

How dangerous are the Northwest's volcanoes?

Anniversary of Mount St. Helens eruption

By MacGREGOR CAMPBELL
Oregon Public Broadcasting

If you live in the Pacific Northwest, chances are good you can see a volcano from where you stand.

In Oregon, Washington state and Idaho, magma has erupted out of the ground in at least 25 places in the last 10,000 years, a mere instant in the lifetime of volcanoes that can be hundreds of thousands of years old.

"There's reason to believe it could happen again," said Seth Moran, scientist in charge at the U.S. Geological Survey Cascades Volcano Observatory in Vancouver, Washington.

At 8:32 in the morning on May 18, 1980, the most famous Northwest volcano, Mount St. Helens, woke up, spewing ash for hundreds of miles, devastating the nearby landscape and killing 57 people.

The volcano stirred again in 2004 and 2008.

"Mount St. Helens is the



Mount St. Helens erupted on May 18, 1980.

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poster child for a very tempestuous volcano," Moran said.

But what about the other hot spots in the Cascades? Are we going to wake up one morning to a new Mount St. Helens?

Moran's team, along with partners at the University of Washington, keep watch. They measure earthquakes, ground

warping and gas emissions, all caused by magma from deep in the earth making its way to the surface. These volcanic vital signs let geologists compare what a volcano is doing today compared to what it normally does and has done in the past.

"That allows us to establish a range of potential behaviors," Moran said.

Each volcano has its own personality. Mount Baker in Washington state emits a lot of gas, but doesn't erupt very often. Mount Rainier, near Seattle, is the icy giant. It's not likely to explode like Mount St. Helens, but could create large mudflows — think rivers of flowing concrete — caused by smaller eruptions melting

the mountain's ice.

Mount Hood is similar to Rainier, not subject to large explosions, but rather smaller eruptions on its sides. Because so many people live on and play on the mountain, Hood's small eruptions, and the subsequent landslides and mudflows they create, can present a danger.

Mount St. Helens generally has fewer people around, but is far more active. It erupts once or twice a century, on average. It's so active, the current mountain is only about 4,000 years old, compared to hundreds of thousand of years for other Cascade volcanoes.

The other volcanoes in Oregon vary widely. Mount Jefferson and Mount Bachelor in central Oregon have been relatively quiet for tens of thousands of years.

"They may be done," Moran said.

South Sister erupts every couple of thousand years on average. Newberry Crater erupts more frequently and can generate rivers of lava, similar to Hawaii's famous Kilauea volcano.

Then there's Crater Lake in southern Oregon. What's now a lake was once a mountain comparing in size to Mount Rainier.

Around 5600 B.C., an eruption 50 times the size of Mount St. Helens in 1980 leveled the mountain. Moran said that Crater Lake may not be done and is high on the observatory's list of potential threats.

Three more volcanoes round out the Cascade range: California's Lassen Peak, Mount Shasta and Medicine Lake.

Moran said these volcanoes don't typically explode without warning. They have a baseline of earthquake, ground deformation and gas activity, even when they aren't erupting. The pattern of that activity can be a clue to what will happen next. For example, an earthquake followed by a series of successively smaller earthquakes, might indicate normal seismic activity. But an earthquake followed by a series of larger earthquakes might indicate an eruption is brewing.

Moran said the goal is not to predict which volcano will erupt when, but rather to provide a forecast, similar to a weather forecast. There will always be a range of uncertainty with an active volcano he said, "but the goal ... is to get that uncertainty to a range that society can live with."

Restitution could top \$36 million for teen who ignited Eagle Creek Fire

Judge will rule on the amount

By AMELIA TEMPLETON
Oregon Public Broadcasting

The 15-year-old boy who pleaded guilty to igniting the Eagle Creek Fire in the Columbia River Gorge last September could be required to pay more than \$36 million in restitution to 11 parties related to fire damage.

Judge John Olson did not reach a decision on how much to award in court and said he would issue a written order on the amount of restitution as early as today.

The unnamed Vancouver, Washington, teen did not attend the restitution hearing in Hood River County Thursday morning. He was represented by his attorney, Jack Morris.

Morris described the \$36 million figure as "absurd." In filings and in court, Morris argued that Oregon's restitution statute, which requires judges to impose the full amount of restitution sought by victims, is unconstitutional when it is applied to juvenile defendants.

"Kids are different," Morris said. "They are entitled to individual consideration."

He noted that his client is considered indigent and urged the judge to award a smaller amount that his client could more plausibly pay back.

"We are not saying that no



The Eagle Creek Fire was set by a teenager playing with firecrackers.

Tristan Fortsch/KATU-TV

restitution should be imposed," he said.

Morris noted U.S. Supreme Court rulings in death penalty and life without parole cases that have held that juveniles are entitled to different consideration by the courts.

He suggested that the restitution order could prevent the teen from qualifying for a home loan, car insurance and other forms of credit.

"The actual act here is throwing a couple of firecrackers," he said. "It's a 15-year-old boy that did something incredibly stupid."

Attorneys for the state pushed Olson to impose the full amount and defended the constitutionality of Oregon's restitution law.

They noted that in juvenile cases, a judge can forgive a dependent's obligation to pay

restitution after 10 years if the defendant meets certain criteria.

"There is an end point in 10 years," said Hood River District Attorney John Sewell. "It is not as draconian and absolutist as counsel says."

The U.S. Forest Service reported the largest damages from the fire at \$21.1 million. The Oregon Department of Transportation reported \$12.5 million, the Oregon State Fire Marshall \$1.6 million and the

Union Pacific Railroad more than \$1 million. Oregon State Parks, Allstate and four private property owners sought smaller amounts of restitution.

Olson said he would take time to consider the constitutional arguments before reaching a decision in the case.

He noted that the highest amount of restitution he'd previously been aware of awarded in a juvenile case was just \$114,000.

"It is an extraordinary amount of restitution," Olson said. "It is an extraordinary amount of loss."

Olson sentenced the teenager in February to five years of probation and 1,920 hours of community service with the U.S. Forest Service.

The boy and his family have cooperated with investigators, and in February he pleaded guilty to 12 charges, including reckless burning, criminal mischief and reckless endangerment.

At the time of the fire, witnesses described seeing a child lobbing a firecracker down a

canyon before the area erupted in smoke and flames. More than 100 hikers and dogs were stranded in the area overnight.

The fire burned nearly 49,000 acres. It was extinguished in November, destroying homes and trails in the Gorge. It also forced businesses to close, displaced people for days and shut down both Interstate 84 and the Historic Columbia River Highway. Portions of the highway remain closed.

Gorge residents impacted by the fire left the hearing disappointed.

Paul Smith, who lives near Stevenson on the Washing-

ton side of the Gorge, said he didn't seek financial restitution for his losses in the fire but had hoped for a chance to speak at the hearing.

Smith evacuated his farm when the fire jumped across the Columbia River and began burning on the Washington side of the Gorge.

"We had two dogs, five horses and 10 chickens," he said.

Smith said he had to put down his 32-year-old gray appaloosa mare, Pondie, due to stress and smoke inhalation.

"I'm not seeking restitution," he said. "I just wanted to say my piece."

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The family of Rusty Donaldson will never forget the love and thoughtfulness given to us during our recent time of sadness at the loss of our husband, father, brother, grandfather and uncle.

Thank you to all who sent cards, brought food, made contributions and sent flowers.

It was so appreciated.

Marsha and Kurt Donaldson
Martha and Dale McGinty
Jennie Mathre