

FIRE

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"It was so close," he said. "It happened so fast, and it was so big. You look back and just wonder how did it not burn the house."

Aundrea Larson, her husband Chris, and two children were among those staying at Lands Inn when the fire started. The family, along with Aundrea's parents, are building a cabin farther up Dick Creek Road as an escape from the hustle and bustle of city life.

Larson said they had just finished cooling off in the John Day River and went to Dayville for ice cream when they saw smoke coming off Sugarloaf Mountain.

"We got that sinking feeling," she said. "We knew it was close. Unfortunately, our worst fears were confirmed."

Larson said they came back as quickly as they could up the winding dirt road with just enough time to gather their things and warn a few more neighbors. They spent the night in John Day, and didn't sleep a wink.

"At first, you're just worried about everybody's place burning down," she said. "We, really truly, had a lot less to lose. People up there have houses and cabins. You just feel for them."

The response from the neighbors was remarkable, Larson said. With extensive knowledge of the area, Buce was able to draw a map for firefighters. Craig Merkord, who also lives nearby, stayed up all night doing burn backs and directing firefighters.

A portion of the Sugarloaf Fire also burned about 55 acres onto the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. Then, just a few days

later, a second fire began in the park around the Blue Basin Overlook Trail which burned up fencing, part of a retaining wall and threatened an historic home.

Several power poles were also damaged, knocking out power to the entire Sheep Rock Unit.

The Blue Basin Fire is under investigation as possibly human-caused. Mike Rubin, chief of facility management for the park, fighting fire in the park can be tricky because they try not to use bulldozers or fire retardant that could damage fossils.

Fire is fairly common at the park, he said, especially given the current drought conditions.

"The big thing to keep in mind is just to pay attention to the fire danger levels and plan accordingly," Rubin said.

With the Sugarloaf Fire now contained, the big emphasis is on Corner Creek Fire — by far the largest right now in Oregon. That blaze has already destroyed one hunting cabin and crept up on local ranches.

Brian Ballou, fire information officer with the Oregon Department of Forestry, said the fire is just 15 percent contained though conditions have improved which should help firefighters.

"It's sure looking a lot better now than it did last Friday," Ballou said.

Larson said the community is thankful for the hard work of the firefighters to keep everyone safe.

"I can guarantee you there was a lot of praying going on," she said. "There were no lives lost and nobody's home lost. We have a lot to be thankful for."

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4547.

Corner Creek, West Fork fires still have life

Fire updates as of Tuesday, July 7

The Blue Mountain Eagle

Corner Creek Fire

The Corner Creek Fire continues to burn actively on the west side of the South Fork John Day River, about 11 miles south of Dayville. The fire was mapped over the weekend and is at 27,166 burned acres since the fire started June 29. The fire grew slightly since Monday, July 6, due to the fire line relocation and burnout operations along the fire's western flank. A lightning strike in the Black Canyon Wilderness was determined as the cause. The fire is 15 percent contained.

There are 1,100 total personnel working on the fire and crews continue to secure lines and mop up hot spots within the fire line. The crews are holding and patrolling the fire along the South Fork John Day River and road.

Helicopters and air tankers worked on the south and west flanks over the weekend with cooling water and retardant drops to help firefighters keep fire growth to a minimum due to winds pushing the blaze against fire lines.

Oregon Department of Forestry Incident Management Team 1 is working to transition management of this fire over to the Oregon Inter-agency Incident Management Team 2, headed by Incident Commander Brett Fillis, who will assume command Wednesday, July 8.

A hunting cabin was destroyed by the fire, while other structures have been protected, including the Rockpile Ranch.



Contributed photo

A plane dumps retardant as it flies over the West Fork Fire on July 6. The fire, burning on the north slope of the Aldrich Mountain Range, has scorched over 300 acres.

The total cost, as of July 7, for the Corner Creek Fire is \$4,300,000.

Road and forest closures: The South Fork Road/County Road 42 from Dayville to U.S. Forest Service 58 Road junction is closed to the general public due to fire activity. Local traffic should drive with caution due to heavy fire-related traffic. The 58 Road and 5820 Road are also closed due to active burning in the vicinity. A forest closure has been issued for part of the Ochoco National Forest near the Corner Creek Fire, including the Black Canyon Wilderness. Mud Springs and Frazier Campgrounds are closed to the public.

The West Fork Fire

The West Fork Fire, burning on the north slope of the Aldrich Mountain range, is estimated at 310 acres the afternoon of Tuesday, July 7, with growth toward the west. The fire is located in the former Thorn Fire, part of the Shake Table Complex that

burned a total of 14,527 acres in August 2006.

The fire was reported Monday, June 29, and held through Saturday, July 4, when winds pushed the fire past retardant lines.

The Malheur National Forest Type 3 Team, the local home unit, took over the fire Monday, July 6. The Incident Commander is Kevin Brock.

Thunderstorms with high winds were expected over the fire Tuesday evening, July 7, with a significant amount of lightning that could cause the fire to spread.

A few helicopters assigned to the Corner Creek Fire were used Monday, July 6, to cool down the West Fork Fire on the Malheur National Forest.

Fire crews, using heavy equipment and air support, are working to build lines around the fire, preparing for potential burnout operations and to keep fire growth to a minimum. Crews are focused on keeping the fire from crossing over onto private property and strengthening the east flank of the fire.

Also assigned to the fire are five 20-person crews, one tender, four falling modules, two skidgines, two dozers, one masticator and 11 miscellaneous overhead.

Deputy Fire Staff Todd Gregory said Monday, "The team is currently working on a full containment strategy."

Sugarloaf Fire

The Sugarloaf Fire, 8 miles north of Dayville, is currently 98 percent contained with 4,740 burned acres. Patrol and mop up continue on the Sugarloaf Fire and the 100 percent contained Blue Basin Fire while watching areas around structures.

There are 174 personnel still assigned to the fire. Fire personnel and equipment not needed on the Sugarloaf Fire are being reassigned to the Corner Creek Fire.

The total cost, as of July 7, for the Sugarloaf Fire is \$3,200,000.

There were no new fires reported over the Fourth of July weekend in Grant County.

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Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Hermiston's Alex Pollock misses the tag on Grant County's Madi McKrola at home plate on June 30 in Irrigon.

Best Fishing PHOTO CONTEST

With two chances to win weekly or grand prize!

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Open to all amateur photographers.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife has stocked some big ones in local lakes and waterways this summer. This is your chance to catch supper and maybe win a prize, in the 2015 Best Fishing Photo Contest sponsored by the Blue Mountain Eagle, Boyd Britton Welding and Prairie Springs Fish Farm.

- Photos will be judged for quality, content, viewer appeal. Remember, it's not the biggest fish — but the best fishing photo that takes the prize!
- Photos must be taken this summer in Grant County.
- Digital format is best - e-mail to kristina@bmeagle.com or bring in a disc to the Eagle office, 195 N. Canyon Blvd., John Day.
- Deadline for submissions: **Sept. 21, 2015** for the grand prize.

Fisherman's Name: _____

Where the fish was caught: _____ **Date taken:** _____

Fish Species: _____ **Weight & Length:** _____

Contact phone number: _____

Contact e-mail address: _____

For more info, call the Eagle, 541-575-0710 — and happy fishing!

STATE

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County Senior League Softball team ended up winning state and advancing to regionals in Montana where they lost in the first round of games.

Shaine Madden and Brianna Zwegardt combined on the mound for the victory in all three games during districts.

In Game One, Grant County beat out Hermiston 19

- 1 and in the semifinal game against Columbia ended 6 - 4 after Grant County came back in the fifth inning to score four runs and take the lead for good.

On offense, Grant County had 32 total hits for the tournament and scored 40 runs. Kaylee Wright was 10 for 12 for the tournament, followed by Hailie Wright who was 4 for 8.

Grant County's Junior state tournament will begin July 11 in Pilot Rock with six teams in the division. The team plays both Saturday, July 11 and Sunday, July 12 at 4:30 p.m.

The team needs to win at least one of the pool play games to make it into bracket play Tuesday, July 13.

Zach Williams has been coaching the girls for the past six years with the help of Mike Strong, Tammy Clark and Lance Zwegardt.

"I have been proud of the girls all season long for how hard they worked to reach their goals. Everyone contributed this week in winning the district tournament," Williams said. "It was a great team victory. This is an extremely talented group of girls with a lot of potential. I feel really good about our chances at the state tournament."

If Grant County wins state, they would be eligible for the July 22-30 regional tournament in Tuscon, Ariz.

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