

STORMS BRING FIRST LIGHTNING-IGNITED FIRES OF THE SEASON



Ellen Morris Bishop

Lightning strikes the grasslands north of Enterprise on Saturday, July 13. The storms over the weekend produced 30 to 40 ground strikes in Wallowa County.

Thunderstorms strike Northeast Oregon

Dick Mason
LaGrande Observer

A storm that swept through the region Monday afternoon hit Southeast Washington the hardest but also impacted Union and Wallowa counties. In Wallowa county, it sparked the first lightning-kindled fires of the season, signaling that fire season has arrived.

Wallowa County received an estimated 30 to 40 lightning strikes, most of which were north of Enterprise, according to information from the Blue Mountain Interagency District Center. Despite the presence of some rainfall with the storm, at least two of the

strikes ignited small fires, one five miles from Lostine and another three miles from Flora. Lightning strikes from the storm on Saturday evening also knocked out Internet service for many in Wallowa County.

It is not known how many strikes Union County received, but it was less than Wallowa County, Jerry Garrett, of the Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center, said.

Northeast Oregon and Southeast Washington received about 600 total lightning strikes during the

storm, Garrett said.

Wind speeds reached 55 miles per hour in Walla Walla, Washington, where downed power lines were reported, according to John Peck, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service.

The storm systems and stormy weather, which the National Weather Service began issuing warnings for late last week, was caused by a mix of high temperatures and high humidity.

"This created unstable conditions," Peck said.

McKee withdraws Big Sheep campground application

Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

On July 8, local contractor Andy McKee withdrew a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application to build an upscale campground on portions of about 825 acres of land he recently purchased on Big Sheep Divide, about 12 miles NE of Enterprise. The project, on land zoned timber-grazing, met stiff opposition from adjacent land owners. About one dozen had filed letters in opposition to the project with the Wallowa County Planning Department.

McKee purchased the land from Charles and Ramona Phillips. Ms Phillips is the chair of the Wallowa County planning commission. McKee initially filed the CUP on April 15, which asked for a conditional use for the campground, which is on land zoned as timber-grazing.

The most current conditional use permit application stated McKee would

provide upscale camping plots of about 20 acres each. Although an earlier application stated that some RV's or RV spaces would be provided, McKee withdrew that application when faced with opposition at the June Planning Commission meeting. He then prepared a revised version. The plan called for initial development of six sites with additional sites being added as market conditions indicated. The sites would have included a minimum 25 ft. fire break and a propane fire pit provided by McKee. No open fires would be allowed, nor would client ATVs or RVs be permitted. McKee also stated he thought the campground a good revenue source for his family business and the county as well.

However, in an email to the Chieftain on Friday, July 12, McKee said that he withdrew the application in order to tighten up the details and squash rumors of his intentions for his property.

Wildfire scorches Central Washington

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

MATTAWA, Wash. — Wildfire burned about 5,000 acres of sagebrush and grass on the south slope of Saddle Mountains about three miles north of Mattawa on Sunday before being brought under control.

About 15 farm homes were under temporary evacuation notice that was later reduced, said Kyle Foreman, Grant County Sheriff Office spokesman. More residences were under lower level of evacuation preparedness.

The fire was reported at 12:38 p.m. Sunday, July 14, by off-road motorcyclists one of whom apparently went down on his motorcycle catching grass on fire in the hills north of roads 24 and R Southwest, Foreman said. The fire appears to be accidental and was in an area open to motorcycles, hiking and public recreation, he said.

It's called the Powerline Fire because it started below powerlines that were not damaged, he said.

Wind spread the fire



Grant County Sheriff's Office /Capital Press

The Powerline Fire burns grass and sagebrush on southern slope of Saddle Mountains near Mattawa, Wash., on July 14.

eastward to north of Road O Southwest. Some 60 local firefighters and fire apparatus and 30 state and federal personnel, a helicopter and a plane "were able to get control" during the night as temperatures dropped and the fire slowed down, Foreman said.

An irrigation canal also kept the fire from spreading into farmland, he said.

"It may burn a couple of

days. We still have many areas burning and will try to create some containment to keep it from spreading and work inward to extinguish it," Foreman said.

The fire is in steep, rugged terrain that is hard to access, he said.

The fire should be manageable unless wind picks up, he said.

State mobilization was called so more firefight-

ers were arriving Monday with a command post and fire camp set up at Wahluke High School in Mattawa.

The fire is about one to 1.5 miles south of and parallel to the 243 Fire that burned in Crab Creek and Symrna canyons on the north side of Saddle Mountains, June 3-5. The cause of that fire remains under investigation by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

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