



Eagle file photo

Summer school students write on a white board in this file photo. School starts soon for local districts.

# School is soon back in session

Blue Mountain Eagle

Students at Grant Union, Humbolt Elementary, Seneca, Prairie City and Long Creek begin class on Aug. 29.

Sharpen the pencils, fill the backpacks and watch out for buses — Grant County students return to school this month. Monument and Dayville students begin school Monday, Aug. 22.

At Grant Union, junior high students in grades 7 and 8 start Monday, Aug. 29, with high school students joining in the following day.

## FIRE

Continued from Page A1

helicopter rappel crews flew to the scene. The smokejumpers arrived first, so the helicopter crews had to wait, he said, but the smokejumpers could not jump directly to the fire area and had to hike in from the meadow below. He said they did not reach the fire until 11:30 a.m., though planes were dropping retardant by 11 a.m.

At 5:41 p.m., a helicopter was reassigned from the Mason Springs Fire, which was still within its containment lines, to the Berry Creek Fire, which continued to grow, according to a Forest Service report about the 2015 fire season. At 9:10 p.m., the report states, a spot fire jumped the retardant and control lines, and the firefighters were pulled off the Berry Creek Fire due to aggressive fire behavior. A firefighter was also transported to the hospital for heat exhaustion, the report states, and a larger Type 3 management team was requested.

The Mason Springs Fire was still contained within the fire lines that evening, Walker said. A firefighter who worked the fire said the engine crews camped near the fire line overnight and began working to mop up the fire the next morning.

At 8:28 a.m. Aug. 13, the Berry Creek Fire was estimated to be 50 acres and actively burning, and the Mason Springs Fire was still contained at about 10 acres, according to the Forest Service report. At 10:30 a.m., air tankers were dropping retardant on the Berry Creek Fire, and hand crews were constructing fire line on the Berry Creek Fire and reinforcing the lines on the Mason Springs Fire.

At about 2 p.m. Aug. 13, with high winds, Walker said a spot fire was discovered outside the lines on the Mason Springs Fire that firefighters were unable to

contain. The report states a helicopter, two air tankers and one bulldozer responded, and the Type 3 management team from the Berry Creek Fire assumed control of both fires and continued to share resources between them. By the end of the day, the report states, the Mason Springs Fire had grown to 500 acres and jumped Highway 395, and an even larger Type 2 management team was ordered.

The following day, with 30 mph winds recorded mid-morning, the fire spread down Canyon Creek toward Canyon City, and a Type 1 management team, the largest, was ordered, according to the report. Gov. Kate Brown invoked the Emergency Conflagration Act, authorizing the request for local firefighters to respond, and 12 engines and 32 volunteer firefighters responded to assist Canyon City, the report states. Despite their efforts, the two fires burned together, according to the report, and 39 homes were destroyed as the fire grew to 22,000 acres that day.

The Canyon Creek Complex was designated as the nation's top fire priority on Aug. 16, the report states, and the Type 1 management team took control as more resources responded to fight the fire. By Aug. 19, the report states more than 900 people were fighting the fire, but it could not be extinguished until September after growing to 110,000 acres and destroying 43 homes.

### Burning questions a year later

A sizable crowd of about 100 people gathered at the Forest Supervisor's Office to ask questions about the fire on short notice Tuesday after the meeting was announced Sunday.

John Day resident Howard Gieger asked if another public meeting could be scheduled with more notice and said he believed an independent investigation of the fire should be conducted.

Beverlin, the forest supervisor who served as agency administrator on the fire, said the community is free to fund and conduct an independent investigation. He said he hoped the community could move forward and heal after this meeting, rather than schedule another. He said, however, the Forest Service would take and respond to written questions.

A woman who lost her home in the fire asked why

more resources were not sent to put out the fire when it was known high winds were expected the afternoon of Aug. 13.

Walker said they were aware of the weather and had all available resources fighting the fire. He said incident commanders on fires throughout the West would all agree there were not enough resources available to fight all the fires that year. "Everybody was out of firefighters at that point," he said. "... We just ran out of people."

Beverlin said obtaining additional resources would be easy this year because there are fewer fires. He said, in contrast, the 12,000-acre Rail Fire currently burning near Unity has twice as many crews fighting the fire than were on the Canyon Creek Complex, which was twice the size, when the Type 1 management team took over.

Traci Weaver, who served as a public information officer on the fire, said agencies cannot afford to staff for the worst-case scenario that occurred with the "perfect storm" of weather conditions last year.

John Morris asked why a bulldozer line was constructed on his property without his permission instead of on Forest Service land. Beverlin said he would have to approve a dozer line on the Strawberry Wilderness Area, but he was not asked by the firefighters in the field. He said, in hindsight, he would have approved a dozer line in the wilderness, but he is not sure if he would have granted the request at the time.

Former firefighter Fritz Phillips of John Day asked why a Malheur National Forest's Facebook post indicated the Mason Springs Fire had been both contained and controlled, the latter indicating the fire is essentially out.

Beverlin admitted that Phillips was right about the post but said it was a miscommunication between public information personnel and the fire managers, who never actually called the fire controlled.

Someone asked if the Mason Springs Fire was patrolled the night of Aug. 12.

The firefighter in charge said he walked a lap around the fire that night before camping beside it. Walker added the fire was within the containment lines the next morning when firefighters began working to extinguish hot spots. He said it

was contained until about 2 p.m. Aug. 13. Walker said no one saw how the spot fire that jumped the containment lines started. He speculated that cutting down a hazardous tree at about that time may have sent an ember beyond the lines.

Another person asked why it took firefighters so long to respond to the Berry Creek Fire, stating it was reported at 6 a.m. but firefighters did not arrive on scene until 11 a.m.

Walker said, if someone reported the fire at 6 a.m., it was not logged in dispatch, but he said it was hectic with 12 fires reported that day. He said the Berry Creek Fire was reported and logged in dispatch at 7:22 a.m. He said aircraft were en route by 8:50 a.m., but the smokejumpers who were over the fire first had to jump to the meadow below and hike in.

Someone asked Walker what the firefighters had learned if a similar situation occurred in the future.

Walker said, in hindsight, he wished he would have kept the two hand crews he released when Burns requested them, even though Burns sent one crew back when he requested it. He said the work order for the helicopter took too long, and the helicopter should have been launched sooner. He said he has already asked the night dispatchers to contact him sooner if something occurs — and they have this year — so he can direct the operations sooner.

A woman who described the fire as "an act of God" asked Beverlin if policies and procedures could be changed from the top down to prevent catastrophic fires from occurring in the future.

Beverlin said firefighters perform after action reviews after every incident to try to learn from them.

"Because of the significant number of fatalities that have happened on wildfires, there are some real strict safety guidelines that we have to comply with," he said.

Although no one was killed on the Canyon Creek Complex, the National Interagency Fire Center reports 164 wildland firefighting fatalities from 2006 to 2015. Of those, 46 were for medical reasons, such as a heart attack, but many were from entrapment, burnovers and other accidents. At least one firefighter has died each year since 1958, according to NIFC, and more than 1,000 firefighters have died in the last 100 years.

"... There's that balance of safety of firefighters and then aggressive suppression efforts," Beverlin said.

### ATTENTION LADIES

**Ratified on Aug. 18, 1920:**

**Amendment XIX.\***  
The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex.  
Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

## CONGRATULATIONS

### to all of the 4H/FFA members at this year's fair!

**Thank you to all the supporters who made the sale a huge success.**

### GRAND CHAMPIONS

Jessica Carter  
Buyer: Iron Triangle

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Buyer: Iron Triangle

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Buyer: Doug's Motor Vehicle Repair

### RESERVE GRAND CHAMPIONS

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Buyer: Chester's Thriftway

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