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Firefighting Helicopters Based At Baker City Airport

Fires and Flying



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Brian Sigler of Bend pilots one of two Kaman K-MAX helicopters stationed at the Baker City Airport this week to douse hot spots on the 204 Cow fire at the southwest corner of Baker County.

By Jayson Jacoby
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Brian Sigler has to hover his helicopter so precisely that he can dip a bucket dangling 150 feet below his aircraft into a container scarcely bigger than a toddler's wading pool.

Also he once had to fly over the Las Vegas Strip and gently place six air conditioners on the roof of a hotel.

Sigler, it hardly needs to be said, values visibility.

Which is among the many reasons he has such an affinity for the Kaman K-MAX.

"When I look out I don't even see the aircraft," Sigler, 37, said Tuesday morning as he stood beside the noticeably narrow helicopter in a grassy field on the west side of the Baker City Airport. "The best thing about it is visibility. I can look out from both sides. It's real nice to fly."

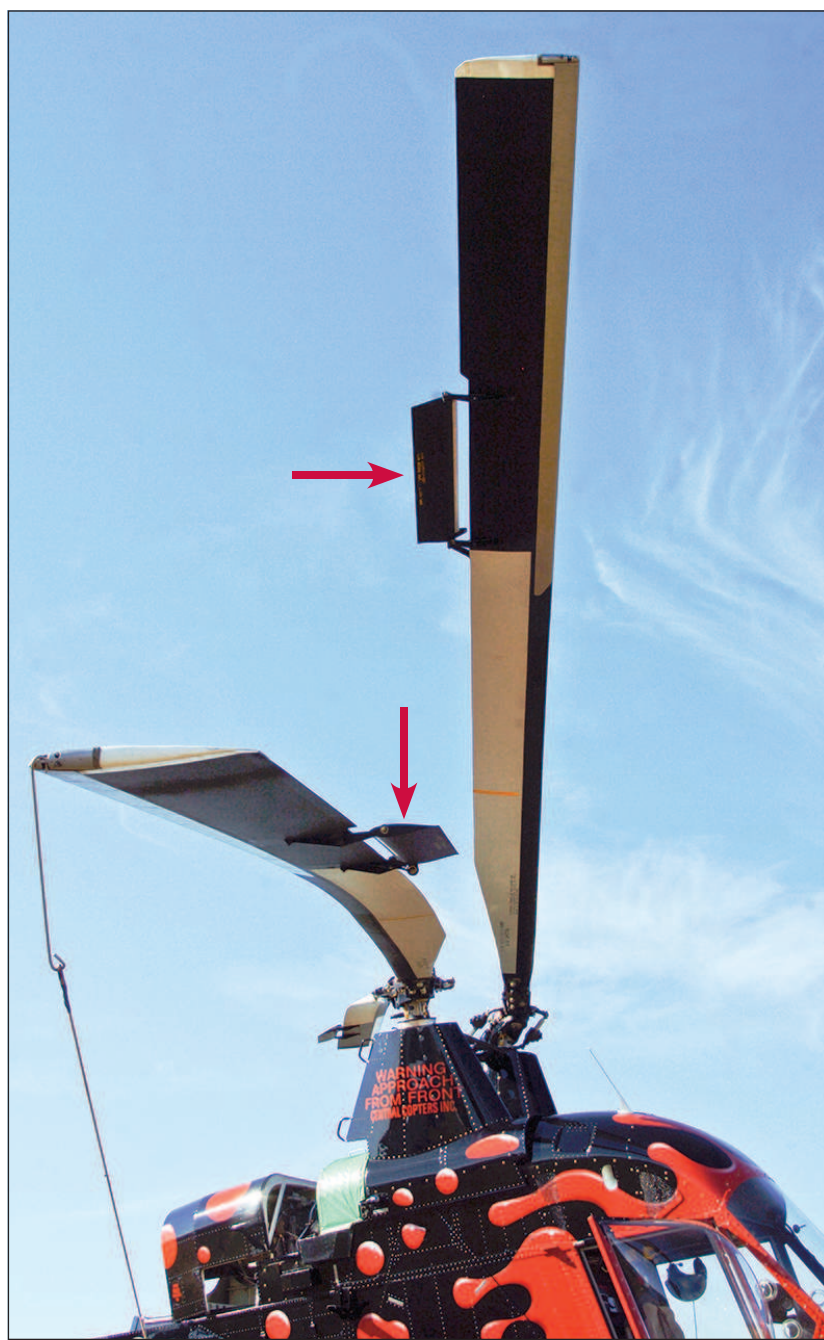
He was waiting for the call to do just that.

Sigler, who lives in Bend and works for Central Copters of Bozeman, Montana, was ready to take off on a 25-minute flight across Baker County to the 204 Cow fire southwest of Unity, where he can douse hot spots with 660 gallons of water.

Sigler and the helicopter's mechanic, Tim Foust, are part of a veritable air armada stationed at the Airport to help ground crews corral the fire, which has burned about 8,800 acres since it was started by lightning Aug. 9 on the Malheur National Forest.

On Tuesday morning five choppers were scattered about the Airport. The fleet included a pair of Kaman K-MAXs from Central Copters.

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S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

The Kaman K-MAX helicopter has unique features including flaps (red arrows in the photo) on the rotors, which twist the blades and allow the pilot to maneuver the aircraft. The rotors are side-by-side, but angled so they spin without touching.

Storm could cool blaze

By Jayson Jacoby
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With the coolest weather since June forecast to arrive late in the weekend, along with widespread rain, Forest Service officials expect the Granite Gulch fire to simmer down.

But the blaze in the Eagle Cap Wilderness northeast of Baker City could boil up a bit in the meantime.

"The incoming storms will certainly slow things down for a while after a peak in activity Wednesday and Thursday," said Adam Wing, incident commander on the Granite Gulch fire.

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BMCC director reflects on time in Baker

■ Daniel Koopman has started a new job in Coos Bay

By Chris Collins
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When Daniel Koopman arrived in Baker City in August 2015 to become the Baker County director of Blue Mountain Community College, smoke darkened the sky and hung over the town.



Koopman

It was the summer of the Cornet-Windy Ridge blaze that torched nearly 104,000 acres south of Baker City, including homes and outbuildings in the Stices Gulch area.

"That was really rough," Koopman said of his first month in his new position.

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Baker County to be featured in documentary

By Lisa Britton
For the Baker City Herald

A film crew will tour Baker County this weekend to explore the arts in rural America as part of a documentary and television series called AmericArt 2019.

The project mission is "Let's talk about art. All voices matter."

Timothy Bishop, who heads up

Travel Baker County, learned about the project at a travel conference called Go West Summit. In a conversation with the producer, Bishop talked about various aspects of art in Baker County, including the Great Salt Lick art contest and auction.

But Baker City was not on the list of stops.

"At that point in time, they were

looking at a route farther south that didn't include Oregon," Bishop said.

Then he got a call in April — the route changed and Baker County was chosen as one of the 10 featured communities invited to participate.

"We are super excited to be on that short list," Bishop said.

The other featured communities are: Montgomery County, Maryland;

Franklin, Tennessee; Wichita, Kansas; McPherson, Kansas; Pueblo, Colorado; Glenwood Springs, Colorado; Elko, Nevada; Reno Tahoe Nevada; and Sonoma County, California.

Bishop worked with Ginger Savage at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center and the Baker Art Guild to prepare for the visit.

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FRIDAY — IN THE MOUNTAINS, PASSES SOMETIMES SURPASS PEAKS