

# Root cause of feared mega-fire is fire deficit

## GUEST COLUMN

Rob Kalvins

From the depths of Hells Canyon to the high alpine peaks and wild rivers, Wallowa County is a landscape of superlatives. These places and the clean cold water, wildlife habitat, and freedom they provide are what make our corner of Oregon so special.

Our home has been shaped by physical disturbances like volcanism, glaciation, wind, and fire. For at least 16,000 years, people have been at work on it too. Neither nature nor humans are fading in influence. The Forest Service deserves praise for recognizing that practical reality.

For about a century, government agencies and private industry have become very good at putting out small wildfires. Coupled with other forms of fire exclusion, past mismanagement, and development, many of our forests have changed a great deal. For some, this is a crisis.

A smart guy named Albert Einstein once said, “we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

With increasing development and climate change being accepted by all but the most intransigent, there is no doubt we are facing a serious situation. We don't have a lot of time to keep repeating past mistakes. This year, on a limited scale, the Forest Service tried something different.

Welcome weather created an opportunity to take a calculated risk and let a small number of wildfires burn under watchful eyes. The most notable local example was the Granite Gulch fire in the Eagle Cap Wilderness.

And it was a risk. Though putting out wildfire is dangerous, expensive, and ultimately counterproductive, there are economic, political, and social pressures calling for more of the same.

Influenced by Smokey Bear, many of us reflexively see all wildfire as destructive and scary. Someday the negative risk to human values will be realized. However, taking a calculated risk over certain failure is a wise course.

The decision also helps build trust. The public is often asked to support increasing the pace and scale of logging in the name of restoration. Meaningful restoration is bigger than just changing the makeup of trees that

grow in a place, it's also about restoring natural processes. Appropriate thinning can be part of the solution, but if we want to fix the patient we have to do more than treat the symptoms.

Counter-intuitive as it may seem, the root cause of the feared “mega-fire” is a fire deficit.

Especially in an age of climate change, we aren't much more likely to stop natural disturbances like insects and fire any more than hurricanes or floods. Trying to restore natural systems with more fire suppression and logging is only making the patient sicker. If we are logging to “set the landscape up for fire”, it only makes sense to take advantage of opportunities to let nature do its work.

Especially in an age of increasing uncertainty, we all have an interest in maintaining functioning landscapes and the values they provide. Finding balance between natural and active restoration can be a challenge. However, we hope the choices made on the Hollow Log, Granite Gulch, and other wildfires represent a step towards achieving it.

**Rob Kalvins**  
Oregon Wild, Northeast Oregon Field Coordinator

# Fall prescribed burning projects to begin on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest

May include up to 11,500 acres

USFS  
Wallowa Whitman NF

BAKER CITY, Ore. — As cooler, wetter weather descends on Eastern Oregon, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest will begin implementing its fall prescribed burning program. Prescribed fire managers are prepared to implement hazardous fuel reduction burns at many project sites across the National Forest. Please note that weather and other site-specific conditions will influence whether projects can be implemented, where and when prescribed burning occurs, and how many acres can be treated.

This fall, Wallowa-Whitman prescribed fire information is available to the public on a new interactive map. To access the interactive map, please visit <https://go.usa.gov/xVseH>.

Over the last five years, the Forest has increased prescribed burning by 20 percent. Prescribed fire has a wide variety of benefits, including reducing dead and down fuels, thinning understory trees, stimulating fire-tolerant plants, enhancing forage and browse, reducing the risk of stand-replacement fires, and creating strategic fuel breaks in urban-interface areas. Fire history studies have shown that fire has long been a dominant natural process in the Blue Mountains — maintaining open, park-like conditions in low- to mid-elevation forests of ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, and larch. The Wallowa-Whitman's prescribed fire program allows fire to play. It's natural on the landscape under controlled conditions.

“By getting good fire back into the forest, we're protecting communities while restoring and sustaining the land,” forest Fuels

Program Manager Steve Hawkins said. “We appreciate the cooperation and understanding of our stakeholders as we work toward our shared goal of healthy landscapes in Eastern Oregon.”

Hazardous fuels reduction is not without impacts. Smoke associated with prescribed burning is challenging to forecast and can be a concern for vulnerable populations. Managers work closely with the Oregon State Smoke Forecast Center on a daily basis to determine when, where, and how much to burn. If a forecast predicts that a burn will significantly impact a community or smoke-sensitive area, it will be rescheduled to a more favorable date.

The Wallowa-Whitman could burn up to 15,000 acres across the forest this fall as conditions allow. The areas listed below are prioritized. To access maps of the burn units, please visit <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/maps/6289/>

incident/maps/6289/

Please note that where and when burning occurs, and how many acres are treated within a project area, may vary due to weather, fuel conditions, smoke dispersion, and other variables. It is anticipated that not all areas will be within prescription and will not be implemented this fall, while other project areas may have additional acres within prescription that may be implemented.

For more information about the Wallowa-Whitman prescribed burning program, visit <https://go.usa.gov/xVseH> or contact Steve Hawkins at (541) 523-1262. Additional information is available on the Wallowa-Whitman 2019 Prescribed Fire InciWeb site at <https://inciweb.nwcg.gov/incident/6289>.

For further information, please contact:

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, Supervisor Office at (541) 523-6391.

# Gov. Brown bans sale of flavored vaping products for six-months

By Claire Withycombe  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown has imposed a six-month ban on the sale of flavored vaping products.

Eight cases of respiratory illness associated with vaping have been reported in Oregon as of Oct. 1.

In two of those cases, the patients died, according to the Oregon Health Authority.

People vape by breathing in and out through electronic cigarettes or vape pens that heat liquid to create a vapor. That liquid can contain nicotine, THC and other ingredients such as flavorings. The industry has been criticized for promoting sweet-flavored products that appeal to children, such as bubble gum and crème brulee flavors.

The ban does not cover



Wikipedia Commons

**Ore. Gov. Brown has banned flavored vaping products for six months while their effects on health and culpability in deaths are investigated.**

unflavored vaping products.

“My first priority is to safeguard the health of all Oregonians,” Brown said in a statement Friday, Oct. 4. “By keeping potentially unsafe products off of store shelves and out of the hands of Oregon's children and youth, we prevent exposing more people to potentially dangerous chemical com-

pounds, and help lessen the chance of further tragedy for any other Oregon family.”

Brown added that the “safest option” for people right now is stop vaping altogether, in line with what State Health Officer Dean Sidelinger advised Sept. 26.

“Until we know more about what is causing this illness, please, do not vape,”

Brown said. “Encourage your friends and family members to stop vaping immediately. Talk to your children about the dangers of vaping. The risks are far too high.”

Last week, Rep. Cheri Helt, R-Bend, called for a temporary ban on vaping products to dig into the causes of illness and death that have resulted from vaping.

“Protecting young Oregonians from the dangers of flavored vaping products is the right decision,” Helt said in a statement Friday. “I encourage the Oregon Health Authority to go further to understand and ensure the safety of all vaping products. Next year, I'll seek bipartisan legislation to protect the lives and health of Oregonians who use vaping products, including bans if necessary.”

# 2019 ODF fire season extinguished!

Oregon Department of Forestry

local fire department before starting a burn.

SALEM, Ore. — The 2019 fire season officially ends today on all lands protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). The last district to end its fire season — the Southwest Oregon District covering Josephine and Jackson counties — did so this morning at 9 a.m.

The 923 wildfires on ODF-protected lands this year is about average. However, thanks to favorable conditions and successful initial attack, the 16,867 total acres burned is 56 percent below average. Based on the number of days in fire season as an agency, this year was the shortest fire season in the 21st century at only 99 days. This is about three weeks shorter than the 121-day fire season average for ODF.

“Thanks to a minimum number of wildfires on the landscape statewide, we were fortunate to have adequate resources to respond to fires on our jurisdiction,” said ODF Fire Protection Chief Ron Graham. “With two team deployments — to the Milepost 97 Fire and Ward Fire — we share in the success of the 2019 fire season with Oregon's complete and coordinated fire protection system, including forest and range landowners, local fire districts, Tribes, contractors, federal, state and county partners.”

The end of fire season removes restrictions on ODF-protected lands intended to prevent wildfire, such as on backyard debris burning and use of certain equipment. Many structural fire departments in Oregon, however, still require a permit for debris burning, so check with your

As Oregon transitions out of fire season, ODF districts across the state are shifting their attention to wildfire prevention efforts. Clearing vegetation, creating defensible space around homes, and keeping those debris piles under control are just a few ways ODF is working with local landowners, members of the public and fellow fire response agencies to mitigate wildfire risk.

“While we are seeing cool, rainy fall weather, it is important to note conditions can change quickly,” Graham said. “Given most of the lightning this time of year is accompanied by rain, human-caused fire starts tend to increase in number. People are anxious to burn backyard debris piles and can get complacent with fire safety. We are grateful for the help of every Oregonian working together to prevent wildfires year round.”

The start and end of fire season are set by each fire protection district based on the fuel conditions in their area. The arrival of steady, soaking rain coupled with cooler temperatures and shorter day lengths usually triggers the closure of fire season. The 2019 fire season varied in length from 122 day in ODF's Southwest Oregon District to just 78 days in the Northwest Oregon District.

For more tips on how to keep yourself, your loved ones and your property safe from wildfire at any time of year, visit ODF's Fire Prevention webpage at [www.oregon.gov/ODF/Fire/pages/FirePrevention.aspx](http://www.oregon.gov/ODF/Fire/pages/FirePrevention.aspx) or go to the Keep Oregon Green website at [www.KeepOregonGreen.org](http://www.KeepOregonGreen.org).

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**ATHLETE OF THE WEEK**

**Federico Buoncampagni**  
This week's athlete of the week honor goes to Federico Buoncampagni, a junior at Joseph Charter School. An exchange student from Italy, Buoncampagni, 17, puts his soccer skills to work as kicker on the Eagles football team. The senior regularly kicks field goals and extra points as well as launching numerous kickoffs into opponent end zones, resulting in touchdowns.

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