

Wildfire: With temperatures above normal, fire conditions worsen

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average for much of the summer. But McCraw said that's beginning to change.

In the Central Blue Mountains zone, for instance, an area that includes much of the southern half of the Wallowa-Whitman, the energy release component — a computer model estimate of how much heat a fire would produce, based on the moisture content in various types of fuels — has stayed slightly below average for most of July.

Fire officials use that index, based on conditions from 1993 to 2015, to gauge how difficult it would be to douse a blaze. The index on Tuesday climbed to average for the date.

The index remains below average, however, for the Northern Blue Mountains, which includes parts of Union and Wallowa counties. For purposes of estimating fire danger, Northeastern Oregon is divided into six zones, and conditions are

much less dangerous than they were a year ago across the region.

At the end of July in 2018 the energy release component ratings reached all-time record highs on much of the Wallowa-Whitman, ranging from 79 to 84. The ratings Tuesday among the six regions ranged from 60 to 67.

High fire danger doesn't always translate to a busy fire season, though.

Lightning is a key component as well, as it is the ignition source for more than half the fires in northeastern Oregon most years. In many years lightning starts 80 percent or more of the blazes on the Wallowa-Whitman.

The statistics this year reflect the generally benign conditions, McCraw said.

Through Monday, there were 12 lightning fires on the Wallowa-Whitman this year, and they burned 18 acres. The three human-caused fires on the forest burned just 1 acre.

"We've had a few storms

come through that put down quite a bit of lightning," McCraw said, "but we're still pretty green and a little wet out there."

A recent lightning fire that burned about one-half acre near Highway 7 about 5 miles southeast of Sumpter illustrates the situation, he said. The lightning bolt actually hit about a week earlier, but the fire didn't produce much smoke until Sunday afternoon. Crews controlled the fire later that day.

McCraw said it's not uncommon for a lightning-sparked fire to smolder for a week or longer — especially when vegetation is still lush and the ground relatively moist — and then be fanned into flames on a hot, dry day. Fire managers call these blazes "holdovers."

"We've had holdovers take 10 or 14 days to show up," McCraw said.

Public use restrictions on state, private and BLM land

Steve Meyer, wildland

fire supervisor at the Oregon Department of Forestry's Baker City office, said the fire season has been atypically placid so far.

"Usually we're a lot drier than we are at this point," Meyer said Tuesday morning.

As of today, the Forestry Department, which is responsible for fires mainly on private and state land, had only one fire this year, a lightning blaze that burned just one-tenth of an acre.

But with the hot temperatures this week, Meyer said the fire danger will increase to high in Baker County on Friday, when the Forestry Department will cease issuing permits for outdoor burning in the county.

People using chain saws will have to stop using them at noon each day, Meyer said.

"Fuels are drying out," he said. "We're definitely in fire season."

The Vale District of the BLM also announced more stringent public use restric-

tions that will take effect Monday, July 29. The BLM manages primarily lower-elevation rangeland where grasses and shrubs tend to dry earlier than forested areas.

Campfires will be banned across the Vale District, as will driving motor vehicles off designated roads.

Cooking stoves and heaters that burn liquid or bottled gas will still be allowed, but they must be used in an area at least 10 feet in diameter that's been cleared of flammable materials.

"The light fuels that characterize the rangeland in this area take very little time to dry out with wind and higher temperatures," Tracy Skerjanec, the Vale District's deputy fire management officer, said in a press release. "We've seen the moisture levels dropping significantly to warrant the additional restrictions."

Lightning sparks fires on Umatilla

A series of thunderstorms

last weekend sparked several fires on the Umatilla National Forest, including six on the Heppner Ranger District.

On Tuesday fire crews focused on the Bull Fire near Bull Prairie Lake, which was reported Monday afternoon and burned four acres.

Fire crews contained a 5-acre fire near Rocky Flat on Monday.

The energy release component rating on Monday crept just above average in that part of the Blue Mountains.

With few fires in the region, and none of them requiring large numbers of firefighters, the Wallowa-Whitman has been able to temporarily assign two of its 20-member elite Hotshot crews to other areas, McCraw said.

The Union Hotshots have been working on fires in Alaska for close to two weeks, and the La Grande Hotshots are on a fire in Washington.

Pilots: International shortage draws female aviators

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struck more recently as she chatted about other pilots' experiences while visiting Times Square in New York City.

"I turned to my brother and said, 'I'm going to be a pilot,'" Wildbill recalled.

Only a few months later, she took her first flight as a student.

"Every cell in my body felt so alive," she said. "I knew I was at the beginning of some big life adventure."

Bridgman and Wildbill started ground school and flying lessons at Bergman Aircraft in Pasco. Recently, the two women and other members of the Mid-Columbia Chapter of the Ninety-Nines converged at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton. The international organization of women pilots provides a forum for networking, outreach and scholarships.

Wildbill and Bridgman, along with former pilot Susan Demarsh, exclaimed as the first plane appeared, a speck on the horizon. The Cessna 172 landed, taxied and pulled up next to the tiny welcoming committee. As pilot and co-pilot Bonnie Molitar and Lynn Harbinson hopped out, hugs ensued. In the next 15 minutes, two other small planes and four more women landed and



Contributed photo

Tania Wildbill, of Pendleton, recently decided to become a pilot.

joined the group.

The women ranged from students to veteran pilots. They spent the day bonding and sharing information as they ate lunch at Sister's Cafe, toured the Tamastlikt Cultural Institute and did yoga at Wildbill's Wellness Wave fitness studio.

Bridgman and Wildbill tapped into the wealth of experience by asking plenty of questions. They compared notes on phone apps for fliers, flying experiences and training.

Harbinson, a flight instructor and a veterinarian, took up flying nine years ago. She said the catalyst was the death of a friend. The sudden loss made her realize she shouldn't delay her dreams.

"I asked myself, 'What am I not doing that I want to be

doing?'" Harbinson said.

The answer was flying and she immediately enrolled in flight school.

For those who want to learn to fly, options include the military, private flight schools and university aviation programs.

Matthew Toelke directs the 52-year-old aviation program at Walla Walla University. The school owns seven planes and has 40 aviation students, including three women.

Toelke, who is also a commercial pilot in the firefighting field, reflected on why so few women choose flying. For one thing, he said, the male-dominated field hasn't always been welcoming to women.

"The captain was kind of the god of the airline," Toelke said. "Some of that macho male stuff pushed women

away, but the industry has changed dramatically. There's a realization that a macho attitude is not the safest attitude."

Aviation seems to be embracing the all-out recruiting of women. Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University hosts flight exploration camps to introduce middle- and high-school girls to flying. Women in Aviation, the Ninety-Nines and other groups are awarding scholarships to female flying students. Many airlines are raising recruiting quotas for female pilots.

Harbinson figures many women just haven't seriously considered the idea of becoming a pilot.

"It's just one of those areas where they don't think of it as an option," she said. "It's not on their radar."

Wildbill is happy with her decision to start flying. Even after hearing the story of a student having to fly solo on her third lesson after her flight instructor slumped over from cardiac arrest, she refused to worry. Instead, she asked her instructor to teach landings sooner rather than later.

"He had me do seven touch-and-goes that day," she said.

Most of the time, instead of worry, flying brings calm to Wildbill.

"It's like yoga in the sky," Wildbill said. "You have to be so focused and present"

Apartments: Pendleton Heights out of limbo as financing surfaces

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to a project that's been beset by delays and renegotiations for years.

The Tutuilla Road housing development was announced in 2012 and was originally conceived as a 72-townhouse subdivision.

As a part of a partnership between Jivanjee and Pendleton city government, the city agreed to donate the land near Olney Cemetery and front the money for necessary infrastructure improvements.

After Jivanjee built 32 townhouses, the city allowed Jivanjee to change the final 40 townhouses into a 100-unit complex.

More renegotiations followed, usually involving more money from the city for infrastructure or moving around the debt owed to the city to make it more palatable to the project's private financiers.

The relationship between Jivanjee and the Pendleton City Council has grown more contentious with each passing round of renegotiation.

After the council rebuked one of Jivanjee's requests in September 2018, the council agreed to take on more of the infrastructure costs and Jivanjee committed to pay \$150,000 to the city before starting the project.

On Monday, Jivanjee said the project has been delayed by the complexities of financing, but he's still invested in seeing it succeed.

Although he's had the city take on more of the financial burden of the development, Jivanjee said the city's contribution is still dwarfed by the \$13 million to \$14 million he will have invested in the project by the time it's done.

"It's a sweetheart deal for (the city)," he said.

With Jivanjee expecting to see loan funds soon, he expects the road to be completed in late September or early October.

Building the first 20 units of the apartment complex will involve a new loan process, Jivanjee said, and he now projects they'll be completed in spring 2020.

Recall: Although odds seem stacked against recall supporters, they are hopeful

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petitions, one of which was filed by Oregon's Republican Party chairman Bill Currier and the other by the Oregon First! PAC and the Flush Down Kate Brown group that is led by Michael Cross.

Justifications for the filings included Brown's cap-and-trade legislation that failed after GOP senators left the state to avoid a vote and the governor's subsequent comments at the end of the session that hinted she may turn to executive powers to pass future environmental legislation.

Also mentioned was legislation that granted undocumented immigrants the ability to get a drivers' license, raising taxes, Oregon's status as a sanctuary state and more.

On Tuesday, Beers spent a few hours of her afternoon sitting under the shade at Veterans Memorial Park in Pilot Rock gathering signatures. Though she voiced her agreement with many of the points listed in the filings, the thing that's compelled her the most has been feeling ignored by the state's executive office and legislature.

"There's 26 things on my list," Beers said, laughing. "But most of all, I don't believe they're listening to the will of the people."

The primary example lauded by Beers and other supporters of the recall is House Bill 2015, which

passed through Congress and was signed into law by Brown at the end of the session. The bill was nearly identical to Measure 88 in granting those who can't prove legal citizenship the ability to get a drivers' license.

In 2014, Measure 88 didn't pass a vote from the public by a margin of 66% to 34%.

"When the citizens of the state vote on something, I don't believe the legislature of the governor have a right to reverse it," Beers said.

An official statement on the recall efforts from the Roundup Republican Women shares the same sentiment.

"The people of Oregon recognize that government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed. They therefore demand a Governor that honors the will of the voters and works for the good of all citizens," the statement read. "They understand it is their right to alter government when it does not abide by these principles."

Since placing the recall petitions out at his rifle shop last Friday, Daren Blagg said he's seen a "huge amount" of people come by to sign it and that the majority have mentioned HB2015 as to why.

Another complaint from the effort's supporters is that Brown has threatened use of executive action to pass legislation, such as cap-and-trade that failed in the past session. However, Democrats aren't buying it.

Mark Petersen, the chairman of the Umatilla County Democratic Party, said recall organizers were more motivated by their dislike of Brown than by executive overreach, seeing as the governor hasn't taken any action yet.

"This whole thing is like political vaudeville," he said. "There's no basis for a recall."

"IF YOU AREN'T FOLLOWING THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE THEN THIS IS WHAT HAPPENS."

— Holly Jo Beers

If organizers don't get more funding for their recall effort, Petersen anticipates it will be "an exercise in futility."

Following the news that recall efforts had been officially filed, Brown's political advisor Thomas Wheatley released a statement linking the efforts all the way to the top of the GOP:

"First, Republicans held the legislative process hostage, now they want to undo the entire election. They claim it's about education funding and addressing climate change. But this is really Trump's politics descending on Oregon. It has no place here and should go back to the morally corrupt place it came from."

The governor's office could not be reached for fur-

ther comment on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Beers took offense to Wheatley's statement.

"They're just ignoring the people," she said. "This has nothing to do with Trump."

While each side is at odds about the motivation behind the recall efforts, Petersen has a point about the hurdles facing its supporters.

option. Since then, only three state governors have even had recall efforts make it to the ballot.

Lynn J. Frazier was successfully recalled by North Dakota voters in 1921, California recalled Gray Davis in 2003, and then in 2012 Scott Walker survived a recall election from Wisconsin voters.

Over that same span, Oregon has recalled three state legislators but has never seen a governor's recall effort make it to ballot. Most recently, Oregon City resident Arin Marcus launched a recall against Brown in 2017 but failed to secure the necessary signatures.

While the odds may appear to be stacked against them, Beers said she thinks this year's effort is a movement that's different than those in the past.

"So many people are awake now. People are really angry," she said. "Everybody can look at what's going on and find something wrong."

That's why, according to Beers, she's had numbers of registered Democrats and people unaffiliated with political parties coming to sign her petition as well.

Beers began gathering signatures on Monday and said as of Tuesday afternoon that she had gotten about 200 on her petitions. In the past, Beers has successfully gathered signatures for local ordinances, mostly related to preservation of the Second

Amendment. Based on those previous experiences, she said she can count on the petitions at Garner's and Blagg's to reach between 500-1,000.

Both stores said they'd have the petitions out and available for people to sign until the October deadline.

While those only amount to a small dent in the required signatures, Beers said she is confident in the movement around the state after hearing of organizers in Medford who collected 8,000 in just two days.

Along with gathering signatures, Beers said she has dedicated time to helping people register to vote if they haven't already. And while optimistic of the effort, she also knows there's a possibility it might fail.

In that event, the more registered voters who are sympathetic to the efforts of Beers and other supporters of the recall means they're better prepared for what's to come.

"Then we move onto the next phase to get people in there to beat the Democrats," Beers said. "Get active, get out there and get elected."

But beyond everything else, Beers hopes the organizing efforts of the recall movement sends a message to Brown.

"We want our voices heard," she said. "If you aren't following the will of the people then this is what happens."