

FIRE: The blaze scorched about 8 acres Wednesday

Continued from 1A

The fire rekindled Thursday around 1 a.m. Britt said the flames reached 20 feet high and licked the leaves on the tree at the south edge of his property. He said he and a neighbor used garden hoses to take on the fire, then Pendleton firefighters drenched the flames.

A crew stayed at the site all night and Thursday morning at 10:20 again knocked down another rekindled fire.

The burn scorched about 8 acres and the cause is under investigation, Pendleton fire reported, but the likely origin was a homeless camp just west of the recreational vehicle park and near the banks of the Umatilla River.

Fire blackened much of the camp, but there was no obvious fire pit. Signs at the site Thursday morning pointed to a fast getaway — occupants left behind melted nylon tents and plastic tarps and charred tennis shoes. Someone also left dirty syringes and needles near the main portion of the camp.

Britt said he told the city police about the camp, and other residents said police roused the campers some weeks ago. Once the hullabaloo died down, they returned.

Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts said police only have so much authority to deal with activities the homeless engage in, and recent developments in case law makes it tougher to prohibit people from resting and camping in public spaces. Police can break up a camp, but the occupants set up elsewhere.

“All we’re really doing is displacing the problem,” Roberts said.

Britt said he wants to see the Pendleton Fire Department conduct more burns in grassy areas to limit the potential for big fires, or have the goats the city uses to eat the



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A melted tarp hangs from an improvised structure at the burned-out site of a homeless camp on the north bank of the Umatilla River on Thursday in Pendleton. A fast-moving fire began in the camp Wednesday evening.

underbrush along the Umatilla River clear off hillsides.

“There’s 10 times the volume of food up here,” he said.

Britt also said this fire could be a catalyst for a change in dealing with the homeless population.

“We have to, as a community, decide how we’re going to help with homelessness,” he said.

The Pendleton police chief agreed.

“There needs to be something innovative and collaborative that’s going to get to the root of the homeless issue,” he said. “It’s going to have be a community-wide approach.”

“We have to, as a community, decide how we’re going to help with homelessness”

— Luke Britt, resident



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A burned Bible sits on the ground in a homeless camp that was the origin of a wildfire that threatened homes on the north side of the Umatilla River.

CAP: Those under the cap could sell their credits

Continued from 1A

the committee will draft legislation that will get through the Oregon Legislature next year and pass into law. After taking October off, the committee will convene in November and December.

Cap and trade would put a limit on carbon emissions for the state’s biggest polluters — those emitting at least 25,000 metric tons of greenhouse gasses. A 2017 report showed polluters overall were emitting about 60 million metric tons per year.

As proposed, the cap would decrease overtime. To make sure they aren’t penalized, those large polluters would buy credits to cash in if they surpass pollution regulations. Those under the cap could sell their credits to companies who are over the cap.

It’s a system currently working in California and several Canadian provinces. Most jurisdictions are on the same marketplace, managed

by Western Climate Initiative. Oregon would likely join those jurisdictions.

On Tuesday, officials from Western Climate Initiative and Quebec followed Dayaratna to explain how the policy has worked in recent years. The hearing was among the most popular at the Capitol this week, with viewers spilling into two overflow rooms. Many audibly scoffed as Dayaratna posited that the committee should instead be focused on getting Oregonians the cheapest energy possible.

Cap-and-trade policy, he said, would “kill thousands of jobs, make families poor and have a negligible impact on climate.”

When asked about increased extreme weather, Dayaratna said the narrative purporting an increase in frequency and severity of droughts and hurricanes are “myths propagated by the mainstream media.”

Dayaratna was invited by state Sen. Fred Girod,

R- Stayton. Girod acknowledged the controversy of bringing him to the Capitol, and asked Dayaratna to explain he wasn’t representing Big Oil.

Dayaratna said that the Heritage Foundation gets minimal financial support from corporations. However, a significant amount of funding for the organization has often come from the Koch brothers, who own Koch Industries. Koch Industries manufactures and refines petroleum, among other things.

Girod twice thanked Dayaratna for traveling from the East Coast for the hearing, saying the committee was “blessed” to have him provide his perspective.

The Quebec officials painted a different picture. The province implemented cap and trade in 2013, and the following year partnered with California to trade credits. Cap and trade regulates Quebec companies responsible for 85 percent of the

province’s greenhouse gas emissions, officials said.

But the regulations haven’t put a chokehold on industry. Officials testified that the regulation increased competition, giving the province its strongest economy ever and a 5.6 percent unemployment rate, third lowest in Canada.

Past Oregon legislation, including a 2017 bill that died despite 33 co-sponsors, indicate the policy would also include an investment element. In a 2018 bill, credits were projected to have a floor of \$16 per metric ton, and then increase each year due to inflation. That money would go into a fund to be invested in projects combatting emissions or preparing the state for climate change.

The projects could range from a resident applying for funds to put solar panels on their home to a city looking to build a light rail train. The state could also use some of the money for things such as wildfire mitigation.

COURTS: Requests have increased 42 percent

Continued from 1A

program manager for Court Language Access Services, the number of requests for several indigenous languages statewide has spiked in the last few years. From 2015 to 2016, requests for indigenous languages increased by 42 percent.

In 2017, there were 133 requests for a Mam interpreter across the state. Requests are likely to be nearly double that in 2018, with 97 requested in the first six months of the year.

Mills said there have already been 33 requests for Q’anjob’al interpreters in the first half of 2018, and there were 33 all year in 2017. Requests for K’iche’ interpreters have already surpassed last year’s numbers, with 25 in the first half of this year, and 24 in all of 2017.

In Umatilla and Morrow counties, there have been 15 requests for Mam language interpreters in the first half of 2018, and 19 requests for Q’anjob’al. There have been 11 requests for K’iche’.

There are several indigenous languages that aren’t requested as often, and some requested this year that the courts had not seen before. Two of the most recently requested languages are Ixil and Achi.

But while the courts are trying to meet language needs, Mills said they often have to rely on people from out-of-state, such as interpreters over the phone for shorter court proceedings like arraignments. Blaine said there is one interpreter who speaks K’iche’ that lives in Oregon, but many of the cases that require interpreters are handled over the phone — even for Spanish speakers.

“We have Spanish interpreters living in the area, but only a couple. It’s not sufficient,” Blaine said.

There is one interpreter in Oregon for Mam, the most frequently requested indigenous language in the state. Bertilda Martin-Mendoza is a native of Guatemala, and Mam is her first language. She moved to the United States as a child, where she learned Spanish, and then English. She started working as a volunteer interpreter in 1998 in Washington, at hospitals and community events.

In 2000, someone asked her to help translate for a court case where someone spoke Mam. Afterward, the judge asked to meet with her, and asked if she wanted to start working there, which led to a career as a courtroom interpreter. Based in Portland, she travels within Oregon, and around the United States for her work. Last year, she helped train three Mam

interpreters in Washington.

Martin-Mendoza said she’s seen a growing number of native Mam speakers who know some Spanish. But it usually doesn’t work the other way.

“There’s no way a Spanish speaker would speak Mam,” she said. “Native languages are not easy to learn. I’ve never met someone that has said they speak Mam as a second language, though there are probably some out there.”

Martin-Mendoza said she had to educate herself for many aspects of the job.

“A lot of the things we see here don’t exist in native culture,” she said. “You have to educate yourself on how you are going to interpret.”

Another challenge is translating specific legal terms — for which she said courts often rely on “relay interpreting.”

“I would translate from Mam to Spanish, and another Spanish interpreter would translate Spanish to English,” she said.

Taking more time

Blaine said a lack of interpreters means that often, court proceedings will be delayed.

“Somebody ends up sitting in jail, or maybe a family case needs to be heard because there are children in danger,” he said. “It can’t be heard until we get an interpreter.”

He said the new case management system has alleviated the issue somewhat, where the first time an interpreter for a certain language is requested, that request shows up on all subsequent court appearances for that person.

Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said the biggest challenge for attorneys working on a case with an interpreter is allowing time for translation.

“When you’re in court, your mind is going, how you want to approach questions,” he said. “When dealing with an interpreter, you have to slow yourself down.”

Other than that, he said, he’s been pleased with interpreter services.

“It seems to be a pretty smooth system,” he said.

Primus added that while sometimes emotion can be lost in translation, he trusts the interpreters to relay the content of a message.

“There’s not a concern in regards to accuracy,” he said.

He added that while his office has no victim advocates that speak indigenous languages, there is one that speaks Spanish.

“That’s something we use every day,” Primus said.

Many of their clients who speak indigenous languages can communicate somewhat with that advocate, he said.

DEBT: Jivanjee said he’s already invested \$4 million

Continued from 1A

Jivanjee paid a percentage of the debt after each unit was completed. According to staff reports, if Jivanjee completed 20 units, he would pay back 20 percent of the debt.

In the interviews, Jivanjee said this method would actually lead to faster payments back to the city while making it easier for him to obtain financing for the project.

(The city) are the ones who keep changing it and make me look like a bad boy,” he said. “I’m not a bad boy.”

While the council rejected one of Jivanjee’s latest proposals, it didn’t even consider another.

Jivanjee said the city had been using its land donation to Jivanjee as value toward its share of a 50-50 split for road extensions into Pendleton Heights.



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The Pendleton Heights housing project has stalled as the developer and the city negotiate new terms.

In a proposal that wasn’t shared publicly, Jinvajee wanted the city to put its half of the road improvements in cash.

The nonpublic proposal also included a provision that would have required the city to provide Jivanjee with any incentives it gives to other housing developers.

The city is currently

engaged in negotiations with I & E Construction to provide an incentive for a proposed 200-unit apartment complex on Westgate.

Jivanjee said he’s already invested \$4 million into Pendleton Heights and is prepared to investment millions of dollars more, but he wants a deal that he would consider more fair to his

project.

And he’s also made efforts to pay down his debt to the city. According to an email from Finance Director Linda Carter, he’s made \$140,922 in payments to the city while still owing \$161,677 directly to the city and another \$592,580 for a state loan that’s held by the city.

But before he can get any revisions to his agreement with the city, he’ll need to convince at least five members of the council to change their minds on revising the deal.

While Corbett, the city manager, was unavailable for an interview, Mayor John Turner said it was unlikely that the council would approve any alterations to the deal at this time.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

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