

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Wildfire mayhem only takes one spark

May is Wildfire Awareness month, and while the weather the past few weeks delivered wet and cold conditions it is wise for residents to remember the hot and dry days of summer are just around the corner.

Warnings about fire danger are now nearly routine because of the dangerous, overgrown state of our forests. The climate isn't helping much either. Add drought to the bigger picture and a recipe for potential disaster is mixed and ready.

Yet the climate can't take all the blame for dangerous wild and forest fires. Blazes accidentally — or otherwise — ignited by humans continues to be a growing problem.

That means those of us who want to take advantage of the great vistas and mountains that are near to our communities need to be aware about the danger from fire.

Fires start with a spark, and that means campers, hikers and anyone else trudging throughout the great expanse of wilderness around us should take heed to minimize the potential for an inadvertent miscue with fire.

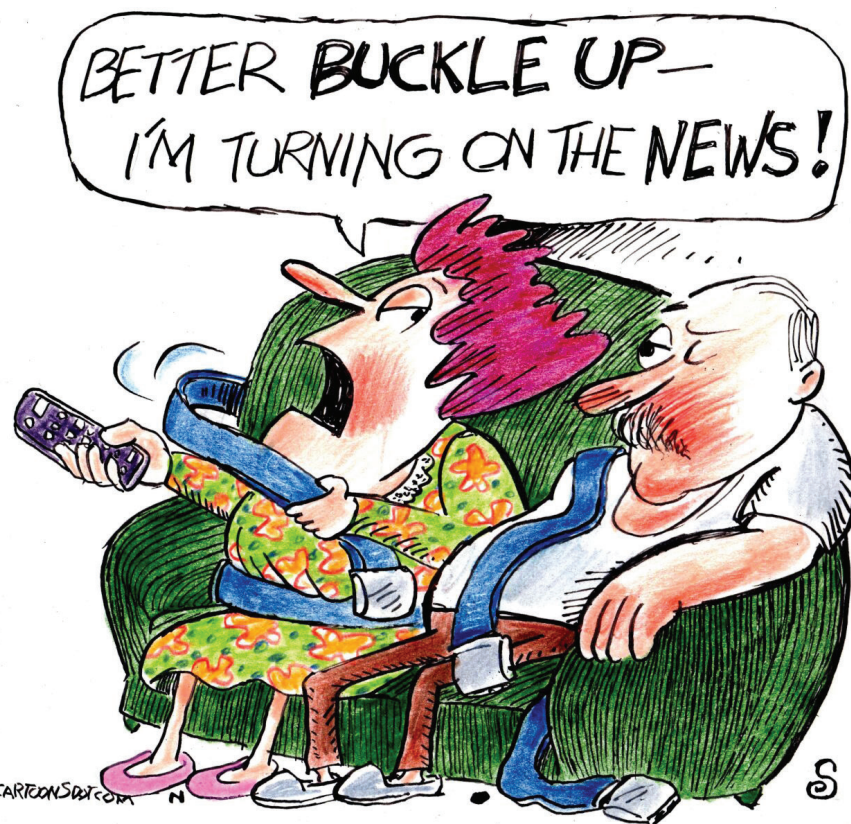
Sparks from equipment — especially motorized equipment — such as cars, trucks and all-terrain vehicles can seem easy to dismiss, but just one can create mayhem in terms of fire.

Sparks also are generated by such things as electricity, chainsaws or even target shooting.

Last year, more than 1,000 fires scorched huge swaths of land in Oregon, and while many were sparked by Mother Nature — such as from lightning strikes — the source of other fires could be traced back to human error.

Now, with rainy, cold weather, the threat of wildfire seems like a distant concern. Yet, the weather will shift — as it always does — and the local climate will be warm and dry. Once we enter into the summer months the threat of wildfire is a real one, and all of us should be mindful a major blaze can erupt quickly.

We should all expect to enjoy our great outdoor recreation spots this summer. But with our privilege to tromp around the area's forest comes the responsibility to be careful and to always use caution.



Severe storms happen here, too



MARC AUSTIN
EYE TO THE SKY

Many might think severe weather only strikes the Great Plains and southeastern United States, but make no mistake, severe storms and tornadoes can strike anywhere in the country.

In fact, every state, including Alaska and Hawaii, have recorded at least one tornado. The Inland Northwest is no different, and while we don't see the same frequency of these hazards as locations east of the Rockies, we do get our fair share.

On May 30, 2020, a significant severe thunderstorm event brought several intense thunderstorms to parts of central and northeast Oregon and far southeast Washington. Rotating thunderstorms, known as supercells, dropped large hail to the size of golf balls and larger to the west of Bend, and caused extensive wind damage in Culver, where winds were estimated at 80-100 mph.

More recently, on May 6 this year, a

storm produced two separate tornadoes between Weston and Tollgate in the Blue Mountains. These tornadoes were given an intensity rating of EF-1, with wind speeds up to 104 mph. The tornadoes caused minor structural damage to a few buildings and wiped out numerous trees.

Umatilla County has historically seen few tornadoes, with only seven documented going back to 1950, including the two on May 6. While these are the only known documented tornadoes, it's likely there have been others that were never witnessed or reported.

Much of National Weather Service Pendleton's county warning area resides in rural areas with sparse populations. The combination of a low frequency of severe weather, and few people to witness and report it, likely means it happens more often than we think.

Digging into the severe weather archives, both Washington and Oregon see an average of two tornadoes per year. These largely occur west of the Cascades, where ingredients for severe weather come together a bit more often — moisture being the key ingredient.

One of the ways to improve our understanding of tornado and severe thunderstorm frequency is to train

people how to safely observe and report severe weather to the NWS. This enables us to get a better grasp of how common large hail, damaging winds and tornadoes really are in the Inland Northwest. The other major benefit of the spotter training program is that it helps NWS forecasters do a better job when it comes to warning the public about hazardous weather.

The combination of complex terrain and limited radar data in some areas, make ground-truth observations critical when severe weather is occurring. The best way to become a storm spotter is to sit in on one of our live or virtual spotter training sessions, or take a series of self-guided online training sessions at your convenience.

We're always looking for more storm spotters to engage with us and provide critical weather information! If you're interested, visit weather.gov/pdt/spotter-training.

Marc Austin is a warning coordination meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Pendleton. Austin leads outreach and weather preparedness programs, and engages the media, emergency management and public safety communities in building a weather ready nation.

YOUR VIEWS

Let us be free to think and do as we choose

I just love it when some political writer insinuates they can read my mind and tell me how to think. The people that want to share our politics with Idaho are a disgruntled few, so that leaves nearly half the county voters as ...?

Why must we be put in a labeled bucket just because we do not support your particular values or party? At least some of us are not so interested in having the Oregon leadership telling us to spend our taxes on illegal immigrants and people who simply will not take a job even when many are available.

We want justice that is fair to all and equally enforced. Many of us would be willing to pay more in taxes to have more rights and freedom than we presently have. We do not believe in government that extends a declared emergency to indefinitely extend its control over our lives. Many of its rules are proving it did not follow the science and were of questionable value. I do not believe the mass of people living and polluting the west

side of Oregon should tell me how to live and think.

Guess I am too independent for others to tell me how to live in my locale. Let us be free to think and do as we choose instead of telling us we are not intelligent enough to take care of ourselves. Let us be free Americans wanting to choose our own way instead of being the sheep that just follows. If you don't like the way we think, then give us native Oregonians your approval to join a different government without leaving our homes.

Let us decide if we will be the loser. Let us pick our definition of benefit.

**John Isley
Enterprise**

Think twice about riverwalk to Echo

Oh, please. Do we, as humans, have to constantly move into human uninhabited areas as if it all belongs solely to us?

The river bank is rife with wild species through a short section toward the new industrial location. The proposed riverwalk to Echo would

cut through that area, disturbing river banks, so far isolated, where wildlife has, for all time, been allowed to live peacefully.

Much of that isolated terrain is still inaccessible to construction and human traffic. A portion just south of the bridge on Highland Avenue in Hermiston even had a 5-acre island; an area where white-tail deer give birth each spring, in the same hidey-holes, below cliffs of rocks, above a set of rapids. A great blue heron rookery is nearby. Canada geese nest on the canal banks, great horned owls nest in the cottonwoods.

There are foxes, coyotes, opossums, wild turkeys, yellow-bellied marmots, raccoons, beavers, river otters, untold species of wildlife, both resident and migrant, animal and avian, who depend upon this breeding ground and have for centuries. So close to our civilized yards and streets.

Think about disturbing that Eden. Where does it end? When do we just back off? Please think twice about continuing plans for the walk.

**Janet Boyd
Hermiston**

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