

# Center designated as emergency shelter

## FIRE continued from front page

Ronde Reservation's boundary and 10 miles from the community of Grand Ronde.

The Tribe's Emergency Operations Team, headed by Emergency Operations Coordinator Jamie Baxter, was activated on Wednesday evening and met again numerous times on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday until the state Department of Forestry announced that the fire was 50 percent contained and firefighting efforts were in the mop-up stage.

Tribal Council authorized the Emergency Operations Team to monitor and respond to the situation and directed Tribal staff to cooperate.

"Tribal Council continued to monitor the situation and remained fully engaged and informed," said Tribal Council Chairman Reyn Leno.

The wildland fire started at approximately 5 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 19, nine miles north of Willamina in the area of East Creek Road, which intersects with Willamina Creek Road. The cause remains under investigation.

Willamina Creek Road was blocked off at Coast Creek Road for area residents heading north and four cabins along East Creek Road were placed under mandatory evacuation notices, which were lifted on Sunday, Aug. 23.

No structures were damaged and the cost to fight the fire is estimated at almost \$1.4 million.

In reaction to the fire, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde closed its Reservation and timber lands on Thursday, Aug. 20, as tinder dry conditions and no forecast of rain continued in western Oregon.

The Oregon Department of Forestry requested that the Tribe's Natural Resources Department personnel assist it by covering Forestry's patrol areas in Yamhill County while state personnel battled the blaze. More than 266 people were eventually involved in extinguishing the Willamina Creek Fire.

The Tribe also sent 100 cases of water to Sheridan on Wednesday afternoon to assist those fighting the fire.

The fire was declared 95 percent contained on Wednesday, Aug. 26, a week after it had started.

## Hazy conditions

Fires farther away, however, posed a more immediate threat to the health and safety of residents living in the Grand Ronde community.

When winds shifted on Saturday, Aug. 22, smoke from large fires in eastern Oregon and Washington state blanketed the Willamette Valley and hazy conditions in Grand

**Engine crew firefighters from Oregon Department of Forestry's Astoria District mop up a stump hole at the site of the Willamina Creek Fire on Monday, Aug. 24.**

Ronde made it almost impossible to see Spirit Mountain from the Governance Center.

The Emergency Operations Team shifted priorities from monitoring the Willamina Creek Fire to caring for community residents with respiratory problems.

During a Saturday afternoon meeting, the Elders Activity Center was designated as an emergency shelter for Tribal members needing a place to stay because the center only brings in 15 percent outside air.

Elders Committee Chair Julie Duncan opened the Activity Center at 1 p.m. and it remained open through the morning of Monday, Aug. 24. Cots were provided for those who wanted to stay overnight.

Local Community Emergency Response Team volunteers Violet Folden and Gladys Hobbs, as well as Tribal Elder Jenny VanAtta helped monitor the Activity Center.

Thirteen people signed up on Saturday, but a majority returned to their homes before 10 p.m. Five people stayed overnight, three of which were volunteers.

On the morning of Sunday, Aug. 23, nine people and four children were at the Activity Center. A mobile medical team from the Tribe's Health & Wellness Clinic headed by Medical Director Dr. Lance Loberg examined 10 people and one respiratory-related prescription was filled.

Medical team members also included Registered Nurse DeAnna Glass, Pharmacy Technician Shelby Wren and Pharmacist Gary BarTEE, who remained in the Health & Wellness Center to fill any needed prescriptions.

"That was the first time a mobile medical team has ever been activat-



Photo by Michelle Alaimo

**Michelle Nave, a registered nurse at the Tribal Health & Wellness Center, takes notes during a meeting of the Tribe's Emergency Operations Team about the Willamina Creek Fire on Thursday, Aug. 20, in the Tribe's Emergency Operations Center that was set up in the Tribal Community Center. At left, the Willamina Creek Fire started on Wednesday, Aug. 19, and burned about 230 acres of heavily timbered land in Yamhill County.**



Photo Courtesy of Oregon Department of Forestry

ed here," Baxter said. "No one went to the hospital during the event and we did not overwhelm our local emergency medical system."

Boxed lunches prepared by Spirit Mountain Casino were served and Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe made breakfast and dinner on Sunday and breakfast on Monday.

Meanwhile, Housing Department and Advanced Security personnel checked on known vulnerable residents in Tribal housing to ensure that they were OK.

By late Sunday afternoon, the air quality in Grand Ronde improved significantly as an off-shore front pushed smoke eastward.

"I think we let the community know we care about them," Baxter said about the emergency effort that involved many Tribal employees working over the weekend. "I think they know that we are here for them."

Baxter added that the Tribe also learned that it can set up an emergency center quickly.

The Emergency Operations Team included numerous Tribal employees and

Tribal Council members, as well as representatives from West Valley Fire District, Yamhill County and Advanced Security.

Along with Baxter, Tribal employees involved included Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Martin, Social Services Department Manager David Fullerton, General Manager Dawn Doar, Housing Department Manager Shonn Leno, Nutrition Program Manager Kristy DeLoe, Publications Coordinator Dean Rhodes, Facilities Maintenance Supervisor Tyson Mercier, Finance Officer Chris Leno, Financial Risk Manager Pattie Mercier, Network Administrator Greg Patton, Senior Telecommunications Technician Mark Scheelar, Registered Nurse Michelle Nave, Grand Ronde Police Chief Al LaChance, Sgt. Jake McKnight and Officer Ron Wellborn, Advanced Security Housing Supervisor Jacob LaCombe, Silviculture and Fire Protection Program Manager Colby Drake, Housing Services Manager Deborah Kroeker, Planning Department Manager Rick George, Spirit Mountain Casino General Manager Stan Dillon, GIS Coordinator Volker Mell and Tribal Council members Reyn Leno and Tonya Gleason-Shepek, among others.

"I thought everybody did a great job," Gleason-Shepek said as the team held its last meeting on Monday, Aug. 24.

At the Tuesday, Aug. 25, Legislative Action Committee meeting, Leno cited Baxter and the rest of staff for their "great effort" over the weekend dealing with multiple issues – nearby wildfire, haze in Grand Ronde, a suspicious package and an attempted robbery at Grand Ronde Station. ■



Photo by Jen Warren/Oregon Department of Forestry