

Local & State

HOWARD BUTTE IN WALLOWA COUNTY

Eye In The Sky: High-tech camera on the lookout for wildfire smoke

By Bill Bradshaw

Wallowa County Chieftain

HOWARD BUTTE — Fire detection has come a long way in the 75 years since Smokey Bear was first created to remind us, “Only you can prevent forest fires.”

In fact, it now includes technology almost unimaginable when Smokey was created in 1944. The first Smokey was an imaginary bear for an ad campaign, but after an orphaned bear cub was found after a 1950 wildfire in New Mexico, he was adopted by the USDA Forest Service to add life to the wildfire prevention effort.

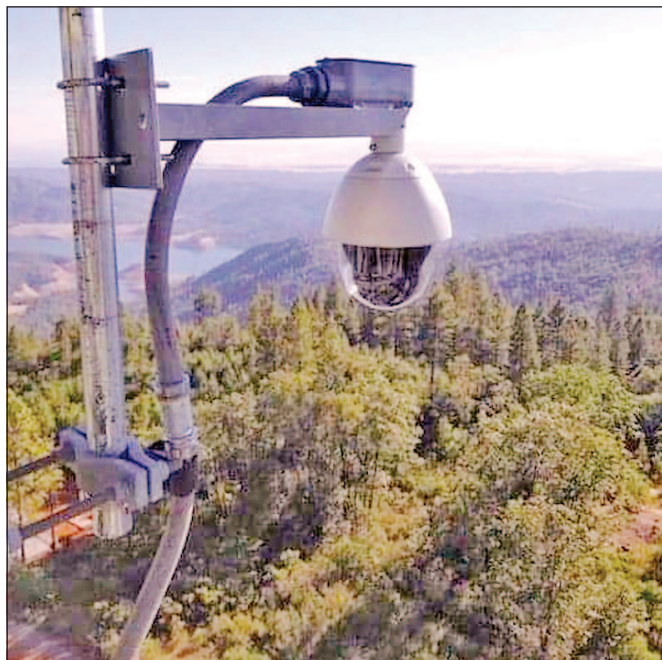
In his original day, fire lookout towers and public reports were the prime detection efforts. Today, alongside a wooden lookout tower built in 1946 on 4,319-foot-tall Howard Butte stands a 110-foot-tall metal tower topped by a 360-degree, high-definition camera. It gives a 20-mile view to detect smoke visible from its perch in western Wallowa County, said Matt Howard, unit forester for the Wallowa Unit of the Oregon Department of Forestry.

The towers stand on 2 acres of land deeded to the ODF by what was then the Bowman-Hicks Lumber Co. for the purpose of establishing a lookout. Also there is communications equipment serving the ODF, state and county agencies powered by a line from Pacific Power and Light, Howard said.

The ACTi i96 PTZ camera completes a full rotation in about 15 minutes. If smoke is detected, an alert is sent via a microwave signal west to Mount Emily and down to La Grande, where the signal is relayed to the Central Oregon Interagency Dispatch Center in Prineville. Once notified of an alert, the center views the image sent by the camera and then contacts the appropriate response units to check it out.

Howard said that since the camera was installed in July, there have been several alerts but all have proven to be legal burns.

Although the state-of-



Oregon Department of Forestry photo

This close-up shows the high-definition fire-detection camera mounted on a 110-foot tower atop Howard Butte in Wallowa County. The camera relays views showing smoke to the Central Oregon Interagency Dispatch Center in Prineville.

“I can’t say enough about it. I’d like to get three or four more in the county.”

— Paul Karvoski, fire chief for Wallowa County and the city of Enterprise, talking about a camera on Howard Butte

the-art camera is the latest technology, it’s by no means a “silver bullet” and they won’t replace human eyes, he said. “We just like having it in our tool box of different tools” for detecting fires, Howard said.

That “tool box” includes a partnership the ODF has developed with the U.S. Forest Service, Wallowa County and other state agencies.

Paul Karvoski, fire chief for the county and the city of Enterprise, works closely with the ODF and hopes to see additional cameras located in the county.

“I can’t say enough about it,” he said on the one on Howard Butte. “I’d like to get three or four more in the county.”

In particular, he’d like to see one established on Courtney Butte overlooking Troy, which was nearly destroyed by the Grizzly Fire in August 2015.

Nathan Goodrich, U.S. Forest Service fire management officer for the Wallowa Valley Ranger District of the

Wallowa-Whitman National Forest based in Joseph, said there are no such cameras in his area. Although there are lookout towers, they are lacking in basic infrastructure required for a camera, such as power lines, cables, hardware and line-of-sight connections to which the microwave dishes can transmit.

“We’ve been looking at those (cameras) for some time now, but they’re pretty spendy to get into,” he said. “They’ve shown to be pretty successful.”

But Goodrich is relatively satisfied with his lookout towers that are manned during the peak fire season from June to October.

“They’re invaluable,” he said. “You can’t talk to a camera and get more information.”

Goodrich said he’d like to see a camera on Mount Ireland on the Grant-Baker County line “if we come into a little extra money.”

For now, Howard Butte has Northeast Oregon’s only fire detection camera. Howard



Bill Bradshaw / Wallowa County Chieftain

Matt Howard, unit forester for the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Wallowa Unit, looks at a view transmitted from the fire-detection camera on Howard Butte on a computer in his office in Wallowa.



Oregon Department of Forestry photo

The Howard Butte camera is the only one operating in Northeast Oregon, but fire officials would like to add others.

said another is planned in Umatilla County, likely by next spring. Another is being considered for Baker County. He said such cameras are used in other areas of the state and other states, though he didn’t have statistics on those.

But the cameras don’t come cheap. The one on Howard Butte, since there already

was a communications tower there, cost about \$60,000, Howard said. To erect one where there is no tower, the price increases by another \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Howard said his unit has an annual budget of about \$900,000, about half of which comes from a landowner assessment and half from the state’s general fund. Oregon

even has an insurance policy with Lloyds of London to cover fire-suppression costs — the only state in the Union with such a policy. Howard said he believes that’s because Lloyds determined Oregon a “good risk.”

“We don’t ever run out of money because we have so many layers of funding to cover it,” he said.

Court ruling limits police questioning during traffic stops

By Rebecca Ellis

Oregon Public Broadcasting

A recent ruling by the Oregon Supreme Court has banned a controversial policing practice: No longer can officers use a broken taillight or a failure to signal as a justification for scouting a driver’s car for illegal guns or drugs.

The ruling instructs officers to stick to questions “reasonably related” to the reason the driver was pulled over, effectively ending law enforcement’s ability to turn a routine traffic stop into a fishing expedition for a more serious offense.

Law enforcement agencies are in various stages of reviewing the ruling and creating new instructions for officers. While the Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office and the Salem Police Department said they were both awaiting guidance from their district and city attorneys, respectively, police departments in Beaverton and Gresham, as well as the Oregon State Police, were working on a training bulletin. The Portland Police Bureau said it is reviewing its

training protocols and updating officers.

While many of these law enforcement agencies have now told officers to keep the conversation during these stops related to the traffic infraction, they say it’s clear the ruling grants some leeway if an officer is in danger or has a strong reason to believe a crime has occurred.

“If a deputy pulls someone over for a traffic violation, walks up, smells the odor of alcohol and sees blood shot eyes, poor coordination in their hands, that would establish reasonable suspicion for a DUI,” said Sgt. Danny DiPietro, a spokesman for the Washington County Sheriff’s Office. “Then they can inquire about that crime.”

But no longer can officers randomly segue into questions about the presence of guns or drugs.

“Each officer or deputy in

this case are going to have to change the way they conduct their traffic stops on a day-to-day basis,” said DiPietro. “It’s very significant.”

The decision stems from the case of Mario Arreola-Botello, who was pulled over by a Beaverton Police officer in 2015 for failing to signal a turn. Arreola-Botello consented to a search of his car, leading officers to discover a package of methamphetamine on the floor.

Arreola-Botello’s attorney, Joshua Crowther, argued the search of his car was unconstitutional because it was spawned by questions that went outside the scope of what police should be allowed to ask during a routine traffic stop.

A trial court and the Oregon Court of Appeals had previously rejected the argument. Both courts cited precedent that officers could go off-topic during an “unavoidable lull”

in the interaction, which usually occurs while the driver was busy searching for their license and registration.

The Oregon Supreme Court saw it differently.

“Put simply, an ‘unavoidable lull’ does not create an opportunity for an officer to ask unrelated questions, unless the officer can justify the inquiry on other grounds,” the decision states.

Civil rights advocates say this decision will likely provide needed protections to people of color, who evidence indicates are far more likely to see routine traffic stops devolve into an investigation.

“This decision closes a loophole in the protection of our constitutional rights that police had been using to conduct warrantless searches,” said Leland Baxter-Neal, a staff attorney with the ACLU of Oregon. “And those searches had disproportionately tar-

geted people of color.”

A report released last year analyzing Portland’s traffic stop data collection from 2016 found Native Americans and black drivers “were searched at significantly higher rates when compared to overall stop rates.”

The trend is not confined to Oregon. In an amicus brief supporting the defense, the Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association and the Oregon Justice Resource Center pointed to an analysis of 55 million traffic stops that found people of color were more than twice as likely to fall victim to this kind of escalatory policing as the average driver.

While, overall, drivers were searched during a traffic stop

3.4% of the time, black drivers were searched 7.6% of the time, and Hispanic drivers were searched 8.7% of the time.

Bobbin Singh, the executive director of the Oregon Justice Resource Center, called the Supreme Court’s decision “symbolically incredibly important for communities of color,” as it provides assurances that the worst-case scenario for a traffic stop is a traffic ticket and not an arrest.

“As a person of color, what I’ll say is, that’s what white people’s expectations are,” he said. “People of color, when they’re stopped by the police, there’s not really any expectation of where the limits are.”

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