

‘The fire cause is undetermined at this time’

**BLUE HERON continued
from front page**

Hoses laid across Highway 99E forced the closure of the roadway and nearby train tracks.

According to a press release from the Clackamas Fire District No. 1, firefighters were called to the Blue Heron site at 2:06 p.m. Saturday for a report of a fire. Heavy black smoke was emanating from a large abandoned building – the old administrative office – at the south end of the property.

Fire crews attempted to locate the fire, ventilate the structure and search the building, but the fire was quickly upgraded and additional firefighting resources from the Tualatin Valley Fire District and Gladstone Fire Department were called in.

The fire conditions worsened, causing structural instability in the building and “extremely” high temperatures. Firefighters left the building and started defensive fire operations, using aerial ladders and waterways around the building to spray water from above and contain the fire.

Meanwhile, police formed a perimeter around the site and located Mejia. He was taken to the Clackamas County Jail. According to the Oregon Judicial Department, Mejia has faced charges dating back to 2012 including disorderly conduct, DUII and interfering with a police officer.

Firefighters stayed on the scene Saturday evening to ensure the fire did not spread to other buildings on the site and fire investigators were on scene on Sunday, Dec. 6, investigating the blaze’s cause.

Fire investigators concluded their preliminary investigation on Tuesday, Dec. 8, and could not determine the cause because the building collapsing under extreme fire conditions hampered their ability to conduct an in-depth examination of the scene. “The fire cause is undetermined at this time but remains under investigation pending further information and improved access to the building,” investigators said.



Contributed photo

Smoke rises from one of the buildings on the Tribally owned Blue Heron Paper Mill site on Saturday, Dec. 5.



A couple from Canby, who grew up in Oregon City, watched as smoke rises from one of the buildings on Saturday, Dec. 6.

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the Sunday, Dec. 6, General Council meeting held via the Zoom teleconferencing application, Tribal Council Chairwoman Cheryle A. Kennedy said the fire had been set intentionally.

Tribal General Manager David Fullerton, Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez, Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight, Lt. Tim Hernandez and Security Supervisor Roel Hernandez responded to Oregon City when alerted of the fire.

Kennedy said the property is insured and that the Tribe would continue to examine the status of Blue Heron.

On Monday, Dec. 7, Tribal Council Chief of Staff Stacia Hernandez said the fire’s effect on future development of the Blue Heron site remains unknown.

“We are currently finalizing our visioning document for the site,” she said. “At part of that process, we looked at future redevelopment scenarios and potential phasing. Saturday’s incident took place at the southern end of the property and in the Mill E complex, which has been identified for future redevelopment. However, it was not included in our plans for the first phase. We hope to learn more in the next few weeks and will be re-evaluating our strategy as necessary.”

Hernandez added that the Tribe will be assessing damages and hopes to have estimates for cleanup and demolition by the end of the year. ■

Detectives and Clackamas Fire arson investigators continue to investigate the fire’s cause and ask anyone with information about it to contact the Oregon City Police Department tip line at 503-905-3505.

No injuries were reported and a

damage estimate was not available.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde purchased the site in August 2019 for \$15.25 million. The Tribe also is in the process of purchasing another half-acre lot adjacent to the site at 450 Main St.

On the Tribe’s official Facebook page, it thanked firefighters for their efforts in containing the fire.

“Words can’t describe our gratitude to the men and women of Clackamas Fire, Tualatin Valley Fire and Rescue and Gladstone Fire for working to get the Blue Heron fire under control,” the statement said. “They kept everyone safe, stayed on scene through the night to make sure the fire didn’t spread and kept the site safe so fire investigators can begin their work as soon as possible.”

During opening statements for

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Photos by Timothy J. Gonzalez