

Wet weekend helps lift wildfire evacuations

By **GEORGE PLAVEN**
East Oregonian

Evacuations have been lifted around the Canyon Creek and Grizzly Bear wildfires in Eastern Oregon as rain and snow helped dampen their intensity over the weekend.

The Grant County Sheriff's Office lifted all evacuation levels for the Canyon Creek Complex on Monday, including all of Strawberry Road and all of Prairie City. Meanwhile, evacuations were lifted Saturday on the Grizzly Bear Complex after seven inches of snow fell over Godman Campground in the Umatilla National Forest near Dayton, Washington.

Both blazes started as small light-

ning-sparked fires that eventually merged into larger infernos, feeding on bone-dry forests and whipped by high, unpredictable winds. Both also destroyed dozens of structures, including 43 homes in Canyon Creek and five more in the Grizzly Bear Complex.

The Canyon Creek Complex has charred more than 110,000 acres south of John Day, and continues to burn east into the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness in the Malheur National Forest. At 75,000 acres, the Grizzly Bear Complex started in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness before threatening the small community of Troy in Wallowa County, near the Oregon-Washington border.

Fire officers in each camp said the weekend's wet weather helped

crews reinforce containment lines around communities, which allowed them to lift evacuations and begin demobilizing resources.

The Canyon Creek Complex is now 85 percent contained. Fire lines are secure along the north, south and west flanks of the blaze, while rapellers work to protect Slide Creek and Strawberry Lake in the Strawberry Mountain Wilderness. The wilderness area remains closed to the public.

Debbie Wilkins, fire information officer on the Grizzly Bear Complex, said the fire is 42 percent contained but still burning actively in the Wenaha-Tucannon Wilderness. Containment lines should hold up along the fire's southern perimeter, Wilkins said.

A smaller Type 3 management team took over operations of the fire on Monday, and another 305 National Guard soldiers deployed to the area have been sent home. The remaining crews hope to transition to patrol duty by Friday, Wilkins said.

Though wetter, cooler weather has temporarily helped firefighters during mop-up activities, Wilkins said it would take seven straight days of rain to truly douse the fire and buck drought conditions in the forest. The extended forecast calls for warmer days ahead, which should quickly dry out larger fuels capable of burning for a long time.

"With the extended drought we've had in the inland Northwest, those fuels are just so dry," Wilkins

said. "It's hard to imagine them being any drier."

State and county roads remain closed around the fire area to protect firefighters as well as the public. Roads are closed north of the Grande Ronde River from the Umatilla National Forest boundary to the Oregon-Washington border; north of the state line to Washington Highway 129; west of Highway 129 to the intersection at Highway 100; and north again to the national forest boundary.

For more information about wildfires in Oregon, visit www.incweb.nwcg.gov.

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Semi tips on Paterson Ferry Road

An overturned semitruck blocks Paterson Ferry Road parallel to milepost 177 on Interstate 84 after the driver lost control while driving westbound on Monday shortly before 10 a.m., spilling his load of corn meal on the road and blocking traffic for several hours. The driver was uninjured.

Staff photo by Jade McDowell



Weston-McEwen band instructor Rob McIntyre stands in front of the Gem Theatre in Athena in March 2015. He has been a driving force in the restoration of the theater.

FISH: Proposal meant to lower rate bass prey on salmon, steelhead

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might open the doors to a potential cottage industry.

"We're very concerned about what's the writing on the wall here," Johnson said.

ODFW has said the proposal is meant to lower the rate at which bass prey on native salmon and steelhead smolts, especially in the John Day River where rising water temperatures have lured smallmouth bass higher into the watershed.

But Steve Fleming, of Mah-Hah Outfitters in Fossil,

cited an ODFW study from 1999 that concluded smallmouth bass are not major predators of spring chinook and steelhead smolts in the John Day, since the bass are not particularly active when smolts migrate in colder water.

On the other hand, northern pikeminnow prey on smolts year round, Fleming said, and bass have actually helped decrease pikeminnow numbers in the river.

"I just don't see the science supporting this deci-

sion-making," Fleming said.

Fleming, who has guided fishing trips on the John Day for 27 years, said the vote to remove bag limits on warmwater fish was thoughtless. He doesn't expect his business to suffer, though he said the fishery, along with rural communities, will all be impacted.

"The word will get out that you can't find anywhere to fish on the John Day unless you have a boat," he said. "The summer traffic will die down."

The new rules are part

of an effort to simplify warmwater and trout fishing regulations statewide. Other changes adopted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission include eliminating the April trout opener and removing bag limits on non-native brown and brook trout in streams, with a few exceptions.

Johnson said Oregon B.A.S.S. will work with other groups to figure out what their options are moving forward.

"Needless to say, it's very frustrating," he said.



Lewis Allen, 7, dances during the 5th Annual Kidz Pow Wow on Saturday at the Tamastslikt Cultural Institute.

POW WOW: All of the participants received prizes in the non-competitive dances

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Franklin, of Tamastslikt, sported a neon pink shirt with the words, "5th Annual Kidz Pow Wow." After each age group danced, she helped award prizes to all who participated in the non-competitive dances. The idea, she said, was to provide a pressure-free venue to allow children, native or non-native up to age 12, to experience powwow. When Alex's group finished (age 0 through 4), each dancer received a backpack containing something homemade.

Franklin grinned as she watched the dancers, sometimes taking out her phone to shoot video.

"It's amazing to see them out there," she said. "They're so excited. It makes all the stress of planning so worth it."

Tribal elder Tessie Williams had commenced the gathering with a prayer in which she had lifted up "our precious children." She watched the powwow wrapped in a Pendleton blanket and nodding her head at the beat produced by the drummers.

"The drummers are wonderful," she said. "The kids are wonderful."

Randy Minthorn sat at a table with a microphone, acting as emcee.

He praised the parents and others who had made the gathering a priority.

"We are here supporting our children," Minthorn said. "This is big medicine to our people. To pass on this knowledge in contemporary times is important."

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Theatre renovation gets financial boost

Old movie house fell silent in 1968

East Oregonian

ATHENA — The effort to renovate Athena's old Gem Theatre got a boost recently with the awarding of three grants totaling \$244,000.

Volunteers are bringing the dusty time capsule, shuttered in 1968, back to life as a space for movies, plays and school functions, as well as streaming concerts and other performances. A museum inside will feature vintage Hodaka motorcycles, once assembled in Athena.

The Meyer Memorial Trust, founded by the late Fred G. Meyer who built a chain of retail stores throughout the Northwest, has awarded \$200,000. The theater received another

\$35,000 from The Collins Foundation, founded by the family of E.S. Collins to give greater expression to humanitarian endeavors in Oregon. Another \$9,000 was awarded by Trust Management Services, which emphasizes education, community service, culture, youth activities and historical preservation.

The project to renovate the old movie house kicked into high gear earlier this year funded by community donations and two \$200,000 grants from the Ford Family Foundation and the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust. So far, volunteers have replaced an outside brick wall, gutted the theater and replaced the saloon's façade, along with various other tasks. The renovated theater will include some of the original balcony seats.

HERMISTON

Hansell town hall set for Sept. 21

HERMISTON — The Hermiston Chamber of Commerce is hosting a town hall with Sen. Bill Hansell (R-Athena) on Monday, Sept. 21.

The senator will be on hand from 9-10 a.m. at Nookies Restaurant, 125 N. First St. in Hermiston, to discuss "the good, the bad and the ugly" of the 2015 legislative session.

He will also provide an overview of bills passed, discuss his goals for the next legislative session and field questions from the audience.



Hansell

The Rivoli Restoration Coalition recognizes and thanks the Wildhorse Foundation for their support of the Rivoli Architectural and Engineering Project!

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