

Rehab begins in Canyon Creek

Area burned by devastating wildfires

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
EO Media Group

JOHN DAY — It's been nearly three months since a major wildfire erupted in Canyon Creek south of John Day, and helicopters continue to buzz over the charred and blackened hills of the Malheur National Forest.

Only now, instead of water or fire retardant, the choppers are dumping thousands of pounds of wood mulch along the ridgetops to slow down soil erosion and prevent flooding in the fall and winter months.

Forest officials have started work to rehabilitate the landscape devastated by the Canyon Creek Complex, which raged across 110,000 acres and destroyed more than 40 homes earlier this summer.

Though the blaze has been mostly contained since September, the chief concern now is a sudden flood rushing down Canyon Creek into Canyon City and John Day. Without enough vegetation to soak up rain and snow, runoff threatens to sweep down the barren hillsides as if it were poured onto concrete.

Putting down mulch can help keep the ground stable and limit the speed that water drains into the creek, said Todd Gregory, deputy fire staff on the Malheur National Forest. Helicopters have already treated more than 140 acres around Vance Creek south of Canyon City, and will turn their attention next to Rattlesnake Ridge later this week.

Mulching is one project



The Malheur National Forest is laying wood mulch down in areas burned by the Canyon Creek Complex to prevent soil erosion and potential flooding.

identified in the Burned Area Emergency Response plan, or BAER, developed by Malheur Forest staff and local landowners. Gregory said they hope to treat between 1,000-1,500 acres with mulch before the snow falls too heavily.

In recent weeks, helicopters dumped anywhere from 75-90 loads of mulch per day, Gregory said. Each load contains about 2,500 pounds of mulch, and it usually takes about a dozen drops to cover one acre of land, he said.

"The hard part is figuring out at what height and what speed to get the best coverage," he said.

Local contractors were hired to grind up the mulch using wood and small-diameter trees logged directly from the forest, Gregory said. Mulching has

been reserved for high-intensity burned areas, along ridgetops where the ground isn't flat, but isn't too steep, either.

Gregory said it has been impressive watching the pilots do their work. They typically fly about 350 feet over ground level at just more than 23 mph.

In addition to mulching, forest workers also finished placing wooden structures known as log jams over portions of Canyon Creek, Vance Creek and Overholt Creek designed to catch burned-up debris that could wash down in a storm and cause flooding.

Other projects identified in the BAER include cutting down hazard trees and storm-proofing roads, Gregory said. He expects an AmeriCorps team will arrive next week to begin rehabbing

more than six miles of trails in the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness — including the popular Joaquin Miller Trail.

So far, the Forest Service has spent roughly a half-million dollars treating the fire area.

"We're working as hard as we can, as quickly as we can, to limit the damage of erosion and flooding before winter hits," Gregory said.

The BAER has been approved by the Forest Service's Northwest Region Office as well as in Washington, D.C., and has involved partnerships with local agencies and companies.

Eric Bush, John Day Air-base Manager and Malheur Unit Aviation Officer, said he is very pleased with the professionalism and safety of everyone working on the project.

Forestry boosts no-logging buffers along streams

The Associated Press

PORTLAND — Forest officials have voted to expand no-logging buffers along streams on private timberland in western Oregon to keep water cool enough for salmon.

The Oregon Board of Forestry adopted the rules last week, despite protests from logging interests. Riparian zone buffers would increase to 80 feet on medium-sized streams and 60 feet on small streams, with the option to not cut any trees or to do thinning on part of the buffer.

The new rules won't apply in the Siskiyou region, which was left out of the buffer expansion.

Currently trees must be left uncut 20 feet from streams on private timberland — though some additional feet are required where a number of trees must be maintained.

Removing too many trees leads streams to warm up, which can harm cold-water fish like salmon, steelhead and bull trout. Logging near streams also eliminates downed logs, which help create deep pools for salmon to escape predators and hide from the heat.

The bigger the no-logging buffers, the more shade, but the greater the economic impact on timberland owners.

Conservationists for years have been trying to get the board to boost the current buffers of 20 feet to 100 feet in order to meet the cold wa-

ter standard. In recent years, record hot temperatures and drought have killed fish.

Earlier this year, federal regulators ruled that Oregon logging rules do not sufficiently protect fish and water in western Oregon from pollution caused by clear-cutting too close to streams, runoff from old logging roads, and other problems.

The Board of Forestry considered two proposals. One would have increased no-cut buffer zones to 90 feet, while the other would have left buffers unchanged, but would have require approaches such as thinning, sun-sided buffers or staggering harvests. The newly adopted rules were a compromise between the two.

"We feel it's a modest step in the right direction, but we're concerned it doesn't go far enough," said Bob Van Dyk with the Wild Salmon Center. Van Dyk said the new small stream buffers still won't meet legal requirements to protect cold water for salmon.

Timber companies said the buffer increase would have big economic effects and is too expensive for loggers. Kristina McNitt, president of the Oregon Forest Industries Council, said the organization sees the new logging restrictions as political and arbitrary. The group represents private timberland owners.

"There is no evidence that modern forest practices harm fish," McNitt said in a statement.

Strong NW cranberry crop coincides with Wisconsin decline

Cranberry production down, demand up

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Strong Northwest harvests and a subpar crop in Wisconsin may boost Washington and Oregon cranberry growers.

The harvest in Wisconsin, by far the top cranberry state,

will be below expectations, holding down total global production, according to Ocean Spray, which takes in more than half the world's commercially grown cranberries.

U.S. cranberry growers are struggling with a huge surplus driven primarily by large Badger State crops and increasing production in Canada and Chile.

A serious supply-and-demand imbalance remains, even though cranberry con-

sumption has increased 8 percent in the past year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service.

Average prices farmers receive have been roughly halved since peaking in 2008.

"With the anticipated smaller industry crop, we do not expect inventories to increase this year, particularly in light of the strong demand we have seen over the past few

years," Ocean Spray spokeswoman Sarah Gianti said.

The Massachusetts-based cooperative, which many Washington and Oregon growers belong to, projected in October that the global crop would reach 12 million barrels, which would top the

record 11.94 million barrels harvested in 2013.

With the harvest nearly over, Ocean Spray forecasts the crop will fall short of the 2013 mark and be less than the 11.81 million barrels reaped last year. One barrel equals 100 pounds.

Wisconsin was projected to produce about 5 million barrels, but winter damage and a May frost lowered yields, said Tom Lochner, executive director of the Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Association. "I've been hearing that it's at least a firm 10 percent down," he said.

Western Oregon delegation gets close look at eastern issues

Bus trip takes a tour of Wallowa County

By **STEVE TOOL**
EO Media Group

Eight Democratic legislators and a number of state officials, including state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, traveled to Wallowa County on Oct. 27 for a bus trip intended to help Western Oregon lawmakers learn more about agriculture in the state's northeastern corner.

The delegation, which also included members of state agencies and conservation groups, came to hear the stories of ranchers and foresters who make their living on the land. The event was the brainchild of Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena. Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, and Wallowa County Commissioner Susan Roberts also were among the attendees.

The group departed Cloverleaf Hall in Enterprise on a Joseph Charter School bus early in the morning.

Although most of the trip focused on ranchers' problems with wolves, Bruce Dunn of the Natural Resource Advisory Council and Wallowa Resources Executive Director Nils Christoffersen spoke about the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative. They also spoke about working with the U.S. Forest Service to facilitate the proposed Lower Joseph Creek Project.

Johnson said she found the discussion of the Wallowa-Whitman Forest Collaborative to be particularly educational.

"Forest collaboratives are something I've viewed with a

certain degree of skepticism, borne out of the fact that I wasn't sure the state of Oregon should be spending money to do work I think the Forest service should be doing," Johnson said. "After listening to people say the collaboratives may be the last best chance to put people to work, get money for local counties and reduce fire danger, I decided we shouldn't let the perfect get in the way of the good."

The event included a partial trip down Redmond grade to visit Troy for a firsthand look at some of the devastation caused by the Grizzly Bear Complex fire. Roberts stopped the journey about halfway down the grade, where the group got a clear view of some of the fire, including one home and property that bore the remnants of fire retardant. Chelsea Matthews, wife of rancher Buck Matthews, gave a compelling account of the family's experience with the fire, and how two of their cowedogs were mauled by wolves in the aftermath of the blaze.

The tour traveled to Sheep Creek Hill, east of Joseph, where area ranchers expressed their frustration with wolves and getting the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to confirm wolf depredations.

Johnson described the trip as an eye-opener. "I enjoyed the trip enormously, found it informative, and preparations on the ground were terrific," Johnson said. "A lot of people took a lot of time to help us understand the issues."

Johnson also said that after listening to ranchers express their frustration about their lack of options if they disagreed with the ODFW about a questionable wolf depredation, she was in favor of creating a separate and

neutral adjudicating body as an appeal avenue for ranchers. She also said she favored more state money being furnished to ranchers for nonlethal wolf deterrents and for depredation compensation.

The bus returned to Enterprise in late afternoon, when politicians attended a meeting with environmental groups at the county extension office. Members of the media were barred from the meeting at the request of the groups.

Dunn, of the Natural Resource Advisory Council, described the trip as a success.

"It's one of the best of this type of trip I've been on," Dunn said. "The legislators asked questions, and it was a dialogue between people, not one-sided like some trips."

Commissioner Roberts echoed the sentiment.

"The legislators asked very good and pointed questions whether it was the forest, fires or wolves," Roberts said. "They engaged with the people of our county. In my opinion, it was more effective than some others we've done."

Hansell, who initiated the event, said he was pleased with the results.

"I heard nothing but very positive responses of my colleagues, about what they saw and who they met," Hansell said. "They had questions answered and were already talking among themselves, asking what they could do legislatively to help."

Hansell also said he was glad that several state departments sent key personnel as representatives.

"They're the nuts and bolts who will implement the policies we hope to legislate," Hansell said.

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