

**Fires, Flood, Hail Hit Reservation**

# Brief Storm Wreaks Havoc



Vernon Tanewasha of the Roads Department found hailstones buried underneath debris on Tenino Road two days after the storm July 25.

A few short moments of violent storming July 25 threw the reservation into a turmoil that could only be matched by a grade B disaster movie. Unlike the silver screen, however, the effects of wind, lightning, hail and rain posed a continuing threat and created many hours of tedious labor.

Sudden high winds from the north brought welcome relief to those suffering from days of sultry weather, but they also ushered in a storm of unusual intensity. Power lines were blown down starting a 20-acre grass fire within sight of the Fire Control Office. Lightning struck the timber and range country repeatedly, setting off at least twelve different blazes.

Hail the size of marbles and larger battered Kah-Nee-Ta and the upper Tenino Valley, sending tourists and livestock for cover. And as if that wasn't enough of a show, driving rain washed tons of rock, dirt and trees down into the Tenino Valley causing employees to abandon the Tribal Administrative Center which lies in the flood plain below.

**Fires**

Thirteen fires, twelve of which were lightning-caused, burned simultaneously in all

corners of the reservation, from the northern fir country to the Simnasho rangeland to the Ponderosa Pine in the south. Two helicopters patrolled the entire reservation, assisted in putting water on the blazes, and transported tools and men to fire sites. At least forty volunteers and employees of the fire control, forestry, roads, and natural resources departments as well as logging outfits, were deployed to control the active fires and watch for smoldering ones.

Forty to fifty mile per hour winds knocked down a power line along the Kah-Nee-Ta Road at 4:00 causing a loss of

power of the Fire Control Office. A glance out the window revealed a fire beginning on the sage and brush covered hill across the highway, but despite the proximity of the fire the fallen line made it difficult to approach.

PP&L cut off the power and pumpers and men moved in to fight the blaze which spread rapidly southward across the hillside. According to Larry Whalawitsa, Fire Control Officer, firefighting was complicated by a westerly wind that arose and blew flames up the hill making it inaccessible by trucks. A heli-

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Junipers blazed and paths of fire raced across the dry hillside after high winds blew down a power line across from the fire control office July 25. A sudden storm brought winds, lightning, hail and rain, touching off fires and a flood.

(Sandy Rangila Photo)

## Helicopters Aid in Fire Control

At recent timber and range fires on the reservation the star of the show has been a small but zippy helicopter equipped with a fifty gallon bucket. In an endless circular flight patter, the chopper fills its bucket with water, swoops over the flames and — if the aim is right — douses them, to the cheers of onlookers.

For these heroics the helicopter and its pilot receive \$169 a day for standby and \$90 an hour for flight time. This is

the first year that the BIA has contracted for helicopter service on a regular, season-long basis. Previously aerial firefighting was requested only in emergencies.

"It is expensive," admits Fire Control Officer Larry Whalawitsa, "but in the long run it pays for itself."

Caveman Helicopters out of Grants Pass, in the person of pilot and owner Jim Hendershot, has been under contract with the BIA since the beginning of fire season. The flying ace and his machine have seen a great deal of action in this summer's fire hazardous drought conditions.

Commenting on the efficiency of fighting fires from the air, Whalawitsa said, "They're very good at initial attacks and they get the water into inaccessible places."

The chopper not only puts water on fires but also hauls equipment and manpower to sites.

Perhaps one of the most important although least flashy functions of the air service is to regularly patrol the reservation as a kind of flying look-out.

"He can cover the open areas so much quicker. He gets the jump on fires and has kept many fires small."

The Deschutes River area is patrolled by air on the weekends when the incidence of illegal campfires is apt to be high. Radio contract with look-outs and ground vehicles makes fast work of identifying and attacking a problem.

In the sparing of timber and range land lie the savings that Whalawitsa sees in the helicopter work. "If he spots one abandoned campfire that could turn into a range or forest fire, than he's more than paid for himself, especially with the dry conditions as they are," remarked Whalawitsa.

In emergencies such as the lightning storm last week, additional helicopter time might be required. Both fire fighting and reconnaissance were provided by Columbia Helicopters and pilot Dan "Marty" Martin

when a dozen fires had personnel and equipment spread quite thin. Such temporary help runs a flat \$260 per hour of flight.

The BIA has no immediate plans to acquire its own helicopter.

Whalawitsa indicated that since this is the first summer for full time air reconnaissance the desirability of such an in-house service has yet to be determined.


In the meantime whirlybirds will be going where look-outs and pumpers can't — and perhaps even stealing the show.



Pilot Dan "Marty" Martin of Columbia Helicopters was called in to assist in firefighting and reconnaissance while thirteen fires burned

or smoldered after the July 25 storm. Here he points out a distant fire on Forest Service land while making a sweep of the reservation.

CDS Photo



**Spilyay Tymoo**

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