

Commissioners receive fire season update

By RONALD BOND
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — What could be in store this fire season — and how it is being handled locally — carried much of the discussion at the Wallowa County Board of Commissioners regular session on Wednesday, July 7.

U.S. Forest Service staff spoke with the board to provide a “check-in” for the current season.

Already, two large fires have burned in Wallowa County, with the Joseph Canyon and Dry Creek fires in June combining to scorch about 9,200 acres. The conditions for the months ahead are not encouraging, either.

“We’re seeing really, I would say, maybe not unprecedented conditions, but concerning conditions,” Brian Anderson, the new district ranger for the Wallowa Mountains Office, said.

He said resources, thus far, have been able to handle the fires that have popped up — not only the two in the county’s Northeastern corner, but also ones that have burned across the border in Idaho, or in neighboring counties.

“We’re being successful attacking those one at a time,” Anderson said. “The concern is if we get more than one at a time, and our resources get stretched. Nationally, the picture isn’t much better. It’s kind of the same across the West.”

If conditions worsen — which is likely, considering the July forecast calls for hotter and drier weather — the chances for worse fires jump.

“It’s possible that as we get (further) into July and August we could have a shortage of resources,” Anderson said. “We could have a fire situation that becomes demanding, quite honestly.”

Anderson noted that the USFS can allow fires on its land to burn to “play its natural role in a landscape.”

He said, however, that the conditions and resources



Ronald Bond/Wallowa County Chieftain
Brian Anderson, U.S. Forest Service district ranger for the Wallowa Mountains Office, answers a question from the Board of Commissioners during regular session Wednesday, July 7, 2021.

may not allow that method to be as readily considered.

“Allowing fire to play its role in a landscape, that is something that the Forest Service is interested in doing, both in wilderness and non-wilderness,” he said. “For each fire we get, we’ll have that discussion, but my gut feeling, my intuition, is we’re going to be conservative this year because of the conditions, because of the resource availability.”

He added, though, that the safety of firefighters will always be the first item considered when discussing how to handle a blaze.

“As I said before, we’re interested in committing responders only when they can do so safely and have an effective response in terms of containing the fire,” he said.

Commissioner Todd Nash shared his concern about what the conditions could be in a month given that water is lacking already.

“Normally in Wallowa County historically, ranchers don’t cut hay until after the Fourth of July, because June is so wet,” he said. “For us, this is pretty historic. ... I can’t imagine what this is going to look like in what is historically our dry time in

August. “It’s very concerning, very concerning to everybody.”

Commissioner John Hillcock called out an area of mismanagement on the Cayuse Flat, saying a decade-long disallowance of grazing has resulted in a “tremendous fuel load” in the region. He added that his pleas to officials with regard to the rule — at the local and national level — have fallen on deaf ears.

“There’s 10 years worth of grass up there, and I’m not getting this call from the ranchers as much as I am the recreationists that have gone up there for years, and they’re calling me and saying, ‘This place is going to burn, and it’s going to burn hot,’” Hillcock said. “We need to use cattle as a tool for fire management. You guys won’t do it and we need to get something done with that.”

“Being new I’m not 100% to speed, but point taken,” Anderson replied. “I understand what you’re saying.”

Nash also pointed to a lack of logging as part of his concern.

“We have a way to go before the county aligns with the Forest Service on actual (logging) goals, and right

now, you’re moving into an area that doesn’t have aspirational goals. There’s a lot of complacency.”

Also

In other action, the board: Approved the hiring of three county employees — including two to temporary youth employment — as well as the resignation of two employees and the termination of one.

Approved a resolution for reappointing members to the Early Learning Hub.

Approved an agreement between the county and state for map maintenance for fiscal year 2021-22.

Approved an easement for Pacific Power to run an underground wire diagonally across Dunham Road north of Enterprise.

Voted to approve a new annual \$6,000 fee for disaster recovery of the county data in the wake of a breach or malware attack.

Voted to approve a resolution — one Commissioner Susan Roberts said is required by the county insurance company — to extend workers compensation coverage to volunteers of the Wallowa Lake County Service District.

Local 4-H students qualify for nationals

Bailey Vernam and Devin Schreiber advance to competition in Kentucky

Chieftain staff

ENTERPRISE — Two local 4-H students will get an opportunity to represent their county in the Bluegrass State later this year.

Nine county 4-H members took part in the 2021 4-H spring classic, which was held virtually in May, and of the group, Bailey Vernam and Devin Schreiber qualified to compete in the national 4-H contest, which will be held in Kentucky in the fall.

The two, along with Chance Arbogast, made up the local senior 4-H horse delegation. They were among more than 100 students who competed statewide to show their animal-science knowledge.

Vernam took first place in Prepared Public Speaking, and will compete in public speaking in the fall. Vernam and Schreiber also joined with Deschutes County members to form a horse judging team, and took first place. Schreiber will compete in nationals as part of Oregon’s horse-judging team.

Contestants can only

compete in one event at nationals.

Locally, there were several other high placers.

Arbogast took second in the individual presentation contest. Vernam, individually, was second in horse judging. Vernam was sixth individually in horse bowl, and the team took fourth. Vernam also was part of a third-place hippology team.

The senior dog judging team of Vernam, Schreiber and Dakota DeLyria placed second, and Vernam was first from an individual standpoint. That trio, along with Pearce Schnetzky, placed second in the dog quiz bowl, with Vernam taking third individually, DeLyria fourth, Schreiber fifth and Schnetzky eighth.

Meanwhile, Owyhee Harguess, Tylee Evans and Kaylee Eaves and Madisen Benjamin took fourth as a team in intermediate dog judging. The team of Eaves, Evans, Harguess and Wyatt Suter placed third in intermediate quiz bowl, with Harguess taking fifth individually.

PDX Contemporary Art coming to Lostine

Chieftain staff

LOSTINE — PDX Contemporary Art is hosting a pop-up art gallery show starting Friday, July 16, at the Lostine Tavern.

PDX Contemporary Art is a Portland-based art gallery founded in 1996.

The gallery, which will feature 28 artists, will be open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, with the exception of July 19, when it will be closed.

The event winds down July 26.

The Lostine Tavern is currently closed, but according to a press release continues to host classes and community events.

Mediums set to be on display include prints, paintings, photographs, ceramics, bronzes, books and more, and will be for sale, with a portion of the proceeds being donated to the Lostine basketball court effort.

Records:

Continued from Page A2

11:47 p.m. — 911 for non-emergency near Wallowa Lake.

JULY 10

7:00 a.m. — Residential burglary alarm set off in Enterprise, false alarm.

8:14 a.m. — 911 call reporting disturbance in rural Lostine.

8:41 a.m. — Weapons denial in Wallowa.

10:48 a.m. — Welfare check requested in Enterprise.

11:33 a.m. — Civil dispute in Lostine.

12:02 p.m. — Suspicious vehicle reported in Enterprise.

3:08 p.m. — 911 call requesting public assist in Joseph.

3:34 p.m. — Report of domestic disturbance in Wallowa.

5:41 p.m. — Follow-up investigation — rural Enterprise.

7:16 p.m. — Report of fire in rural Joseph.

8:08 p.m. — Civil dispute in Enterprise.

8:21 p.m. — Agency assist requested in Enterprise.

8:36 p.m. — 911 call for non-emergency in rural Joseph.

10:00 p.m. — 911 for non-emergency in Joseph.

10:52 p.m. — Agency assist in rural Enterprise.

11:31 p.m. — 911 request for public assist in Enterprise.

JULY 11

4:34 a.m. — 911 report of suspicious person in Joseph.

9:28 a.m. — Civil dispute reported in Enterprise.

10:56 a.m. — Found cell phone reported in Wallowa Lake.

10:59 a.m. — Civil dispute reported in rural Enterprise.

1:28 p.m. — Public assist in Enterprise.

5:02 p.m. — Overdue

hiker reported in Eagle Cap Wilderness.

5:59 p.m. — Scam call reported in Enterprise.

6:30 p.m. — Welfare check

request in Enterprise.

6:51 p.m. — Calf out in rural Lostine.

9:38 p.m. — Noise complaint in Joseph.

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