

BLM braces for fiery summer

By **Ardeshir Tabrizian**

The Malheur Enterprise

VALE — Fire season is underway in Malheur County, and the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management has already responded to a number of recent fires.

The Vale BLM is expecting a much more active and severe fire season than in 2019, said Al Crouch, fire mitigation and education specialist in Vale. The BLM began to see fires in the Vale District in May, and the area is on track for a dry year, Crouch said.

While the dryness has slowed down due to recent rain, he said hotter weather can rapidly change that.

He said it was too early to predict the fire potential in the Vale District this summer.

The 2019 fire season was well below average for Malheur County, Crouch said, with a decrease in all forms of fires.

“Last year, it was wetter and greener,” he said. “This year, we’re not expecting that at all. We’re expecting it to be hot and dry.”

The next three weeks will be critical to determine moisture content in range fuels, such as grasses.

Those fuel conditions will depend on the amount of lightning, how much moisture comes with it and what people do to prevent wildfires, Crouch said.

Fuel is measured in four classes, with the highest being found typically in larger logs, he said, and it is indicative of long-term drought. This dead fuel level was above average entering June in the Northwest and well above it in Eastern Oregon, which will likely see less than average precipitation between June and September, according to a Wildland Fire Potential Outlook from the National Interagency Fire Center issued June 1.

Increased moisture leads to grass growth, creating fuel for



BLM photo

A Bureau of Land Management fire crew conducts pile burning of cut juniper at Hunter Mountain, north of Juntura, on May 13.

wildfires, while dry conditions will cause brush fields to dry out faster — both posing risks for fire potential, Crouch said.

Flashy fuels can increase more quickly in taller, dried grass than timber in forests, said Jennifer Smith, spokesperson for the National Interagency Fire Center.

There has been early drying along the river corridors, which have recently drawn abnormally high recreational use, Crouch said. The combination “makes for a potentially bad mix for wildfires,” he said, and fires have already occurred in those areas.

The Vale BLM has responded to six human-caused fires this year and a few lightning fires, but those do not include fires under the jurisdiction of a fire department or district, or the rangeland fire protection associations, he said.

About 30% of fires on Vale

BLM-administered lands are human-caused, with the rest being a result of lightning. Of the human-caused fires, 70% are caused by some form of equipment, he said.

Nationally, humans cause an average of 87% of wildfires every year, according to a set of “Talking Points” from the NIFC.

In the rangeland, wildfires mostly occur as a result of lightning when there are sparks in dry land, said Tamara Cannon, secretary of the Vale Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

Crouch advised that people should check equipment to ensure it works properly and doesn’t produce sparks, keep vehicles off of dry grass — especially in low elevations — and check regulations. He recommended calling the BLM office, as well as visiting its website or the Blue Mountain

Interagency Dispatch Center website for information about current fire restrictions in Eastern Oregon.

The Vale BLM has seen more shooting-caused fires, he said, which people can help mitigate by following the fire prevention order prohibiting tracer ammunition, incendiary ammunition and exploding targets and fireworks on BLM lands. He also advised against shooting hard targets, trash or anything metal.

“Just exercise good shooting ethics — shoot safely, pick up trash and enjoy yourself,” Crouch said.

The BLM has also seen a spike in the number of unattended or abandoned campfires in the Vale District, which is both a threat for causing wildfires and a violation that is subject to a fine, said Crouch.

He urged campers to keep their fires attended, ensure that the area around a campfire is clear of flammables up to 10 feet, keep fires small and contained with a metal or rock ring, don’t burn when it is windy and “make sure your fire is dead out before you leave.”

Crouch also said it is critical that landowners and homeowners do their part in helping prevent wildfires. Embers can collect and ignite on roofs and in gutters, as well as enter unscreened openings around houses, according to a May 4 news release from Oregon State Fire Marshal Jim Walker.

“Keep your roofs, gutters and eaves clear of all leaves, pine needles and other flammable debris,” Walker said.

Fire officials “suggest removing dead vegetation a minimum of 30 feet around homes and other structures,” as well as pruning trees and keeping grass short and green to help ensure that potential fires are close to the ground and more manageable for fire crews, the news release said.

FUNDRAISER

Continued from Page 3A

While the Rachel Center hopes to collect most of the bottles (and donation-filled envelopes) by the end of July, Grove said it’s not unusual for contributions to continue to flow in throughout the year.

Just recently she had bottles returned from last spring’s campaign.

“We take bottles full of money any time,” Grove said.

The Rachel Pregnancy Center offers help to both men and women who are dealing with financial or emotional problems related to an unplanned pregnancy. The annual Baby Bottle Drive is its main fundraiser for the year.

The center’s spring newsletter lists these services provided in the community:

Pregnancy Help

- Free pregnancy testing
- Information about pregnancy options
- Adoption referrals
- Maternity clothes
- Referrals for free ultrasound scans.

Grove said that service became available in Baker City when Allyson Howarth, a nurse practitioner who works at Dr. Randy Alanko’s office, joined the Rachel Center Board.

“Lots of times when they see an ultrasound they decide not to have an abortion,” Grove said.

Parenting Help

- Encouragement
- Baby clothes up to Size 3
- Diapers and formula if needed
- Baby furniture and items

Grove said clients have the opportunity to voluntarily participate in the center’s Earn While You Learn program, which includes classes ranging from prenatal to parenting instruction about infants, toddlers and older children as well. A Bible study also is included.

“Baby Bucks” earned through Earn While You Learn can be used to purchase baby furniture from the center, gift cards for gas and groceries and to obtain car seats from the Baker City Police Department.

Post-Abortion Recovery and Other Counseling

Camille Hearne, a child and family counselor, volunteers to provide free counseling for women healing from an abortion and for others in special circumstances, Grove said.

Volunteers

The center’s volunteer team includes client advisers, receptionists, clothing assistants, Earn While You Learn instructors, church advocates, technical support, donation partners and a board of directors.

Patricia Hoelscher is board chairwoman and Cathy Blankinship is treasurer. Other board members are Jesse Whitford, Howarth and Grove.

The Rachel Center helped 151 families at a rate of 40 clients per month in 2019, according to the spring newsletter.

More information is available by visiting the office or calling 541-523-5357 during business hours. Grove also may be reached by email at rpc.director1@gmail.com or visit the center’s Facebook page.

OREGON LEGISLATURE ANTICIPATED TO CONVENE FOR SPECIAL SESSION LATER THIS YEAR

People of Color Caucus proposes police reform bills

By **Peter Wong**

Oregon Capital Bureau

The nine minority-group members of the Oregon Legislature will promote bills to tighten the accountability of police after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the subsequent protests in Portland and other cities.

The People of Color Caucus, which numbers two senators and seven representatives among the 90 legislators, seeks two bills during an anticipated special session of the Legislature later this year and another measure for the 2021 session.

“I am pleased to see allies from all colors now stepping forward to do something about this,” Sen. Lew Frederick, D-Portland, said at a news conference last week. “It is time. We have had enough. I want to see some action and I hope we will.”

The Portland City Council on Thursday promised to support the bills. Many other issues were raised in a joint work session Thursday morning during the wide-ranging discussion, from reforming the state’s training system for new police officers to requiring them to live in the communities in which they serve.

One measure is a new version of Frederick’s Senate Bill 1567, which cleared the Senate unanimously, but died in the House without a vote after the 2020 session ended abruptly on March 5. A similar measure he sponsored (Senate Bill 383) also passed the Senate in 2019 but died in a House committee.

Under the bill, if an arbitrator concludes there was police misconduct, the arbitrator cannot lessen any disciplinary action taken by the police

“I am pleased to see allies from all colors now stepping forward to do something about this. It is time. We have had enough. I want to see some action and I hope we will.”

— **State Sen. Lew Frederick, D-Portland**

agency against the officer based on that misconduct.

The other bills may face a tougher legislative road.

One measure would require the Oregon Department of Justice, led by the elected attorney general, to investigate deaths or serious physical injuries when police use deadly force. Those investigations are now conducted by police — though not the agencies employing the officers involved in the use of force — and district attorneys in Oregon’s 36 counties.

The other measure would direct the House Judiciary Committee to convene a bipartisan work group to look at Oregon’s law governing police use of deadly force when making an arrest or preventing an escape. The measure is intended to prompt recommendations for change in the 2021 session. The basic law goes back to 1971, and in 2007, the Legislature required use-of-force plans on a county-by-county basis.

House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, said in a statement:

“Oregon has an opportunity to address abuses that have gone on for far too long. We must rise to the challenge of this moment and make real change to create a safe and supportive community

for all Oregonians.”

Democrat Rob Wagner of Lake Oswego, the new Senate majority leader, pledged his support for the measures. He said in a statement on his Facebook page:

“As elected leaders, we have the power to change the ways our laws uphold institutional racism and systems of oppression, and we cannot wait any longer to take action. The People of Color Caucus (members) ... have put forth policy proposals to improve police accountability and act against injustice. I am eager to work with my colleagues to advance these important policies. We must act now.”

Caucus of nine

In addition to Frederick, the caucus members are Sen. James Manning of Eugene and Reps. Teresa Alonso León of Woodburn, Janelle Bynum of Clackamas, Diego Hernandez of Portland, Akasha Lawrence Spence of Portland, Mark Meek of Oregon City, Andrea Salinas of Lake Oswego and Tawna Sanchez of Portland. All are Democrats. Lawrence Spence isn’t seeking election, but the caucus is likely to add to its ranks Nov. 3.

“I look forward to supporting the POC Caucus as they fashion their proposals into effective legislation,” Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum said in a statement last week.

“We must dismantle racism. Doing so requires looking at our systems from every angle. Dismantling racism demands thoroughly listening to those voices and issues that make us uncomfortable. Dismantling racism mandates acknowledging that the answers haven’t been found,

the solutions haven’t been enacted, that many promises have turned up empty.”

In 2015, the Legislature barred police use of profiling, a practice of identifying criminal suspects based on broad personal characteristics such as race.

In 2017, at Rosenblum’s urging, another law required agencies to collect information on traffic and pedestrian stops by police.

The first phase involved reports by Oregon’s 12 largest agencies, including the Oregon State Police, sheriff’s offices in the three metro-area counties and police in Portland, Gresham, Hillsboro and Beaverton. Their data was released last year by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, which eventually will collect information from all Oregon police agencies to see if there are patterns where police are stopping minorities disproportionately.

Past and present

During the news conference last week with Gov. Kate Brown, Frederick referred to past incidents when police have stopped him as he was going to and from his home in Portland’s Irvington neighborhood, where he has lived since 1977.

He recounted one incident in the early 1990s, when he was a reporter for Portland television station KGW and his station car was stopped in King City with his photographer at the wheel. “He suddenly saw the barrel of a gun right across his face, pointed at me,” Frederick said. (The mayor of King City since 2016 is Ken Gibson, who is black.)

Brown said in the after-

math of Floyd’s death — caused when a Minneapolis police officer put his knee on Floyd’s neck for almost nine minutes — that Oregon’s elected leaders must do more to address these issues.

“To everyone who is hurting right now, I want to say I see you. I hear you. I stand with you. And I add my voice to yours,” she said. “Years and years of failure to reform po-

lice practices. Years of failure to hold police officers accountable. Years of failure to bring real reforms to our criminal justice system, which incarcerates Black Americans at five times the rate of white Americans.

“I count myself as one of the many white politicians whose good intentions haven’t done enough to tackle the scourge of systemic racism.”

TREAT DAD TO THE BEST



Father’s Day Special

Open 12 Noon

Prime Rib Dinner

with triple chocolate truffle mousse.

Includes salad bar.

Also featuring regular menu items



Open for dinner: M-W-Th-F at 4:30 pm

Saturday - 3:30 • Closed Tuesday

Open by reservation for private parties

541-856-3639

10 miles north of Baker City on Hwy 30, in Haines, Oregon.

www.hainessteakhouse.com