

Wyden fired up to prevent forest fires

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Just 2 percent of fires on the Umatilla National Forest turn into the infernos that rage for days, roar across thousands of acres and consume millions of taxpayer dollars.

Those blazes were why U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden sat down Thursday with more than a dozen local emergency administrators and officials at the Umatilla National Forest offices on the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton. The Oregon Democrat was there to learn about the latest on wildfires in Eastern



Wyden Crapo

Oregon, including the potential fire danger, and to talk up the wildfire funding bill he and Idaho Republican Sen. Mike Crapo drafted.

Chris Johnson, deputy fire officer for the Umatilla National Forest, said the forest averages 81 fires a

year, but only seven have started so far this season. And the Forest Service keeps 98 percent of those fires to no more than 10 acres.

Still, that 2 percent is the problem. And while the season is starting slow, the National Weather Service in Pendleton issued a fire watch Thursday due to dry thunderstorms in the area Friday and Saturday.

Johnson said the fire danger level is bumping up against the "high" threshold, and resources from other national forests are en route just in case.

A wind-whipped fire Saturday in the Deadman Pass area burned

688 acres. John Buckman, district forester with the Oregon Department of Forestry, told the senator the fire jumped Interstate 84 and took 300 people and 13 state and federal aircraft to bring under control. And the cost was more than \$1.5 million.

Wyden said a fire that jumps an interstate is the kind of example he can use to build support for the his and Crapo's proposal to free up money for projects to prevent large fires in the first place. Land management agencies for years have used those funds to pay to fight fires instead, and this legislation would but an end to the practice of

"fire borrowing."
"You just can't have the big fires eat up more and more of the budget," Wyden said.

The budget analysis comes out a wash for the bill, he said, and has drawn support from U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York. Wyden said his fellow Democrat is on board because dipping into fire prevention funds "has discommodulated the entire system" and prevented projects in New York.

When lawmakers like Schumer sign on, Wyden said, you know you are on the way to a fix. He said passing the proposal is his top priority.

HERMISTON



Staff photo by Jade McDowell
Past Hermiston Rotary Club president Tim Beibert hands a donation check to Dennis Barnett at the Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center.

Rotary Club gives \$25,000 to EOTEC

East Oregonian

The Eastern Oregon Trade and Event Center board got some good news Thursday afternoon in the form of a \$25,000 donation from the Hermiston Rotary Club.

The donation, which will be spread out over five years through a financing option offered to EOTEC donors, went to the nonprofit Friends of the Fair and Rodeo to provide flexibility for how the donation is used.

Rotary Club President Dean Fialka said the club's past, current and future presidents came together and decided that the sizable donation could help the new fair and rodeo grounds be a quality project for the community.

"We'll be very interested to see it all come together," he said.

Former Rotary Club president Tim Beibert presented the check to EOTEC fundraising committee member Dennis Barnett on Thursday during the Rotary Club's regular meeting. The meeting took place in EOTEC's newly-completed event center, and club members were offered a tour after the event.

Barnett said after construction bids for both the rodeo arena and barns came in over budget, the donation was very much appreciated and will be put to good use.

"It's truly amazing how giving our community and Rotary really is," he said.



Staff photo by Alexa Lougee
A travel trailer pulling an oversized load snagged drooping power lines along Highway 395 Thursday.

August heat leads to downed power lines across Hwy 395

By ALEXA LOUGEE
East Oregonian

A semi-truck carrying an oversized load clipped power lines near the Pilot gas station in Stanfield on Thursday afternoon, blocking all lanes of traffic for about a half hour and cutting power to parts of town.

The truck was hauling half of a manufactured home north on Highway 395, and the hot temperatures had caused the power lines to sag in the middle. The tallest point of the manufactured home roof snagged onto the lowest part of the sagging wires.

The force of the moving truck on the wires caused the power lines and one of the power poles to snap in half.

By a stroke of bad luck, a man riding his electric scooter down Foster Cemetery Road toward Highway 395 to pick up his mail was

hit on the head by the falling power lines. Responders from Umatilla County Fire District 1 evaluated the man on scene and released him to go home. A good Samaritan helped the man into her car, picked up his mail for him and drove him home.

The names of those individuals are not available, and no other injuries were reported.

ODOT and Stanfield Police worked to halt and direct traffic along the highway. Umatilla Electric Company responded to address power concerns.

Stanfield Police Chief Bryon Zumwalt said some people had lost power, and one of the Stanfield City water pumps had stalled due to the power failure. He said Umatilla Electric was expected to replace the pole and fix the lines sometime Thursday night.

HERMISTON



Staff photo by Tammy Malgesini
Paramedics from Umatilla County Fire District 1 treat victims at the scene of a crash Wednesday evening in the 400 block of Northeast Fourth Street, Hermiston.

Three boys hit by car in fenced yard, one remains in hospital

By ALEXA LOUGEE
East Oregonian

One boy remains hospitalized after being hit by a car while standing in a fenced-in yard.

Three 11-year-old boys were standing in the yard of the house at 430 Northeast Fourth Street in Hermiston, planning a sleepover Wednesday evening when a 2014 Chevrolet driven by Jesse J. Focht, 23, left the road and hit them.

One of the boys' dad, Ryan Whitman, lives two blocks down and ran toward the location after hearing sirens. When he got there, he said, "My heart sank in my chest."

Two of the boys were lying on the ground unconscious. Soon he saw his son was conscious and being comforted by a neighbor. The two other boys regained consciousness and paramedics treated the boys on scene.

Whitman took his son to Good Shepherd Medical Center, while the other two boys were transported via ambulance.

As of Thursday morning two of the boys had been released and one boy remained hospitalized. The victim in the hospital has broken ribs, spleen injuries and lacerations that required several stitches. The two others suffered injuries including a sprained ankle, bruising and swelling and lacerations.



Focht

Focht was driving southbound on Northeast Fourth Street around 6:46 p.m. when his car crashed into the front yard fence.

Hermiston Police Chief Jason Edmiston said in a press release that "alcohol consumption does not appear to be the main contributing factor in the crash, but we are waiting on chemical analysis of evidence collected before making the final determination."

Edmiston also said they have not ruled out distracted driving, though Focht did not have a cellphone on him.

Bystanders grew agitated at the scene and the suspect was placed in the back of a patrol car for his own safety.

In March 2015, Focht plead guilty to possession of methamphetamine and was given 18 months probation and a six-month suspension of his license. In May, Focht again faced charges of possession of methamphetamine and the unauthorized use of a motor vehicle.

Focht was arrested at the scene Wednesday night for probation violation.

"Clearly this is a very emotional investigation as three children were in what was believed to be a protected area, playing," Edmiston said in the press release. "We appreciate the support of Umatilla County Parole and Probation as we want to ensure we conduct a thorough investigation."

Pendleton man killed in crash in Baker City

East Oregonian

A Pendleton man was killed Thursday in a car crash in Baker City.

Ronald Fisher, 59, died at the scene of a two-car collision at the intersection of A Street and 2nd Street, according to Oregon State Police.

Fisher was traveling southbound about 11:56 a.m. when his 2015 Chevrolet Equinox collided with a westbound car driven by Yvonne Hesselstine of Baker City. Hesselstine's vehicle, which contained a passenger, struck Fisher's vehicle on the driver's side. Fisher's vehicle rolled onto its top and Fisher was ejected. He died at the scene, and safety restraint used may have been a contributing



Contributed photo by Oregon State Police
A Pendleton man died in a two-vehicle crash at the intersection of A Street and 2nd Street in Baker City on Thursday.

factor, said OSP.

An ambulance took Hesselstine to Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Baker City for minor injuries. Her passenger was not injured in the crash.

The intersection was

closed for four hours as the investigation was conducted and the wreckage removed. This is an ongoing investigation and more information will be released as it becomes available.

BRIEFLY

Seniors get techy with help from local Girl Scouts

HERMISTON — Local Girl Scouts are offering technology and software classes for the area's senior citizens.

The first class will be Saturday, Aug. 20 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. and will cover social media, technology classes, Facebook, Skype, email, One Drive and Word basics. The second class will be Saturday, Aug. 27 from 9-11 a.m. and will focus solely on more advanced Word program skills, including how to formulate contact lists and mailing addresses.

The classes will be held at the Hermiston BMCC center in the computer labs, so there is no need to bring a computer. The Girl Scouts are offering these classes as part of their Gold Award Project, which is like the Boy Scout Eagle Project.

Those interested in attending are asked to call Sofia Tello at 541-701-8693.

Medicare 101 sessions provide help, information

Information about Medicare enrollment, coverage options, associated costs and where to get help in the community is featured in Medicare 101.

Several sessions are offered in the area by the Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance office.

Although the class is free, people are advised to register in advance to ensure enough seats and handouts are available. The sessions are:

- Tuesday, Aug. 16 from 6-8 p.m., Hermiston Public Library, 235 E. Gladys Ave.

- Wednesday, Aug. 17 from noon to 2 p.m., Milton-Freewater Public Library, 8 S.W. Eighth Ave.

- Wednesday, Aug. 17 from 6:30-8:30 p.m., Pendleton Public Library, 502 S.W. Dorion Ave.

- Thursday, Aug. 18 from 10 a.m. to noon, Stanfield Public Library, 180 W. Coe Ave.

- Thursday, Aug. 18 from 2:30-4:30 p.m., Umatilla Public Library, 911 Seventh St.

For more information, contact shiba.oregon@oregon.gov or 800-722-5134.

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