he said that illegal cutting would most likely continue, along with other problems associated with firewood cutting, such as traffic jams, fist fights and personal injury accidents.

"The traffic jams start around five o'clock in the morning," Wiley said. "It stays bumper to bumper until around two in the afternoon. The next weekend it starts all over again. The 'rainshine' doesn't stop them either, just slows them up. It isn't until the snow flies that they stop cutting."



Above, Jim Hathaway carries a pumpkin in from the field at Toney's Farm Market. At right, Shawn Berry is shown carrying the pumpkin he selected. Both are first graders at Kelso School.



Mountain Players plan to show the community a good time

by SCOTT NEWTON

It's the people, both on the mountain and in the Mountain Players, that makes theater worthwhile for Dave Ligatich, who directs, and plays one of the leading male roles, in the upcoming Neil Simon comedy "Barefoot in the Park."

"There's no cliquishness here," Ligatich said. "Everybody's just here to have fun, and that's what they do.

They have fun.

"If somebody misses a line, it's part of the show. They love it. They eat that up because everybody's just here to have fun. Nobody's here to critique a show."

"When people walk out the door they have a smile on their face. They have something to talk about."

Marge Brown, who plays the widowed mother, goes so far as to say it was through the Mountain Players that she

gained acceptance in the community.

She said, "You know, there's something funny about this mountain. I'm one of the oldest members here. I've been here for almost 18 years, and it's only been in the last five years that, 'they accept you, finally.'"

"Once they accept you, look out, you know, if anyone bothers a mountain person."

"They're supportive, but it's a closed group, and neat people, very unusual.

But you have to put out an effort to get to know them.

"And I really didn't until about six years ago, when I got into this. And now, I know a lot of people on the mountain. I mean, they're so supportive."

And though everyone understands when someone blows a line, members of the Mountain Players interviewed last week said that they are interested in producing more professional shows.

They spent \$500 on new make-up recently, and would like to do as much as they can toward updating the Lions Club building in Wemme as they can.

Lex Secomb, president of the Mountain Players, said, "The Mountain Players built this." She raised a hand, indicating the Lions Club building. She pointed out that the Lions Club, the Lions Auxiliary, the Women's Club and the Mountain Players all overlap, to a degree.

"We'd come and work on this place till 12, 1 o'clock at night," she said. We want to keep things here going, Ligatich added.

And how did the Mountain Players get started?

"At Zigzag Inn, we were all sitting at the bar, as usual," Secomb said, laughing. "This was just years ago."

"And, we got to talking about theater, and all of a sudden Lois (Boget) says, 'Well, let's start us something like that.'"

"She was actually an instigator and an organizer. She instigated, she organized, and you did all the work. That's how she did things."

Boget, also the founder of the Women's Club, died four years ago in September.

"She was a fantastic person," Secomb said.

Secomb, who is the head waitress at the Zigzag Inn and has worked there for 18 years, said that it is the diversity of the people involved that makes the group what it is.

"This is what makes the mountain players," she said. "It's all fun. It's a community thing."

"We have great response, really."

Ligatich plays the part of Paul, a somewhat stuffy lawyer that hasn't got the knack of living that his wife, Corie, does. Corie is played by Connie Ligatich, Dave's wife.

Brown plays Corie's mother, Mrs. Banks, who eventually falls for Victor Velasco, one of a number of eccentrics living in Paul and Corie Bratter's New York City apartment building.

Velasco is played by Darrell Eblen, which is not a name unfamiliar to Sandy people.

He's played Teyve in "Fiddler on the Roof," and Judd in "Oklahoma."

"He's the best to come out of the Sandy area that I've ever seen," Ligatich said. "He's excellent. He can play any part and bring it off."

Hank Dalpaz, who has been involved with the Mountain Players for some time, will play the part of the delivery man, Craig Duro, who has had some professional experience, will play the part of the telephone repairman.

Ligatich feels that Brown is a natural.

"(It's) just a certain smile, the way she says a line. She always has the insight to see how a line should be said."

"It's something like a quick smile, or a little laugh at the end of a line, that just takes the audience and cracks them up. It isn't that the line that cracks them up, it's the expression, or the way she delivers the line."

"The audience, the entire audience, just falls in love with her. It's perfect."

"Every minute he's lying," jokes Brown about Ligatich's praise.

"The doctor sketch I was proud of, and 'God's Favorite.' Just say numerous other horrible things," she instructed this reporter. "I prefer to forget. I've totally forgotten them."

She later adds, "I'm on stage on time, let's put it that way."

"Dave is a good director," she continued, "and these people I'm working with now are very excited. They really are."

"I'm most proud of this one."

Asked if she gets nervous performing, she said, "No, not anymore. I used to get so nervous, but I was telling Dave, now I've got direction."

"I am nervous about doing my part, keeping up with these guys, because they're good. They are."

"Yeah, I'm nervous about holding up my end."

Ligatich said that the nervousness that goes with putting on a play should be minimized somewhat because "Barefoot in the Park" is a play they're comfortable with.

"It's so lifelike and believable. Every one of the characters fit. The camaraderie is excellent. People end up coming out of the show calling each other their stage names. You can get into it that much."

It's fairly obvious that Ligatich, who is recreation director at Red Lion, just gets into theater.

He was involved with the Mountain Players before high school. At Sandy Union High School he participated in drama, and worked as a drama aide for almost two years after graduating.

Many of the college classes he's taken have been drama-related, and he also tries to attend as many workshops as he can.

There are 60 Mountain Players members, but Ligatich would like even more to become involved, and pointed out that they could utilize any number of different skills.

"There's always room for somebody to do something. Always."

"Barefoot in the Park" will be performed Nov. 20 and 21, and Dec. 12, at the Lions Club building in Wemme. Tickets, which will be on sale soon, will be \$2.75 for adults, \$2 for youngsters 14 and up, and free to those under 14.

Nov. 20 will be family night. Nov. 21 and Dec. 12 will be cabaret nights, with drinks being served.

For additional information, contact Ligatich at home at 622-3811 between 5 and 7 p.m.



Connie Ligatich, Marge Brown and Dave Ligatich

Staff photo