

Forty-Acre Burn

■ Tribal firefighters help in a federal-state effort to keep down the weeds and prevent something uncontrollable from starting.

By Spencer Olson, *Smoke Signals* Intern, with Ron Karten

On Tuesday, July 12, 2005, 40 acres of field were burned to the ground in an organized fashion. The burn reduced the amount of dry weeds and grasses that make fuel for runaway fires, and also killed noxious and non-Native weeds on the lower part of the Baskett Butte back behind the 2,500-acre Baskett Slough Wildlife Preserve along State Highway 22.

The area around the burn is a high traffic area for tourists with a fire risk from the dry vegetation. The controlled burn prevented nature from starting one that could go out of control. Killing weeds allows more Native plants to survive, and, in turn, helps the insects and other animals that live off of them.

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Native Americans have burned fields here for the same purposes for hundreds of years (see *Smoke Signals*, 8/01/02).

"We've been doing this for four years solid," said Brian Gales, Fire Management Officer for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was known on the field as the "burn boss." The group has about 30 more burns scheduled for this year, he said.

The burn was a joint effort that included the federal Bureau of Land Management, federal and state departments of Fish and Wildlife, the Oregon Department of Forestry, along with eight Tribal firefighters from the Natural Resources Division, and two Tribal rigs, one a fire engine.

Jeff Nepstad, Silviculture & Protection Coordinator for the Tribe's Natural Resources Division, called the exercise "good experience" for the firefighters, who were to do a slash burn on Reservation lands later in the month. Many from the crew have

already begun fighting forest fires from Oregon to Arizona to Nevada.

The burning costs about \$200 an acre or about \$8,000 for this field. Funding came from the state Department Fish and Wildlife.

At this burn, four normal engines and one contingency engine ensured safety.

"We drive around and if the fire gets close, we wet it down," said Tribal member Colby Drake.

The burning itself was very organized. As "Burn Boss," Gales monitored fire conditions like weather and he coordinated safety efforts. "Be ready to be flexible," he said to the crew before starting. All those involved in the burning stayed in

contact with him with radios.

A test burn measured how far and fast and in which direction the fire would burn. The test burn also created a wall of pre-burnt ground, so if the fire were to rage out of control, it would not get past.

After the test burn, the field was burned in strips with firefighters spraying a stream of a burning liquid made of one-third gasoline and two-thirds diesel fuel. It looked like they were spraying fire.

"See how they kind of suck each other together," said Greg Hagedorn, a Fire Management Specialist with U.S. Fish & Wildlife. He referred to the rows of flames.

The entire process took about an hour, with a little time afterwards dedicated to "touchups" or missed spots. Once the burning was complete, only a barren black landscape remained, but after only two weeks, said Gales, the field would start to green up again with Native plants and grasses.



Traditional Practice — Firefighters from Tribal, state and federal departments produced a steady, controlled burn that cleaned up 40 acres in about an hour.

Kid Columnist Interns With *Smoke Signals*



Spencer Olson

Photo by Ron Karten

By Rhiannon Wheeler, Summer Intern

A promising young Tribal member is making a name for himself in the Grand Ronde community. Spencer Olson, a freshman at Willamina High School, is now interning at the *Smoke Signals*.

As a writer, Spencer has accomplished a great deal in his fourteen years. He attended a writing workshop in Montana where he gained experience, then when he came home from that trip, his aunt thought that it might be a good idea to submit some of the work he did to the *Statesmen Journal*.

After reviewing his writing, they decided to give him his own column.

In the section called: In The Know School & Youth: Focus on Students, where he shares his opinions that kids face today.

In a quick interview with him here's what he had to say:

Rhiannon Wheeler: What effect do you hope your writing has on people?
Spencer Olson: My writing makes people happy, as long as they read it; I am happy, even if they send me hate mail.

RW: How did you hear about the *Smoke Signals* internship?

SO: I saw something in the *Smoke Signals* and thought it was a good way to make some money.

RW: Does your Native American roots inspire your writing in any way?

SO: A lot of experiences of the ancestors in history give me a unique perspective on event today and I think about what if it had happened to them back then.

Otherwise, Spencer is your ordinary 4.0 GPA kid. He enjoys computers and reading. He watches CSI, listens to christen pop and NEWS Radio. He hopes to attend Oregon State University majoring in Machine Engineering and minor in Journalism. If he goes into journalism then he would like to write in the Options Section.



Firestarter — Doug Malatore (Blackfeet), a recent addition to the Tribal Natural Resources Department, lights up the grasslands on the Baskett Butte near Highway 22. Malatore comes to Grand Ronde with experience as a "Hot Shot" firefighter in Montana.

Photos by Ron Karten