

Hot weather prompts forest use restrictions

Regulations to limit human-caused wildfires

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

With summer camping season beckoning families outdoors, forests across northeast Oregon have started limiting certain activities to minimize the risk of human-caused wildfires.

The Umatilla National Forest entered Phase A of its public use restrictions Monday as fire-fighters battled numerous lightning-sparked fires on the Heppner, Walla Walla and Pomeroy ranger districts.

Phase A is the second level of restrictions implemented by the Forest Service when the fire danger is moderate to high. Restrictions include no chainsaws between 1-8 p.m.; no off-road or off-trail vehicle travel; and no smoking except in vehicles, buildings, developed recreation sites and cleared areas.

Lightning sparks fires on Umatilla forest

As of late Sunday night, lightning has started 18 new wildfires on the Umatilla National Forest burning roughly 150 total acres. The largest of these fires include:

Table Rock Complex: Reported Saturday, about two miles south of Bluewood Ski Area. Consists of three fires in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness and two fires in the Mill Creek Watershed totaling approximately 80 acres. Three of the five fires are fully contained, and the largest fire — at 60 acres — is now 60 percent contained. More than 50 firefighters are assigned to the complex.

Seasonal campfire restrictions are also in effect through Oct. 31. Campfires are allowed only in fire pits surrounded by dirt, rock or commercial rings, and must be attended at all times. All flam-

Texas Fire: Located on the Heppner Ranger District, two miles east of Madison Butte Lookout. Approximately 8 acres in size, and 40 percent contained. Access into the fire is difficult, and 16 rappellers are currently working on the blaze.

Collin Butte Fire: Fully contained at approximately 45 acres. Located four miles northeast of the community of Winlock on the Heppner Ranger District.

A reconnaissance observation flight was scheduled Monday to scout for additional fires that have been reported, but not yet located. Fire danger remains high on the forest. For more information about trail and road closures, call 1-877-958-9663 or visit ww.fs.usda.gov/umatilla.

mable material should be cleared within a three-foot radius from the edge of the pit.

The Wallowa-Whitman National Forest will enter Phase A restrictions beginning Wednesday.

Hot weather over the weekend quickly increased fire danger in the forests, which are already parched following a year of record-low winter snowpack statewide.

“Recreationists, firewood cutters, hunters and other forest users can all help in ensuring a safe fire season,” said Bret Ruby, fire staff officer on the Wallowa-Whitman forest.

The Oregon Department of Forestry, meanwhile, will enforce its own set of restrictions — known as regulated use closures — beginning Wednesday across the Northeast Oregon District.

The district, which provides fire protection on 1.9 million acres over seven counties, formally declared fire season June 16. Fire-fighters have already responded to 10 human-caused fires burning a little more than 40 acres so far this year.

Regulated use closures are similar to the Forest Service’s public use restrictions, but include a few additional bans for private landowners. Cutting, grinding

and welding metal is prohibited between the hours of 1-8 p.m., as well as mowing dried grasses with power-driven equipment except to harvest crops.

Use of fireworks, sky lanterns, exploding targets and tracer ammunition is also prohibited.

ODF district spokeswoman Jamie Knight said that, while fire managers can’t control the weather, they can control the human factors that can ignite large wildfires.

“It’s been hot and dry for sure,” Knight said. “If the weather trends continue as they are, it could be a very eventful season for us.”

More information about fires, restrictions and closures is available on the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch website at www.bmidc.org. To report a fire, contact the dispatch center at 541-963-7171 or simply call 9-1-1.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

Wind pushes fire this way and that

By **KATHY ANEY**
East Oregonian

Erratic winds tested the patience of firefighters Sunday afternoon as they battled a blaze several miles north of Pilot Rock.

The lightning-caused fire raced through Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) acreage and standing wheat, burning roughly 1,700 acres before firefighters subdued the blaze that burned on both sides of Hoeft Road west of Highway 395.

Jeff Hemphill, a captain with the Pilot Rock Fire Department, acted as incident commander on the fire. He said a witness described the blaze roaring to life a minute or so after lightning struck around 4 p.m.

“It just took off,” Hemphill said.

Hemphill called for mutual aid. Multiple agencies responded, including fire personnel from Pendleton, Echo, Ione, Boardman, Umatilla, Hermiston, Stanfield, Umatilla Tribal and the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Squirrely winds compli-

cated things for firefighters.

“Three or four times, just as we got a handle on the leading edge, the winds would change,” he said. “Often with a thunder cell, winds are constantly shifting.”

Hemphill praised farmers who showed up with pumpers, tractors and a dozer to help contain the fire.

“All the credit in the world goes to the farmers,” Hemphill said. “With a lightning strike fire, it’s very, very difficult to catch it with just our fire trucks. Out here, it’s neighbors helping neighbors.”

Hemphill said roughly 500 of the blackened acres were standing wheat belonging to two farmers.

Another lightning-caused fire near Big Butter Creek blackened roughly 20,000 acres of privately owned pasture land Saturday evening. Firefighters, who fought the blaze until about 2 a.m., returned to the area the next afternoon when another fire ignited about 3:30 p.m. Pilot Rock Fire Chief Ron Neeley estimated the entire acreage for the two fires at 25,000-30,000 acres.



Alonzo Corona, 6, of Pendleton leaps into the wading pool at Til Taylor Park as temperatures reach into the triple digits on Monday in Pendleton.

Hottest June weekend ever

Pendleton, Hermiston, Walla Walla, Meacham set record highs for June 28

East Oregonian

“This ain’t nothing compared to (Southern heat).”
— **Johnny Roberson**, originally from Tennessee

The sun beat down with a vengeance this weekend across the region, breaking heat records Sunday as sweltering summer weather covered eastern Oregon and Washington.

According to the National Weather Service, Pendleton, Hermiston, Walla Walla and Meacham all set new high marks for June 28.

Pendleton topped out at 109, matching Saturday’s record, and Hermiston reached 107.

In other areas, Walla Walla was the hottest on record, reaching 113 degrees

to beat Saturday’s 109 high mark for June.

Meacham, which set a new June record on Friday of 93, hit 101 on Sunday.

Folks around Pendleton shared how they stayed cool during the record-breaking heat wave.

To beat the heat, Dameon Creason, 24, said he followed his uncle’s advice. First, he froze a damp rag.

Then he said he wrapped it around his neck, tucking the ends into his shirt.

Johnny Roberson, 38, said he made for the mister outside the Rainbow Cafe at 209 S Main St., which releases cool water into the air along the sidewalk. But Roberson, originally from Tennessee, prefers the dry Eastern Oregon heat to Southern humidity.

“This ain’t nothing compared to (Southern heat),” he said.

Living in an old fifth-wheel Aljo near the Wildhorse Casino, Mike Summers, 56, said he had two fans running the entire weekend and made sure to stay hydrated.

He said it’s so hot in the

trailer that “it’s like living in a sardine can.”

The Oregon Health Advisory urges people to drink plenty of water as temperatures rise into the triple digits, and even take cold showers or apply cool compresses as needed. It also warns people to never leave infants, children or pets in a parked car.

Cloud coverage caused Monday’s temperatures to drop slightly, with many areas not reaching the 100 degree mark.

The forecast calls for highs to remain in the triple digits through at least Thursday.

For updated weather information, visit www.wrh.noaa.gov.

BRIEFLY

Group to try last-minute BMRC save

PENDLETON — Although the wheels have already been set in motion to demolish the Blue Mountain Recovery Center, a community group is trying to appeal to the city to stop it.

City Manager Robb Corbett said the Pendleton City Council will hold a special meeting Tuesday at 6 p.m. to hear the group’s case.

While he didn’t want to disclose any names ahead of the meeting, Corbett said the group is composed of local business owners that have banded together to oppose the demolition.

The group isn’t opposed to the demolition of the nearby Eastern Oregon Training Center.

The Oregon Legislature appropriated more than \$1 million to demolish BMRC and EOTC in December and passed a bill to transfer the land to Pendleton June 16.

3 Kings Environmental, the contractor hired by the state Department of Administrative Services, started abatement Monday and will begin demolishing the Westgate facilities in August.

After the project is completed in October, Pendleton will use the land for economic development purposes.

The meeting will be held at the council chambers in city hall, 500 S.W. Dorion Avenue.

Pendleton cooking fire burns kitchen

PENDLETON — A house caught fire Sunday at the 600 block of S.E. Sixth Street in Pendleton.

According to Pendleton

Fire Assistant Chief Matt Benedict, the fire was caused by some “untended cooking” in the duplex’s kitchen.

Pendleton firefighters responded to the house around noon and immediately put out the fire, which was confined to the kitchen.

Benedict said no residents were inside the house when it caught on fire.

The Red Cross provided the affected family of two adults and two children with food and clothing.



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*NO DOGS ALLOWED IN PARK

www.CityOfIoneOregon.com/FourthOfJuly or check us out on Ione 4th of July Facebook

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Kids! Read this Summer with a Foster Grandparent Volunteer at the Library!

1 hour daily sessions for students in grades 1 to 6 at:
Hermiston Library: ~ Jul. 6 - Aug. 14
Pendleton Library: ~ Jul. 6 - Aug. 14

We have 2 trained volunteers at each city library from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Call (541)-276-4474 to reserve a day and time for your child.





TRAIL TRAKKERS

2015 Summer Walking Program

May 25th - Aug. 27th

Morning Walks

meet at Oxbow Trailhead (Intersection of 11th & Elm St.) Monday through Thursday 7:00 - 8:00 am

Questions? Call 541-667-3400 ext 3050 or email healthinfo@gshealth.org