



COURTESY PHOTO

When using internal combustion equipment in forests and woodlands, a single spark can start large blazes, such as in the case of the 26,000-acre Stout Creek Fire in 2015.

SPRING CLEANUP SHOULD PREVENT, NOT START WILDFIRES

SALEM — Many Oregonians have good intentions each spring when they set out to eliminate wildfire hazards around the home. But the tools they use may actually start a wildfire if not handled properly.

A sad example is the 2015 Stout Creek Fire in southwest Oregon. Reportedly caused by a resident mowing dry grass, this fire eventually grew to more than 26,000 acres and cost \$37 million to put out.

Kristin Babbs, president of the nonprofit fire prevention organization Keep Oregon Green, said improper use of mowers, chain saws and other equipment is the leading cause of wildfires on state-protected lands in Oregon.

"A spark from a hot exhaust system or a steel blade striking

a rock can easily start a blaze in dry grass or brush," she warned. "Keeping grass mowed low can reduce fire hazard, but mowing dry grass in the afternoon or on a hot day is very risky."

Babbs joins the Oregon Office of the State Fire Marshal and Oregon Department of Forestry in saying spring is the best time to prune, mow and clean up excess vegetation. "Do it while plants are still green, not during the summer when fuels are dry," Babbs said.

To minimize fire risk during spring cleanup, Babbs recommends the following:

- Follow current fire restrictions.

Check with the local Oregon Department of Forestry district or forest protective association to learn if there are any current restrictions or regulations on the use of power tools with internal combustion engines, such as lawn mowers, chainsaws and weed trimmers.

Some areas may restrict their use depending on weather and vegetation conditions.

- Mow before 10 a.m.

The best time of day to use gas-powered equipment is early morning, when the humidity is higher and temperatures are lower. Never mow when it's windy or excessively dry.

- Use the right tool for the

job

Lawn mowers are designed to mow lawns, not weeds or tall, dry grass. Use a weed trimmer with plastic line, vs. metal blades that can strike rocks, create sparks and start a wildfire.

Remove rocks in the area before you begin operating any power equipment to avoid sparks.

- Have an approved spark arrester on all portable gas-powered equipment

In wildland areas, an escaped carbon particle from a muffler may be all it takes to start a fire. This includes cars, tractors, harvesters, chainsaws, weed trimmers and mowers.

- Keep the exhaust system in proper working order, spark arresters clear of carbon build-

up, and the engine free of oil and dust. Allow equipment to cool before refilling with gasoline. Use the recommended grade of fuel and don't top it off.

Wildfire awareness, preparedness and prevention are crucial at any time of year. Learn how you can be a part of the solution at www.keepporengreen.org.

GEM WALKERS ANNOUNCE JUNE JAUNT

The Yachats Coastal Gems walking group invites anyone to join the group on its next walk, Tuesday, June 5, in Newport. This walk circles the town of Newport through Old Town, along the Bay Front, past Yaquina Bay Lighthouse and through Yaquina Bay State Park. There is a 1-mile beach option available at lower tides.

Dogs are allowed but must be on a six-foot non-extendable lead to walk with the group and owners must carry and use appropriate cleanup materials.

The 3- and 6-mile walks have varied walking surfaces and a few mild hills. Walking sticks and sturdy shoes recommended.

Walk at your own pace. Call Maryann at 541-961-4279 for more information or email yachats-coastalgems@gmail.com.

The Yachats Coastal Gems will meet inside the Hallmark Resort, 744 SW Elizabeth St, in Newport. Walkers meet at at 9:45 a.m. for registration, then start the walk at 10 a.m.

Use street parking when possible.

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