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DROPPING IN

Firefighters get rappel training in Grant County



A rappeller dangles above the ground May 5 during the U.S. Forest Service's national rappel certification training at the Grant County Regional Airport.

BY STEVEN MITCHELL
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Regional Airport served as the jumping-off point May 2-7 for essential training for a select group of wildland firefighters as the U.S. Forest Service hosted its yearly rappel-certification training course.

Roughly 60 returning firefighters from Oregon and Idaho dangled from helicopters hundreds of feet in the air to practice rappelling, a method of descending rapidly using ropes and climbing hardware.

Adam Kahler, a national rappel specialist who started as a rappeller in Grant County in the early 2000s, said the training was one of two annual recertification events the U.S. Forest Service hosts each year. There's also a rookie training in Salmon, Idaho.

Rappel-trained firefighters are an elite group. According to Kahler, the Forest Service has just 300 rappellers nationwide.

The training session, he said, is a chance not only to come back and conduct crew training, but it also provides an opportunity for multiple crews — rappellers, helicopter spotters, and pilots — to work together again.

Kahler said a rappel crew's specialty is roping into small, remote, quick-response fires.

All of the training is standardized. So, when a crew is called out, depending on the location, they can be on a fire in as little as an hour.



A rappeller dangles above the ground on May 5 during the U.S. Forest Service's national rappel certification training at the Grant County Regional Airport.

That's why the training is so important between the multiple crews, Kahler said.

"(Rappelling) is just a very quick, efficient way to get people on the ground where they need to be," he said.

Two tornadoes in Eastern Oregon uproot trees and damage buildings

The Oregonian

Two moderate tornadoes that touched down in Eastern Oregon on May 6 uprooted trees and damaged buildings, according to a National Weather Service.

The two tornadoes, both categorized as EF1, were generated by a severe thunderstorm that moved along state Highway 204, the service said.

They occurred between Weston and Tollgate, which are in the Blue Mountains northeast of Pendleton, at 1:40 and 1:55 p.m.

Tornadoes rated EF1 are considered moderate and have winds from 86 to 110 miles per hour.

The first tornado struck about 8 miles east of Weston. It traveled east through Umatilla County for about 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 miles and was about 175 yards wide at its maximum width. It reached a wind speed of 97 mph. It ripped the roof off one building and sent it more than 300 feet, the report said. The tornado also caused the roof and walls of a farm to collapse.

The second traveled less than a mile, north of Highway 204, which is also known as the Weston-Elgin Highway. It reached 104 mph in wind speed but did not damage any property or structures, according to the weather service.



One of two tornadoes that touched down in Eastern Oregon on May 6 damaged buildings and uprooted trees.

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