

Community

FIRES

Continued from Page 1A

Although the situation is a bit more complicated, local fire managers say the explanation for the comparatively quiet 2018 fire season can be distilled to a single factor: Lightning.

Or rather, a lack of lightning.

“We had a few storms that came through but there wasn’t a lot of lightning compared with past seasons,” said Steve Meyer, wildland fire supervisor at the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Baker City office. “That was definitely the biggest thing, the lack of widespread lightning.”

It was big because lightning sparks more wildfires than any other source, including people, in North-eastern Oregon.

In some years lightning is the culprit in 80 percent or more of the blazes.

Lightning-sparked fires are especially common on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, with an annual average of 71 over the past 10 years.

Lightning has started more than 100 fires on the forest in 15 separate years since 1972.

But 2018 was an anomaly.

With the risk of lightning almost over for the season, there have been 26 lightning fires on the Wallowa-Whitman this year.

That’s the fewest in any year since at least 1972. The previous low point was 33 fires in 2016.

The 2017 fire season was more typical, with 91 lightning fires.

The unusual scarcity of lightning was a welcome respite, said Willy Crippen, fire management officer for the Burnt-Powder Fire Zone, which takes in much of the southern half of the Wallowa-Whitman.

“We’ve been pretty beat up the past couple of years,” Crippen said.

Although Crippen agrees with Meyer that the lack of lightning was the most important factor in keeping the 2018 fire season at bay, it wasn’t the only one.

Crippen said it was also vital to have what fire managers call “initial attack” resources — those that respond first to a new blaze — available nearby, and in particular airplanes and helicopters.

“We did have some really successful initial attacks on the few lightning fires we had,” Crippen said. “Our goal, ultimately, is that 98 percent of initial attacks are successful.”

Success, in this case, means that the fire is contained — but not necessarily extinguished — after the first period of firefighting.

This year the initial attack crews were successful with every lightning blaze on the



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald file photo

The Cornet/Windy Ridge fire seen from Bowen Valley, just south of Baker City, in August 2015.

“We had a few storms that came through but there wasn’t a lot of lightning compared with past seasons. That was definitely the biggest thing, the lack of widespread lightning.”

— Steve Meyer, Oregon Department of Forestry

Wallowa-Whitman, Crippen said.

Although the rash of large fires across the West for much of the summer depleted the number of crews available, Crippen said that didn’t have an effect on the aircraft available for initial attack in Northeastern Oregon.

The reason, he said, is that a few helicopters or single-engine air tankers are much more valuable for initial attack than for working on a massive fire.

“In that case, one more helicopter isn’t going to make the difference,” Crippen said.

But having a helicopter arrive within 30 minutes after a fire is reported can potentially prevent a small blaze from becoming a big one, he said.

And that potential was considerable this summer.

Crippen said indexes that measure how fast a fire likely would spread reached all-time record highs on some days in July and August.

The temperature topped 100 degrees on three days in July at the Baker City Airport, and on three others during August.

The August heat wave was the most severe on record at the airport, with all-time records set on consecutive days — 108 on Aug. 9, and 109 on Aug. 10.

Meanwhile the absence of thunderstorms, though it limited the number of lightning fires, also eliminated the major source of summer rainfall for the region.

The persistent hot, dry weather had fire crews ready for what could have been a combustible situation, Meyer said.

“Definitely a lot of the summer we were kind of on pins and needles,” he said. “The fuels were definitely ready to burn, and we did set some records with fire indexes.”

The Oregon Department of Forestry, which mainly is responsible for fires on state and some private land, had a fire season that was closer

to average than was for the Wallowa-Whitman.

The agency responded to 74 fires across the region, one more than the 10-year average.

The Forestry Department’s Baker District was the exception, however, with just seven fires that combined burned less than

LOCAL BRIEFING

Free car seat inspections set for Saturday

A free car seat check-up event will take place Saturday, Oct. 6, at the Baker City Fire Department, 1616 Second St., from 9 a.m. to noon. Certified Child Passenger Safety technicians will be on hand to offer education and answer questions on how to properly secure a child in a child safety seat, proper use and installation of the child restraint and/or booster seats in the vehicle, proper use of LATCH (Lower Anchors and Tethers for Children) system, and appropriate positioning of occupants in vehicles with airbags.

The event is free and an appointment is not necessary. Each seat check takes approximately 40 minutes.

The purpose of this check-up event is to provide parents and caregivers with information on the proper use and installation of their child safety seats. According to Safe Kids Worldwide, road injuries are the leading cause of preventable deaths and injuries to children in the United States and correctly used child safety seats can reduce the risk of death as much as 71 percent; however, three out of four seats are not used or installed correctly.

The clinic is sponsored by the Oregon Department of Transportation, St. Alphonsus Medical Center and Baker City Police Department. For further information please contact: CPS Technician, Phoebe Wachtel with the Baker City Police Department at 541-524-2014.

Concert will support Children’s Theater

True North will give a concert Oct. 5 as a fundraiser to support bringing Missoula Children’s Theater back to Baker City.

The event will be at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, 2177 First St., Baker City. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. and the music starts at 7 p.m. Tickets are \$20 in advance at Betty’s Books or Crossroads Carnegie Art Center. Tickets at the door are \$25. The concert was arranged by Carol Harley.

Prescription drug take back event Oct. 27

The Baker City Police Department, in collaboration with the Drug Enforcement Administration, will accept unwanted or expired prescription drug pills and patches on Saturday, Oct. 27, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Police Department, 1768 Auburn Ave.

Police can’t accept liquids, needles or sharps of any kind.

The service is free and anonymous.

More information is available by calling Phoebe Wachtel, the department’s administrative assistant, at 541-524-2014, extension 20, or Lynn Magnuson, evidence technician, at 541-524-2014, extension 29.

SHOOTING

Continued from Page 1A

No arrests have been made. The investigation is continuing.

“We’re reviewing all aspects of the case, including whether the shooting was justified,” Shirtcliff said.

The Baker County Major Crime Team was called to 2515 Main St. on a report of gunshots at about 7:30 p.m. Monday.

The team consists of members of the Baker City Police Department, Baker County Sheriff’s Office, Oregon State Police and the Baker County District Attorney’s Office.

Minding the County's Business



- Republican upholding Eastern Oregon values
- Strong supporter of the 2nd Amendment and the right to firearms
- Solutions oriented commissioner who supports growing our economy through utilizing our local resources
- Promotes fiscal responsibility, accountability and investing in our community
- Encourages career education and job training to bolster the skills of Baker County Youth

electbrucenichols.com • bruceforbaker@gmail.com

Bruce Nichols for Commission Chair

Elect 
(R)

BRUCE NICHOLS
BAKER COUNTY COMMISSIONER



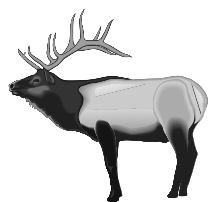
BAKER ELKS IS COLLECTING HIDES

The Baker Elks Lodge is collecting deer and elk hides once again for the Veterans in Homes and Hospitals. Hide barrels are located throughout Baker County at the following locations: the alley behind the Elks Lodge, Halfway, Richland, North Powder, Salisbury Junction, both sides of Sumpter Junction, Whitney, Unity, Austin Junction, Burnt River Junction on the south side of Dooley Mountain and now located at Little Suzie’s and Baker County Custom Meats.

Hides should be free of legs and head. Hunters can help ensure the best price by taking the following precautions: Care by not dragging the animal for great distances. Avoid cutting holes in the hide. Get the hide to a barrel while it is still fresh and put a couple of pounds of table salt on the hide if possible and roll it before dropping it in the barrel and do not put the hide in a plastic bags.



If you are not a hunter but would like to help with this program, donations can be sent to Baker Elks Lodge #338 Hide Program, PO Box 347, Baker City OR 97814-0347



Vote

yes

for KIDS

Measure 1-88



Dr. Sheryl Blankenship

“I proudly support our children’s education.”

Paid for by the YES FOR KIDS Committee, Debbie Penning, Treasurer