

But Nelson says the fair is struggling with writing a distinct fire plan.

And Pack, a fire crew volunteer for 14 years and co-coordinator since 1993, is concerned that some at the fair don't take the fire danger seriously. Only a very small amount of the dead wood and dry brush has been dealt with, and the buildup increases every year.

"I've proposed, and it's actually been taken as kind of a joke, that we start burning some of the islands," he says. "These are closed areas that I think would be excellent for the reintroduction of fire."

Todd would also like to see fire used at the fair, at least in the grassy parking areas. But he says it would be futile to try it unless the cars were parked somewhere else for a year.

And UO landscape architecture professor Bart Johnson, who studies the area's endangered oak savannas, says that fire can control trees and brush, but the results may not be easy to predict. "You can't just re-introduce fire and

assume you're going to get a high quality oak savanna."

Burning can either favor native biodiversity, which the fair wants to promote, or fire-tolerant invasive species already established on the site. A combination of fire and reseeding native plants is sometimes the best bet. "Fire Bill" Pack says the biggest challenge is educating the Fair Family about the potential fire danger facing the fair and overcoming resistance to actively managing the land to deal with the problem.

He wants to teach people about the long history of the Kalapuya people's use of fire to make the fair site an ideal place for people to come together. Scientists, including Johnson, believe much of the Willamette Valley would have been fir forests when settlers came to the area if the Kalapuya hadn't used fire to shape the landscape. "The area wasn't left unmanaged before," Pack says. "The Kalapuya knew how to manage it."



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