

Troy begins to heal after grizzly summer scene

by Katherine Stickroth
For the Chieftain

A grizzly bear rampaged toward Troy in August, threatening many lives.

It was so large that it destroyed countless numbers of cattle scattered over vast burning landscapes. Homes were destroyed and livelihoods affected.

But this bruin didn't wear a fur coat. It was the Grizzly Bear Complex wildfire that barreled down the Wenaha River Canyon in Troy's direction.

"It is named correctly," said Paul Karvoski, director of Emergency Services Management in Wallowa County. "It would not stop. It traveled 8 miles in six hours."

Months later, Troy residents continue to find a fire of this magnitude difficult to comprehend. They hesitate to say any one person was a hero, though Karvoski is consistently mentioned when stories are recounted, as are Doug Mallory and Kristen Yeager, owners of the Troy Resort.

Upon receiving notification of the fire, Karvoski arrived in Troy and assessed that residents and property were in imminent danger — and there were no resources to fight fire.

"What we had was what we had," Karvoski said. In such circumstances, Karvoski's vital responsibility is to request that state officials activate Oregon's Conflagration Act, which mobilizes task forces to fight fire.

Karvoski topped Bartlett Bench with Sheriff Steve Rogers and other emergency officials to move into cell service range. While waiting for the callback, they watched a smoke plume arch its way toward Troy, igniting spot fires ahead of it. Yet another front of the inferno headed toward them. Pressure mounted as each minute challenged their safety for the sake of a call. Finally, his phone rang — five task forces from Portland would come, plus other detachments.

Back at Troy, Karvoski gazed up the Wenaha River. "There was a wall of flames 3 to 4 miles wide, and you knew it was coming at you. You could hear a roar, with trees popping and snapping. It was an eerie feeling." Soon afterward he was notified of the Falls Creek fire south of Joseph, where homes along Hurricane Creek were in jeopardy. "I sat at the Hurricane Creek Grange Hall and watched it for eight hours," he said.

Karvoski said he didn't know if he was coming or going for the next three weeks. By Labor Day,

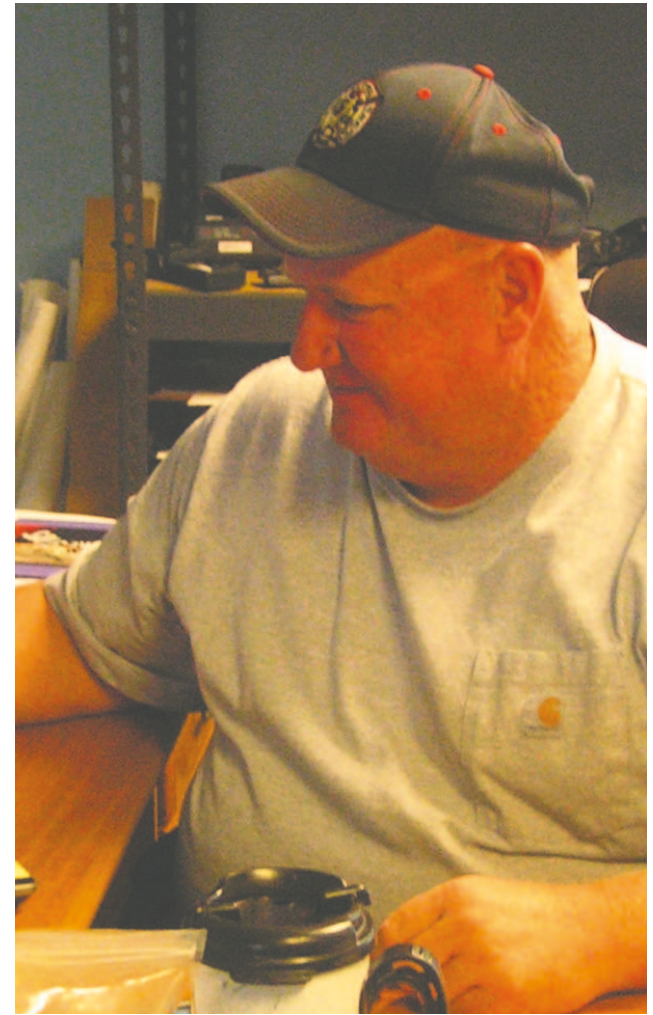
however, weather conditions and resources provided enough relief for him to attend the Boise State-Washington football game.

"I didn't want to miss that," he said with a smile. Karvoski is quick to divert expressions of appreciation to others who were instrumental in saving Troy. "Ranchers and their friends immediately began blading fire breaks to protect what they had. There was a Forest Service kid who did one hell of a job managing people to get the fire line going. I can't say enough for what Union County did. And Doug (Mallory) and Kristen (Yeager) did everything they humanly could to help." "I'm still in survival mode," Doug said recently while Kristen scurried behind him in the kitchen. "I could feel the fire's heat, though it was 4 to 5 miles away. Flaming pine cones fell from the sky like grenades. Helicopters buzzed back and forth. Made me think of Vietnam. We didn't think any help was coming.

"We provided food as best we could. Commissioner Susan Roberts helped make close to 300 sandwiches. Some firefighters upon arrival had not eaten in two days."

"We just made sandwiches and prayed," Kristen inserts.

Area residents, grateful for Paul, Doug and Kristen, realize it will take time for all to piece their lives together. However, with adequate moisture in the winter, Kristen says, "There's at least one thing to hope for. At least there should be plenty of mushrooms next spring."



Courtesy of Katherine Stickroth

Paul Karvoski, Emergency Management Services Director for Wallowa County.



Courtesy of Doug Mallory

Grizzly Bear Complex fire approaches Troy