

Fire destroys homes in Washington town

BY JAMES HANLON, QUINN WELSCH, GARRETT CABEZA AND EMMA EPPERLY

The Spokesman-Review, Spokane, Wash.

LIND, Wash. — Many Lind residents scrambled to evacuate Thursday, Aug. 4 after a fast-moving wildfire tore through the small town.

Six homes and eight structures were destroyed, Adams County Sheriff Dale Wagner said in a video update on Facebook.

Kevin Starring, fire chief of Adams County Fire District 2, said he was heartbroken about the structures lost.

"I've lived here my entire life and never worked through this or been through this, so I'm pretty devastated about that," Starring said.

The 2,500-acre fire struck south of Lind, a town of 535 people in the middle of Adams County, around 11:45 a.m. Thursday, the state fire marshal's office said. The cause is under investigation.

Starring said late Thursday afternoon there was no active fire and crews were putting out hot spots.

He said he's battled large wheat fires and others like it, "but I've never been involved where people have lost their homes and lost everything. You read about and see it on TV all the time, but until you live through it, you have no idea."

Wagner said there were no reports of major injuries besides one firefighter suffering from smoke inhalation who was airlifted to Spokane.

Starring said he was concerned the fire could burn the entire town because of the strong winds and flames that burned higher than fire trucks.

The fire started southwest of town and rolled over the hillside on the town's southern edge. He said firefighters knocked the blaze down a bit and saved some homes.

In other areas, Starring said the fire was "too intense," and crews had to leave as the flames came right

at them. Starring said crews would likely be on scene for two or three days to ensure the fire fueled by warm, dry and windy conditions does not reignite.

"It's not good, but it could have been a lot worse," he said.

Megan Shepard's home was saved.

The fire came within about 20 feet of her driveway before firefighters swooped in and stopped it. She said the wind shifted directions, helping push the fire east, away from her home.

Some of her neighbors weren't so lucky. Shepard said she spoke with one of them in town after the fire ripped through his property.

"It's devastating," she said. "I mean, I'm happy that my home was OK, but I mean, they're our neighbors."

Shepard said she and her husband were at work when the fire started, and her son was the only one

"It was scary trying to get home in time," she said. "My husband was like, 'I don't know if the house is going to be there when you get there.'"

Shepard said she and her family loaded up their dogs, ducks and chickens in case the fire did burn their property.

"I was worried about my animals," she said. "I was like, 'I need to get my animals out.'"

Lind clerk Barbara Pence said the fire appears to have skirted along the south edge of town to the east. The town was prepared to evacuate and advised residents to leave if they felt unsafe, but the north part of town was never ordered to evacuate, she said.

"We were lucky that it didn't come into town and take out the entire town," Pence said. "It is sad that we lost the homes that we did and we feel for the people that are affected. And as a small community, the community will band together and help

those families, I'm sure."

Pence said the City Council will need to meet to determine what the city can do to help residents who lost their homes.

"We feel for the people that have been affected, and we are here to help with what we can," Pence said.

Lind Mayor Paula Bell said the fire caused the town to lose power, and Avista Utilities was on scene to address the issue. Meanwhile, city crews were working nonstop, she said, to ensure the city's water wells were running properly.

Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste authorized the mobilization of state firefighting resources, including multiple aircraft and fire agencies from around the region. Local volunteer firefighters also assisted, and Bell said she appreciated the assistance.

"It's too bad that it's a disaster that brings people together, but it's good to have neighbors," she said.

A sheriff's car passes between vehicles that were burned then flooded and a pile of trees that were carried by a flash flood at the McKinney Fire in the Klamath National Forest near Yreka, California, on Aug. 3, 2022.

David McNew/AFP via Getty Images-TNS



Wind-whipped fire left Northern California hamlet in ashes

BY HAVEN DALEY AND CHRISTOPHER WEBER

Associated Press

KLAMATH RIVER, Calif. — A week ago, the scenic Northern California hamlet of Klamath River was home to about 200 people and had a community center, post office and a corner grocery store. Now, after a wildfire raged through the forested region near the Oregon state line, four people are dead and the store is among the few buildings not reduced to ashes.

At an evacuation center Wednesday, Aug. 3, Bill Simms said that three of the four victims were his neighbors. Two were a married couple who lived up the road.

"I don't get emotional about stuff and material things," Simms said. "But when you hear my next-door neighbors died. ... that gets a little emotional."

The 65-year-old retiree bought his property six years ago as a second home with access to hunting and fishing. He said Klamath River is a place people are attracted to because they can have privacy and enjoy nature.

He went back to check on his property Tuesday, Aug. 2 and found it was destroyed.

"The house, the guest house and the RV were gone. It's just wasteland, devastation," Simms said. He found the body of one of his two cats, which he buried. The other cat is still missing. He was able to take his two dogs with him to the shelter.

The McKinney Fire broke

out July 29 and was still out of control on Wednesday, despite progress by firefighters who took advantage of rain from thunderstorms and lower temperatures.

But even the welcome precipitation brought problems. On Tuesday, heavy rain swelled rivers and creeks and a private contractor in a pickup truck who was aiding the firefighting effort was hurt when a bridge gave out and washed away the vehicle, said Courtney Kreider, a spokesperson with the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office. The contractor was hospitalized with non-life-threatening injuries, she said.

More than 100 buildings ranging from homes to sheds have burned. Identifying the four people who were killed could take several days, Kreider said.

The fire has charred nearly 90 square miles and is the largest in California so far this year. The cause is unknown.

With the rain and cooler temperatures, the blaze grew very little and fire officials said crews used bulldozers to carve firebreaks along a ridge to protect homes and buildings in and around Yreka, which has about 7,800 residents and is the largest city in Siskiyou County.

On Wednesday, evacuation orders for residents of Yreka and Hawkinsville were downgraded to warnings, allowing people to return home. But they were warned the fire remains a threat and were urged to be ready to flee again if nec-

essary.

Skies were mostly clear on Wednesday and temperatures were in the mid- to high 90s, baking an already parched landscape.

California and much of the rest of the West is in drought and wildfire danger is high, with the historically worst of the fire season still to come. Fires are burning in Montana, Idaho and Nebraska and have destroyed homes and threaten communities.

Scientists say climate change has made the West warmer and drier over the last three decades and will continue to make weather more extreme and wildfires more frequent and destructive.

California has seen its largest, most destructive and deadliest wildfires in the last five years. In 2018, a massive blaze in the Sierra Nevada foothills destroyed much of the city of Paradise and killed 85 people, the most deaths from a U.S. wildfire in a century.

When it began, the McKinney Fire burned just several hundred acres and firefighters thought they would quickly bring it under control. But thunderstorms came in with ferocious wind gusts that within hours had pushed it into an unstoppable conflagration.

Roger Derry, 80, and his son, Rodger, were among the few families from Klamath River whose homes were spared by the inferno. The elder Derry, who has lived in the unincorporated town for

more than four decades, said the fire was terrifying.

"When that fire came over that ridgeline, it had 100-foot flames for about 5 miles and the wind was blowing. It was coming down like a solid blowtorch," he said. "There was nothing to stop it."

Harlene Schwander, 82, lost the home she had just moved into a month ago to be closer to her son and daughter-in-law. Their home survived but her house was torched.

Schwander, an artist, said she only managed to grab a few family photos and some jewelry before evacuating. Everything else — including her art collection, went up in flames.

"I'm sad. Everybody says it was just stuff, but it was all I had," she said.

In northwestern Montana, a fire that has destroyed at least four homes and forced the evacuation of about 150 residences west of Flathead Lake continued to be pushed north by winds on Wednesday, fire officials said.

Crews had to be pulled off the lines on Wednesday afternoon due to increased fire activity, Sara Rouse, a public information officer, told NBC Montana.

There were concerns the fire could reach Lake Mary Ronan by Wednesday evening, officials said.

The fire, which started on July 29 in grass on the Flathead Indian Reservation, quickly moved into timber and had charred nearly 29 square miles.

Ready, set, go: Less than 100 days until election

BY GARY A. WARNER

Oregon Capital Bureau

It's easy to feel like the November election is a long way off.

Primary election ballots were still being counted just 10 weeks ago.

It's been just a month since the Fourth of July.

One of the main "candidates" for governor hasn't qualified to run and likely won't hit that mark until the end of August.

Summer, the old and increasingly irrelevant conventional wisdom says, is a time of political doldrums. Labor Day, the traditional "kick-off" of the general election campaign, is still a month away.

But political tradition hasn't held up in recent election cycles and has been largely kicked to the curb in 2022. There will be a new governor, at least three new members of Congress, and a host of new legislators representing new districts. Also on the ballot are measures on gun control and barring recalcitrant lawmakers from running for office if they walk off the job too often.

One look at the calendar shows the climax of the 2022 election is rapidly approaching. As of Sunday, there were 100 days until the Nov. 8 general election.

The primary culled and cleared the political field.

The May 17 ballot featured 346 candidates: 146 Republicans, 134 Democrats and 97 running for officially non-partisan offices.

The effect of voting was dramatic.

May 17 began with 34 candidates for governor, 10 for U.S. Senator, 16 for the new 6th Congressional District, and 10 for U.S. Senator, seven for the Bureau of Labor and Industries commissioner.

When the final votes were tallied over a week later, each race had two finalists.

The primary notched its first major casualty of 2022 when U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Canby, was upset by progressive Terrebonne attorney Jamie McLeod-Skinner in his bid for an eighth term representing the 5th Congressional District.

The outcome of the May

17 vote also put two bitter rivals from the House on a collision course in the race for governor.

With Gov. Kate Brown barred from running again due to term limits, Democrats chose former House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, as their nominee. Former House Leader Christine Drazan, R-Canby, topped the GOP primary field.

Kotek and Drazan had both resigned from the House early to run for governor. Along with inflation, COVID-19, abortion, guns, housing and homeless policies, their campaigns would be framed by a personal animosity born from a 2021 fight over a broken bargain on political redistricting.

"She lied and broke her promise not just to us but to Oregonians," Drazan said Sept. 21, 2021. "She just sold the soul of our state for Democrats' political gain."

In most years, that would be enough drama by itself. But last week the first major debate of the governor's race was held at a newspaper publishers' convention in Clackamas County. Sharing the stage with Kotek and Drazan was a third candidate for governor who has raised the largest campaign war chest, but hasn't appeared on a ballot or even qualified to run for the office.

Former Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, dropped out of the Senate and the Democratic Party in a bid to become just the second governor since Oregon became a state in 1859 to win the governorship without a major party affiliation.

Johnson has a solidly bifurcated political pedigree.

Born in Bend and raised in Redmond, she was the daughter of timberman and philanthropist Sam Johnson, who served as a Republican in the Legislature and as mayor of Redmond. His daughter moved to his left, both on the map and on the political spectrum. She made her name in the aviation business on the Oregon Coast and her own long career in Salem was as a Democrat.

Johnson is seeking to cast herself as the middle lane between a far-left Kotek and a far-right Drazan.

Federal agency sues Idaho over its abortion law

BY MICHAEL BALSAMO AND REBECCA BOONE

Associated Press

BOISE — The Justice Department on Tuesday, Aug. 2 filed a lawsuit that challenges Idaho's restrictive abortion law, arguing that it conflicts with a federal law requiring doctors to provide pregnant women medically necessary treatment that could include abortion.

The federal government brought the lawsuit seeking to invalidate the state's "criminal prohibition on providing abortions as applied to women suffering medical emergencies," Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

The announcement is the

first major action by the Justice Department challenging a state trigger law since the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June. The court's decision has led some states to enact restrictive abortion laws and is likely to lead to abortion bans in roughly half the states in the U.S.

The Justice Department brought the suit because federal prosecutors believe Idaho's law would force doctors to violate the Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act, a federal law that requires anyone coming to a medical facility for emergency treatment to be stabilized and treated, Garland said.

"Idaho's law would make it a

criminal offense for doctors to provide the emergency medical treatment that federal law requires," Garland said.

Idaho, like many Republican-led states, has several anti-abortion laws on the books, creating a legal quagmire now that the U.S. Supreme Court has overturned the landmark abortion rights case Roe v. Wade.

The law targeted by the Justice Department criminalizes all abortions, subjecting anyone who performs or attempts to perform an abortion to a felony punishable by between two and five years in prison.

People who are charged under the law could defend themselves against the criminal allegations by arguing that

the abortion was done to save a pregnant person from death, or that it was done after the pregnant person reported that they were a victim of rape or incest to a law enforcement agency — and provided a copy of that report to the abortion provider.

"Under the Idaho law, once effective, any state or local prosecutor can subject a physician to indictment, arrest, and prosecution merely by showing that an abortion has been performed, without regard to the circumstances," the Department of Justice wrote in the lawsuit.

"The law then puts the burden on the physician to prove an 'affirmative defense' at

trial."

Advocates for sexual assault survivors have said the rape and incest exception is essentially useless, because Idaho's public record law doesn't allow law enforcement agencies to release reports when a case is still under investigation — a process that generally takes weeks or months.

Dr. Caitlin Gustafson, a family physician, and a regional Planned Parenthood organization have already sued over the abortion ban and two other anti-abortion laws in the Idaho Supreme Court, which is expected to hear arguments in the case on Wednesday. In the lawsuit, Gustafson contends that the

exception for medical emergencies is vague and impossible to interpret.

"It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for me to implement the medical exception and provide care to a pregnant person whose life may be at risk," wrote Gustafson, noting that some serious pregnancy-related medical conditions like preeclampsia can cause death though it is not guaranteed to do so.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little, a Republican, said the U.S. Supreme Court gave states the ability to regulate abortion, "end of story." He promised to work with the state's attorney general, Lawrence Wasden, to defend the law.