

Idaho farmers help protect neighbors from wildfire

By JOHN O'CONNELL
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IDAHO FALLS, Idaho — Even as Ken Christensen watched some of his rangeland burn, he was overwhelmed with gratitude for his neighbors, who brought a fleet of tractors and discs to dig fire lines and help protect the rest of his property.

The Henry's Fork fire started early Aug. 21, sparked 7 miles east of Idaho Falls by an undetermined human cause. It had expanded to 52,233 acres by Aug. 25, with 30 percent of it contained.

Fire officials say the area includes dryland farms, rangeland and land in the Conservation Reserve Program. No estimates of damage to agricultural land or the loss of livestock have been made.

However, officials say they are certain farmers who contributed their time and heavy equipment to the battle have minimized losses and protected homes.

"I think our community really came together and these farmers really stepped in way above and beyond



Equipment manned by growers Steven Longhurst, left, and James Hoff is used to dig fire lines late Aug. 21 to control the Henry's Creek fire near Idaho Falls. Fire officials say growers who brought equipment have been essential in their firefighting efforts.

to help us out. They were a godsend," said Dave Coffey, deputy chief of operations with the Idaho Falls Fire Department. "They created fire breaks and put homes in a safe zone, where I didn't have to worry about them."

The Henry's Creek fire has been devastating to Christensen, who estimates 2,800 acres of his rangeland has burned. He'd planned to use that ground as fall pasture. He's also lost about 2 miles of fencing.

But the rancher also counts his blessings that he hasn't lost any cattle, and for the tireless efforts of neighboring farmers, who first showed up on the afternoon of Aug. 21 and returned the next day when the fire flared.

"It was so impressive how many farmers showed up," Christensen said.

He acknowledged he was at a loss for words when he sought to thank one of the growers who raced to establish a fire break before the flames arrived.

"You're kind of at your wit's end standing there and watching your place burn," Christensen said. "I didn't know what to say to that guy except, 'Thanks.' He's busting his machine going over this rocky ground."

Christensen also used his equipment to dig a fire line that protected an alfalfa field, where his cattle are now grazing. He's asked Bonneville County to issue a disaster declaration, enabling him to graze CRP acres.

Some of Mark Blatter's fencing and CRP land also burned. His five sons worked with shovels to help establish a fire line and "a lot of neighbors got in there and really worked it."

Idaho Potato Commissioner James Hoff said the fire started about 3 miles from his farm but the winds never

pushed it in his direction. He and his father, Tom, took a break from preparing for spud harvest and helped their neighbors, using about 200 gallons of fuel to dig several miles of fire line. Hoff fought the fire for several hours on both Aug. 21 and Aug. 22. The labor left him exhausted, with a bad headache.

"It kind of looked like everything was going to be under control. Then they lost control at 1 a.m. on Monday," Hoff said. "The winds picked up. It just took off like a shot."

Hoff aided several property owners, including Christensen, and he and his father agreed to change locations on the night of Aug. 22 at the request of the fire department to protect a neighborhood.

According to a fire information officer with the Great Basin Incident Management Team 7, 289 firefighters were dispatched to the fire, which has been fueled by high winds and low humidity. Bonneville County sheriff's deputies have contacted homeowners asking them to prepare for possible evacuation.

BRIEFLY

Idaho police use school bus to catch texting drivers

MOSCOW, Idaho (AP) — A school bus roaming the streets of Moscow this week has been a cover for police officers looking to catch traffic violations.

Members of the Moscow Police Department, Idaho State Police and Latah County Sheriff's Department rode in the bus that was equipped with a video camera, and radio, *The Moscow-Pullman Daily News* reported. Officers were particularly interested in catching drivers who were texting and driving, which is illegal in Idaho.

When a driver was seen committing a traffic violation such as texting while driving, the bus-riding officers would radio a patrol car in the area and then a traffic stop would be made.

ISP Sgt. Rich Adamson said the bus was used because people didn't expect officers to be inside and it also gave the officers a higher vantage point to see into cars. Adamson said he got the idea from a national highway safety summit earlier this year and proposed the tactic to Moscow police.

Cpl. Travis Hight said it is often hard to cite a driver for texting because the law is poorly worded. He said the law says a driver cannot text, which includes reading, typing or sending messages, but doesn't exclude looking at a phone to select music.

According to police brochures, sending or receiving a text takes a driver's eyes off the road for an average of 4.6 seconds. That means a driver could drive the length of a football field blind if they were traveling at 55 mph.

Six wolves killed in western Washington

SALEM — Washington wildlife managers this week have killed four more wolves in the Profanity Peak pack, bringing the total to six as the Department of Fish and Wildlife seeks to eliminate the entire pack from Ferry County.

The department shot an adult male Sunday and the next day killed a female pup

and two adults, including at least one male, according to WDFW wolf policy leader Donny Martorello.

The sex of the second adult is unknown, according to WDFW. The wolf was killed from a helicopter, but has not been found.

Previously, the department shot two female adults Aug. 5. WDFW suspended the hunt Aug. 18, but resumed it the next day when the department confirmed wolves had attacked more calves.

WDFW originally planned to "partially remove" the Profanity Peak pack, but decided to eliminate the entire pack after depredations on cattle continued.

Prior to the six shootings, the pack had six adults and five pups, according to WDFW.

WDFW has confirmed the pack has killed or injured eight cattle since July 8. The pack probably attacked at least seven other cattle, according to WDFW, though investigators were unable to absolutely confirm the cattle were attacked by wolves.

The state has never exterminated an entire pack to stop attacks on livestock. WDFW announced plans to remove the Wedge Pack from Stevens County in 2012. Officials shot seven wolves, but two in the pack survived.

Pot shop ordered to stop selling

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — A marijuana business that opened in violation of Clark County's ban on recreational pot sales has been ordered to stop selling its products.

The Columbian reports a judge on Tuesday ordered owner John Larson to stop selling recreational marijuana immediately at his Hazel Dell shop. The store remained open for business Thursday, and Larson says he plans to appeal.

The county maintains Larson provided false information about what he would be selling at the store in order to obtain a building permit.

Larson's application describes the shop, which opened in December, as a "general retail business" selling novelties, crafts, and antiques.

Tribe trucks totem pole 4,800 miles in fossil fuels protest

PORTLAND (AP) — A Pacific Northwest tribe is traveling nearly 5,000 miles across Canada and the United States with a 22-foot-tall totem pole on a flatbed truck in a symbolic journey meant to galvanize opposition to fossil fuel infrastructure projects they believe will imperil native lands.

This is the fourth year the Lummi Nation in northwest Washington has embarked on a "totem journey" to try to create a unified front among tribes across North America that are individually fighting plans for coal terminals and crude oil pipelines in their backyards.

The highly visible tours, which include tribal blessing ceremonies at each stop, fit into a trend of Native American tribes bringing their



Linda Soriano of the Lummi Nation performs a smudge ceremony at Saint Mark's Episcopal Cathedral in Seattle, fanning smoke from burning sage with eagle feathers onto a totem pole on Thursday.

environmental activism to the masses as they see firsthand the effects of climate change, said Robin Saha, a University of Montana associate professor who

specializes in tribal issues and environmental justice.

"I wouldn't go as far as to say there's an anti-development movement, but tribes are feeling the effects of

climate change quite dramatically and are responding in a lot of different ways," Saha said. "Some of them feel as if they're not going to survive."

In North Dakota, for example, people from across the country and members of 60 tribes have gained international attention after gathering in opposition to the four-state Dakota Access oil pipeline. The totem pole heads to that site, near the Standing Rock Sioux's reservation, next week.

Tribes in the Pacific Northwest have protested publicly and taken legal action as West Coast ports have emerged as strategic locations for crude oil and coal companies to reach customers in energy-hungry Asia.



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