

# By the numbers: Measuring the 2015 fire season

From a news release provided by the Oregon Department of Forestry

So, just how severe was Oregon's wildfire season this summer? About 838,000 gallons' worth, according to Neal Laugle, the Department of Forestry's (ODF) aviation unit manager. That's how much liquid retardant the department's air tankers dumped on fires in 2015. And that figure doesn't include the thousands of gallons of straight water dropped by ODF contracted helicopters in close support of ground firefighting forces.

The window of opportunity in which to stop a new blaze from growing large has shrunk from days to hours, due to the extreme summer weather and forest fuel conditions. Fire managers with ODF and the fire associations increasingly rely on air power to even the odds, launching air and ground resources simultaneously, which often shaves response time to minutes.

ODF's contracted large air tanker can reach a fire quickly and deliver 3,000 gallons of retardant in a single load. This slows fire growth and buys time for fire engines and hand crews to arrive on scene and begin direct attack. Single-engine air tankers (SEATs) use their speed and maneuverability to box in a fire with multiple, smaller retardant drops. All told, air tankers logged more than 700 flight hours this summer. The agency's helicopters put in 834 hours slinging water to hot spots with their cable-suspended buckets.

## FIRE AVIATION SNAPSHOT

Statistics currently available are for ODF- and fire association-protected lands west of the Cascades. This summer, most of the aerial firefighting took place east of the Cascades (86 percent), followed by southern Oregon (14 percent), and northwestern Oregon (less than one percent).

In 2015, the Douglas Forest Protective Association in Douglas County flew 60 helicopter missions and also assisted ODF's Southwest Oregon District and the Willamette National Forest. A small plane flew 55 missions that included fire detection, monitoring of existing fires and guiding air operations (air tankers and helicopters) over fires.

The department's Southwest Oregon District (Jackson and Josephine counties) conducted 150 missions, including air tanker and helicopter flights. Helicopters performed air attack, helitack (insertion of firefighters at fires, along with making water drops) and transport of personnel and cargo.

Coos Forest Protective Association logged 55 flight hours on 19 different fires in Coos and Douglas counties to quench the flames with water drops. In addition, CFPA aircraft flew reconnaissance during lightning events to detect new fires.

ODF's aggressive firefighting tactics can create an "airshow" of multiple tankers and helicopters over an active fire. When the meter is running on all these air-



Sentinel file photo

Helicopters were called in to fight the Cable Crossing Fire near Glide this summer.

craft, costs mount quickly. But stopping even one high-potential blaze from spreading to thousands of acres can save millions of dollars in the long term.

As an example, the 26,000-acre Stouts Creek Fire in Douglas County cost \$37 million to extinguish. And that is just for suppression. Damage to the forest resource, which includes timber as well as fish and wildlife habitats, typically

totals at least three times the firefighting expense.

No one can accurately predict the intensity of future fire seasons. But the current trend has the department, its partner resource agencies, and private forest landowners scrambling to meet the challenge. Aviation will undoubtedly continue to play a major role in Oregon's fire protection system in the years to come.

## COMMUNITY BRIEFS

### Gamesquall

Gamesquall, an annual board, card, miniature and roleplaying game convention, returns to downtown Cottage Grove's Odd Fellows building this Thursday, Dec. 31 beginning at noon.

Organizer Jake Boone, who doubles as a City Councilor, describes Gamesquall as a "poor man's version of Portland's Gamestorm convention" that runs from noon Thursday until 2 a.m. the next morning. Guests can play games from the extensive library that will be available or bring their own.

The Odd Fellows Building is located at 317 E. Main St.

### Tree pickup

The Kiwanis Club in Cottage Grove will be picking up Christmas trees starting Dec. 26 through Jan. 9. Donations are appreciated. Those interested can call 541-556-2642 to schedule a pickup.

### 912 Project

Lane County Commissioner Faye Stewart will discuss the state of the county and his bid for the U.S. Senate at the next meeting of the Cottage Grove 912 Project on Monday, Jan. 4 at 6:30 p.m. at Stacy's Covered Bridge Restaurant, 401 E. Main St. The meeting is open to the public.

### 'Cowspiracy' showing

Sustainable Cottage Grove will be showing the documentary environmental video "Cowspiracy" at the Healing Matrix at 7 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 7. The event will be followed by a question-and-answer discussion session and is free and open to the general public.

This presentation is part of a series entitled Transition Talks: Films that Inspire Discussion and Community in Cottage Grove.

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret is a groundbreaking feature-length environmental documentary following an intrepid filmmaker as he uncovers the most destructive industry facing the planet today – and investigates why the world's leading environmental organizations are too afraid to talk about it.

The Healing Matrix is located at 632 E. Main Street in Cottage Grove. More information may be obtained by e-

mailing AhimsaAcres@gmail.com or calling/texting Rob at 541-543-5735.

### Free privacy discussion

How do our principles about privacy hold up in the world of corporate information gathering and government surveillance? What are the costs and benefits to living in a society where almost everything about us is discoverable and discussed?

This is the focus of "A World without Secrets: Privacy and Expectations in the United States," a free conversation with Wendy Willis on Thursday, Jan. 7 at 6 p.m. at Hard Knocks Brewery. This program is hosted by the Opal Center with Hard Knocks Brewery and sponsored by Oregon Humanities.

Wendy Willis is a poet, essayist, and national leader in civic engagement and collaborative governance. She serves as executive director of Kitchen Table Democracy, a national nonprofit organization housed at Portland State University and devoted to improving democratic governance.

Through the Conversation Project, Oregon Humanities offers free programs that engage community members in thoughtful, challenging conversations about ideas critical to our daily lives and our state's future. For more information about this free community discussion, please contact Leah Murray at 541-946-7252 or [OCAE@opalcenter.org](mailto:OCAE@opalcenter.org).

### Winter gardening presentation

The Cottage Grove Garden Club's Tuesday, Jan. 5 presentation will find participants making garden art. Fused glass sun catchers and other "dangling pretties" for our patios and gardens are one option. Cottage Grove's Kit Porter, a fused glass artist and instructor, will be leading the group in the making of glass ornaments. President Peggy Severns will also lead in decorating terra cotta garden pots using an assortment of mixed media in painting and gluing. For guests who wish to take home their artwork, there will be a materials fee.

Members and non-members are welcome on Tuesday, Jan. 5 at 7 p.m. at The First Presbyterian Church (corner of Adams and Third Streets).

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