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FROM EMBERS TO ASHES

HOMES AT RISK MILES FROM FLAMES

Firewise provides community risk assessments, resources

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

As a wildfire burns, even if the walls of flame do not pose an immediate threat, embers floating in the wind can ignite homes miles away.

If the burning material enters the house through a vent or lands on roof debris, it can smolder until it eventually engulfs the house in flames — even if the original fire never touches the surrounding area.

Grant County Firewise Coordinator Irene Jerome said the biggest threat to homes is not what many people think.

“What we finally have figured out is it’s not the wall of flame,” she said. “The biggest home burner is embers.”

In addition to having defensible space around the home to prevent the walls of flame — and spot fires caused by embers — from encroaching on the house, owners must also think about the house itself.

Mark Howell, fire prevention officer for the Malheur National Forest’s Blue Mountain Ranger District, said a large fire can distribute embers three miles away. Uncovered vents and crawlspaces or

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Eagle photos/Rylan Boggs

Mark Howell, the fire protection officer for the Blue Mountain Ranger District, helps property owner Roy Walker remove bark mulch from near his house in the Pine Creek Area. TOP PHOTO: Howard Gieger, left, and Phil Bopp tend a burn pile on Gieger’s 40-acre property in the Pine Creek area on Saturday, May 6. Gieger is the Firewise chairman for the Pine Creek area.

“What we finally have figured out is it’s not the wall of flame. The biggest home burner is embers.” — Irene Jerome, Grant County Firewise coordinator

Iron Triangle creating two biomass processing facilities

By Rylan Boggs
Blue Mountain Eagle

Two biomass processing facilities are expected to be up and running in Grant County this summer.

Utilizing low-value vegetation from the Malheur National Forest, the Iron Triangle plants in Seneca and John Day will initially produce posts, poles and chips and could move into torrefied products, if the market is available. Torrefaction is the process of baking biomass into a coal-like fuel that can be burned.

The market for torrefied material depends on the Portland General Electric power plant in Boardman converting from burning coal to torrefied material, according to King Williams of Iron Triangle. PGE planned to shut it down entirely by 2020.

“If they choose to start buying, undoubtedly, we will be in that market,” Williams said.

Neither of the facilities currently have torrefaction equipment, but Williams said if it was needed they would get it.

A state grant will aid the construction of the project in John Day. The county is passing state funds and liability to Iron Triangle through a series of intergovernmental agreements. Iron Triangle will provide a minimum of \$1.75 million, and a state grant through Business Oregon will provide \$811,800. Iron Triangle is required to provide at least 10 jobs for eight consecutive quarters and operate the facility for 10 years.

Williams said the 10 jobs were a minimum requirement, and there would likely be more. The John Day facility will chip and sort materials to be sent to the Seneca facility or elsewhere.

The Seneca facility will sort and chip material and produce poles, Williams said.

Iron Triangle will be creating the facility on part of the old Grant Western Lumber property in John Day.

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King Williams

Loggers association suggests federal reforms to improve forest economy

B & M Timber awarded for Canyon Creek Complex salvage

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

For the first time since 2013, the Oregon Department of Forestry and Associated Oregon Loggers hosted an operators dinner in John Day May 17, where attendees heard updates on the industry, legislation and insect problems.

Associated Oregon Loggers Forest Policy Manager Rex Storm said, although there have been changes since 2013, the forest economy remains “very slack,” with only one local mill and lean timber supply. The problem is not a shortage in demand, he said, but a lack of a “sufficient and reliable volume of timber” preventing investment in mills, making it difficult to find buyers for private logs.

While ODF primarily works with private landowners, Storm said the timber supply from the larger national forests has more impact on the logging infrastructure. He said, while the association looks forward to the completion of the forest plan revision that has been in progress for many years, he is “not optimistic” it will have the legal sufficiency for a sustainable timber supply. He said harvest levels need to double or triple to improve the economy.

Storm said he was hopeful President Donald Trump would usher in changes needed at the federal level. He said four steps would improve timber supply: a forest plan with legal sufficiency for local authority; Forest Service leadership reform; Forest



The Eagle/Sean Hart

Oregon Department of Forestry Stewardship Forester Kirk Ausland, right, congratulates Brad Clemens of B & M Timber on receiving a Central Oregon District Merit Award for his salvage logging efforts after the Canyon Creek Complex at an ODF and Associated Oregon Loggers operators dinner May 17 in John Day.

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