

USDA approves emergency grazing, cover crops for affected ranchers in north-central Oregon

Area ravaged by large wildfires earlier this year

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**
EO Media Group

Help is on the way for farmers and ranchers in north-central Oregon who lost tens of thousands of acres of crops in a series of large wildfires that swept through the region earlier this summer.

The USDA on Wednesday approved emergency grazing for affected ranchers on Conservation Reserve Program, or CRP, land through Sept. 30. Officials with the Risk Management Agency will also allow summer fallow wheat growers to plant cover crops in burned areas to prevent soil erosion, without affecting their crop insurance.

The relief comes at the behest of Oregon congressional leaders, including Democratic Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, and Republican Rep. Greg Walden, whose district covers Wasco and Sherman counties where the fires raged in July and August.

USDA Secretary Sonny

Perdue announced the measures in a letter sent to Walden on Sept. 5. Perdue said the agency is compiling reported losses to determine if they will declare a federal disaster statewide.

According to the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center in Portland, Oregon has experienced 1,680 fires burning 762,959 acres in 2018. The 10-year average from 2006 to 2017 is 2,400 fires burning 733,019 acres, meaning this year's fires are fewer, but larger on average, than they were over the past decade.

In a statement, Walden said fires have not only impact forests and choked communities with smoke, but also devastated farmers and ranchers — especially in Wasco and Sherman counties, where some producers lost some or nearly all of their crops.

"I applaud Secretary Perdue's prompt approval of my request to get our farmers and ranchers the assistance they need to get back on their feet after these fires," Walden said.

Large fires in the region include the Substation fire, which started July 17 and



Mark Graves/The Oregonian via AP

A fast-moving fire raged across Wasco County southeast of The Dalles on Wednesday, July 18, 2018. USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue has announced relief for farmers and ranchers affected by wildfires that burned earlier this summer in Wasco and Sherman counties.

torched 78,425 acres. The Natural Resources Conservation Service estimates the fire impacted 31,000 acres of cropland and standing wheat over 86 farms in both Wasco and Sherman counties. One farmer, 64-year-old John Ruby of Wasco County, also died while fighting the fire,

digging a firebreak to protect his neighbor's property.

The Long Hollow fire started just nine days later, consuming another 33,451 acres south of Dufur. Finally, the South Valley fire started Aug. 1, adding another 20,026 acres. All three fires were either confirmed or

likely human-caused.

A major concern now is preventing soil erosion on the blackened landscape. Farmers were encouraged to plant cover crops, but since wheat is normally grown in a summer fallow rotation, producers worried it would put them under "continuous pro-

duction" under their crop insurance.

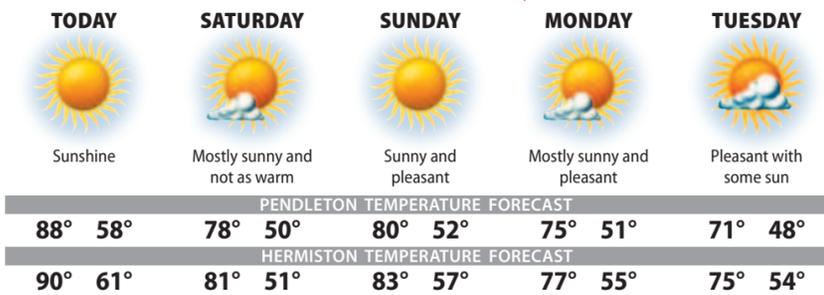
Perdue said the Risk Management Agency, which regulates crop insurance, will make changes to accommodate growing cover crops on affected acres for the 2020 crop year.

Additionally, ranchers who lost rangeland for their livestock will have the ability to graze animals on land enrolled in CRP, a program where the federal government pays farmers to take environmentally sensitive land out of agricultural production for 10-15 years.

Both Sens. Wyden and Merkley released statements saying they will continue to work toward helping farmers and ranchers recover from fires. The Oregon Farm Bureau thanked the senators in its statement, adding, "The ability to plant cover crop and still be compliant with farm bill programs is critical."

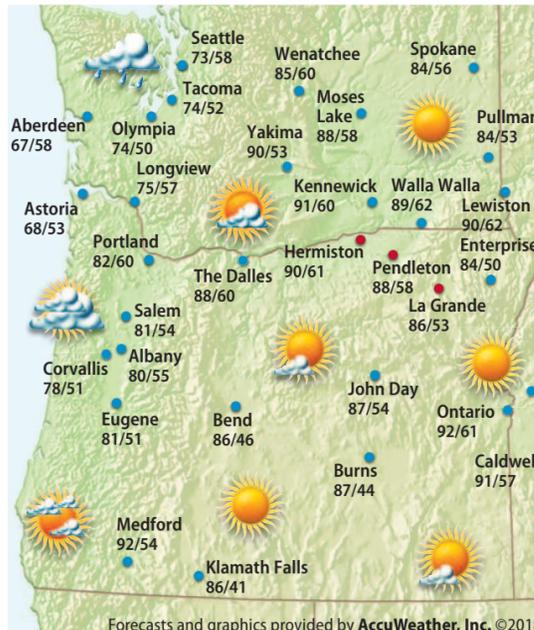
Wes Jennings, farm program chief for the USDA Farm Service Agency in Oregon, encouraged any farmer or rancher affected by the wildfires to contact their local county FSA office to learn about what resources may be available.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



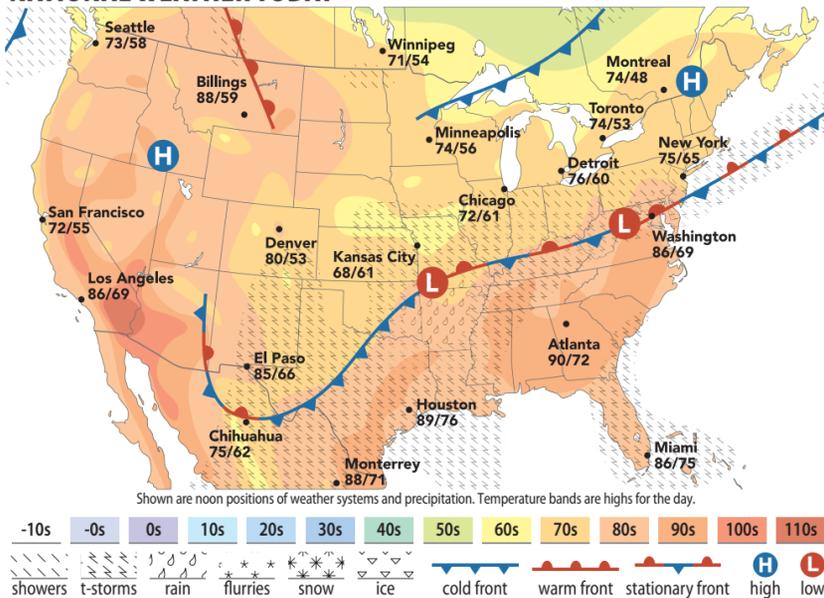
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	85°	52°
Normals	82°	53°
Records	102° (1955)	34° (1898)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.09"	
Year to date	6.52"	
Last year to date	11.37"	
Normal year to date	8.47"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	85°	47°
Normals	82°	52°
Records	99° (2003)	39° (1961)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.07"	
Year to date	5.15"	
Last year to date	6.65"	
Normal year to date	6.19"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Sat.
Boardman	WSW 6-12	WSW 8-16
Pendleton	W 4-8	W 8-16
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:23 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	7:22 p.m.	
Moonrise today	3:34 a.m.	
Moonset today	6:30 p.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 110° in Thermal, Calif. Low 28° in International Falls, Minn.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Investigation into couple missing after fire treated as homicide

Palmer: Evidence currently being tested

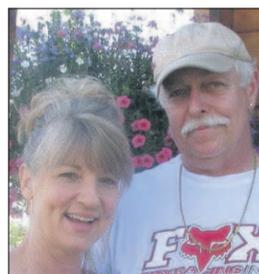
By **RICHARD HANNERS**
EO Media Group

The investigation into the couple missing after their house in Grant County burned in July is being treated as a homicide.

Grant County Sheriff Glenn Palmer said evidence collected at the scene of the fire on Nan's Rock Road between Mt. Vernon and John Day is believed to be of human origin, and testing is being conducted by the Oregon State Medical Examiner's Office in Clackamas.

The possible remains have not been identified, Palmer said in a Sept. 5 press release.

"This agency is not prepared to release any identities in this case of anyone," Palmer said. "As the investigation progresses



Contributed photo

Sharon and Terry Smith

we will release information to the public as it becomes available."

Terry Smith, 67, and Sharon Smith, 65, have been missing since their off-the-grid and isolated home was destroyed by a fire July 17-18. Their silver or light gray 2006 Toyota Tacoma with Oregon license 714EGG also went missing.

Two cadaver dogs from the Crook County Sheriff's Office searched the scene following the fire with negative results, Palmer said in an Aug. 2 press release.

Family and friends told the *Blue Mountain Eagle* about the social nature of the Smiths and how unusual it would be for them to disappear for any length of time without communicating with their friends and family.

Cathy Hinshaw, Sharon's sister who lives in Hawaii, told the newspaper she felt pretty sure from the beginning that the Smiths had died and were consumed in the fire. But there were still unanswered questions.

"I can't understand where the truck went," she said. She asked the sheriff's office asked her for a DNA sample and then three weeks later asked her to send a form confirming that they could use her sample.

Hinshaw said she spoke to Sharon the evening of the fire, and Sharon had told her they were headed to bed. The Smiths had planned to clean the caretaker's house the next day and then go fishing.

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