

State releases data on retardant, water use in summer wildfires

So, just how severe was Oregon's wildfire season last summer? About 838,000 gallons' worth, according to Neal Laugle, the Department of Forestry's (ODF) aviation unit manager. That's how much liquid retardant the department's air tankers dumped on fires in 2015. And that figure doesn't include the thousands of gallons of water dropped by ODF contracted helicopters in close support of firefighters on the ground.

The window of opportunity for stopping a new blaze from growing large has shrunk from days to hours, due to the extreme summer weather and forest fuel conditions. Fire managers with ODF and the fire associations increasingly rely on air power to even the odds, launching air and ground resources simultaneously, which often shaves response time to minutes.

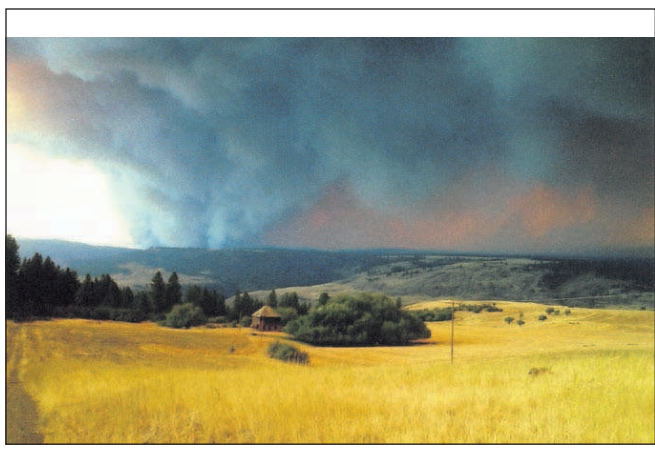
ODF's contracted large air tanker can reach a fire quickly and deliver 3,000 gallons of retardant in a single load. This slows fire growth and buys time for fire engines and hand crews to arrive on scene and begin direct attack. Single-engine air tankers (SEATs) use their speed and maneuverability to box in a fire with multiple, smaller retardant drops. All told, air tankers logged more than 700 flight hours last summer. The agency's helicopters put in 834 hours slinging water to hot spots with their cable-suspended buckets.

Statistics currently available are for land west of the Cascades protected by ODF the fire associations. Last summer, most of the aerial firefighting took place east of the Cascades (86 percent), followed by southern Oregon (14 percent), and northwestern Oregon (less than one percent).

In 2015, the Douglas Forest Protective Association in Douglas County flew 60 helicopter missions and also



Steve Tool/Chieftain
This helicopter is heading out to dump water from the Grande Ronde River onto the Grizzly Bear Complex fire near Troy on Aug. 20.



Courtesy of Bob Morse
The Grizzly Bear Complex fire, as seen from Lost Prairie area in August.

assisted ODF's Southwest Oregon District and the Willamette National Forest. A small plane flew 55 missions that included fire detection, monitoring of existing fires and guiding air operations (air tankers

and helicopters) over fires.

The department's Southwest Oregon District (Jackson and Josephine counties) conducted 150 missions, including air tanker and helicopter flights. Helicopters performed air attack, helitack (insertion of firefighters at fires, along with making water drops) and transport of personnel and cargo.

Coos Forest Protective Association logged 55 flight

hours on 19 different fires in Coos and Douglas counties to quench the flames with water drops. In addition, CFPA aircraft flew reconnaissance during lightning events to detect new fires.

ODF's aggressive firefighting tactics can create an "airshow" of multiple tankers and helicopters over an active fire. When the meter is running on all these aircraft, costs mount quickly. But stopping even one high-potential blaze from spreading to thousands of acres can save millions of dollars in the long term.

As an example, the 26,000-acre Stouts Creek Fire in Douglas County cost \$37 million to extinguish. And that is just for suppression. Damage to the forest resource, which includes timber as well as fish and wildlife habitats, typically totals at least three times the firefighting expense.

No one can accurately predict the intensity of future fire seasons. But the current trend has the department, its partner resource agencies and private forest landowners scrambling to meet the challenge. Aviation undoubtedly will continue to play a major role in Oregon's fire protection system in the years to come.

New batch of laws to take effect in 2016

By Jade McDowell
East Oregonian

As Oregonians prepare to ring in 2016, they're also preparing for a slate of new laws that go into effect on Jan. 1.

Here's a look at how they will affect the lives of Oregonians.

Workplace: Some of the most notable laws are part of the "fair shot" package passed by the legislature this summer in an effort to expand protections and opportunities for workers.

Every business with more than 10 employees will be required to provide sick leave for their workers in 2016 — even those who are part-time or paid by the hour. Sick leave policies can still vary by employer, but each will be required to provide at least one hour of sick leave for every 30 hours worked, up to 40 hours a year.

Oregon is also "banning the box" in 2016, making it illegal for employers to ask on a job application whether an applicant has a criminal history. They can still ask during an interview, but the idea is to prevent blanket discrimination of ex-offenders by allowing them to get a foot in the door.

Employers will no longer be allowed to forbid workers to inquire about their co-workers wages, or disclose their own salaries. And employers will be barred from requiring their employees create personal social media accounts, provide the passwords to their accounts or promote the company on their personal profiles.

Domestic workers like nannies and housekeepers will be extended several new protections in 2016, including mandatory breaks, paid vacation time and recourse against harassment.

Law enforcement: The legislature also worked to provide increased protections to crime victims.

The statute of limitations on rape will double in 2016, allowing prosecution up to 12 years after the

crime occurred instead of six. If the crime happened to a minor, the victim has until age 30 to come forward.

Secretly filming someone in a place of "presumed privacy" — including bathrooms and locker rooms — will be upgraded from a misdemeanor to a felony in 2016. That law complements a slew of other invasion-of-privacy laws that came into effect in 2015, including a ban on "upskirting" (intentionally photographing up a woman's skirt or down her blouse without permission) and "revenge porn" (posting nude photographs or video of someone online with the intent to humiliate them).

Federal laws banning those convicted of domestic violence or subject to a restraining order from owning firearms were only enforceable by federal agents in the past, but starting in 2016 other law enforcement will also be able to remove guns from convicted abusers.

A new law also protects someone who seeks medical help for the victim of a drug overdose from being arrested or prosecuted based on evidence only obtained because the person sought help.

Police also will be able to break into a vehicle and free an animal if they believe temperatures inside the vehicle are endangering the animal's life, and calling in a bomb threat or other false report about a hazard in a public building will be a Class A misdemeanor.

Education: Most of the education bills passed in 2015 don't take effect until the new school year starts next fall, but a "student bill of rights" pertaining to standardized testing will take effect in January.

The law allows parents to opt their child out of standardized test for any reason, and requires schools to send parents information about each test and their right to opt their student out.

Miscellaneous: Starting in January, drivers will be able to pump their own gas from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. in counties with fewer than 40,000 people, which includes Wallowa County.

It will be illegal to use unmanned aerial vehicles for hunting or fishing.

Using an electronic cigarette, also known as vaping, will be banned in offices, restaurants and other places where smoking is already banned.

Pharmacists will be allowed to prescribe birth control directly to women, saving them a trip to the doctor's office, and insurers will be required to cover up to a 12-month supply in one purchase.

And in March, the speed limit will increase to 70 miles per hour on Interstate 84 east of The Dalles.

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

This week's athlete of the week is Joseph Charter School senior Satori Albee.

Over a three-game stretch from Dec. 11-19, Satori averaged 13 points and 13 rebounds a game for the Eagles. She led the team in both categories with 18 points and 17 rebounds in a loss to Arlington at the Wallowa Lions Tournament on Dec. 12.

A gifted and multi sport athlete, Albee excels at volleyball as well.

As it happens, Albee is also a student athlete, who makes regular appearances on her school's honor roll.

Albee is the daughter of Cameron and Kristin Albee of Joseph.

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SATORI ALBEE



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