

Busy fire season expected in Pacific Northwest

Malheur, Umatilla fire crews preparing for dry forests

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

While there is nowhere of high concern right now in Grant County for a potential wildfire, firefighters on the Malheur and Umatilla national forests are gearing up for the upcoming fire season.

Eric Miller, assistant fire management officer for the Malheur National Forest, said they have all of their resources fully staffed and are training for the upcoming seasons.

He said that all resources should be ready to go by mid-

June, and they will order outside resources as needed to supplement their staffing.

“We are still challenged by COVID, and if it is a busy fire season in the Western U.S., then we will be competing with other fires for critical resources such as aviation, (interagency Hotshot) crews and incident management teams,” Miller said. “Last summer, there was a large increase in visitors to public lands, and we’re expecting that trend again this year — so we want to get the word out to visitors on how they can help prevent fires, since we don’t want a corresponding increase in fires.”

The upcoming fire season is always hard to predict, accord-



Contributed photo/Todd McKinley

Lightning in 2019 caused four fires on the Malheur National Forest.

ing to Miller, but current projections based on drought monitoring and the forecast indicate a busy fire season in the Pacific Northwest.

Miller said the predictions are for above-normal tempera-

tures and below-normal precipitation, further increasing the drought conditions.

Miller and Rachel Pawlitz, interagency communication specialist for fire, fuels and aviation management, said

one way Grant County citizens can help this fire season is following the public use restrictions.

They added that people need to avoid leaving their campfires unattended and report smoke to John Day Dispatch or 911.

“The basic rule of thumb is: If a fire is too hot to touch, it is too hot to leave,” they said. “Also, check your vehicle and address worn brakes, clogged exhausts, underinflated or flat tires, poorly greased bearings, and ensure there are no dragging parts, trailer chains or tow straps. Clear your undercarriage of accumulated grass and weeds, which can easily take a spark. Carry a fire extinguisher in your vehicle.”

PREVENTING FOREST FIRES

Check conditions — including weather forecasts and public use restrictions — before heading onto public lands. Check Keep Oregon Green’s webpage for the latest on fire restrictions: <https://keeporegongreen.org/current-conditions>.

Consider alternatives to a campfire. Pack a portable camp stove as a safer option for outdoor cooking. These are often allowed even when campfires are prohibited. When the sun sets you can still set a “campfire storytelling” vibe by getting creative with a solar-powered lantern or a flashlight.

Select the right spot. If campfires are allowed, use an existing ring. Fire pits in established campgrounds are the best spots. Avoid placing fires near shrubs or trees, tents, structures or vehicles. Avoid low-hanging branches overhead and store extra firewood a good distance away. Clear the site to bare soil if no ring is available. Remove ground vegetation at least 5 feet on all sides and encircle your fire with rocks.

Keep it small. Smaller campfires are less likely to escape, and large fires are more likely cast hot embers long distances. Add firewood in small amounts, and only after existing material is consumed. Never use gasoline or other accelerants. Don’t use flammable or combustible liquids, such as gasoline, propane or lighter fluid, to start or increase your campfire.

Attend your campfire at all times. An unattended campfire can grow into a costly, damaging wildfire within minutes.

Drown all embers with water when you are ready to leave. Have water and fire tools on site. Bring a shovel and a bucket of water to extinguish any escaped embers. Stir the coals, then drown them again. Repeat until the fire is dead out.

Survey reveals growing concerns over wildfire in Oregon

By Michael Kohn
Oregon Capital Bureau

As wildfires seem to grow in number and severity each year, Oregonians are expressing greater concern for how wildfire affects their own lives.

A recent survey conducted by the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center found a strong majority of Oregonians see wildfires as “a somewhat or very serious threat” to residents of the state.

Respondents described challenges with managing the forests, as well as climate change that is drying out forest areas and making them more susceptible to wildfires.

The survey was conducted May 4-10, with 918 Oregonians responding. The survey has a margin of error of 2-3%.

Here are some of the hard numbers: Nine out of 10 (93%) Oregonians see wildfires as a somewhat or very serious threat to life and property. Most people expressed concern about wildfires affecting the people of Oregon rather than their own community (68%) or their family



Contributed photo/Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office

A fire burns in Clackamas County the week of Sept. 9, 2020.

(58%).

Most Oregonians are also convinced that the number of serious wildfires will continue to rise. More than half said wildfires in the state will increase in both frequency (55%) and severity (53%).

Beliefs that wildfires will grow in frequency and intensity are not tied to political beliefs, the survey found.

Even though liberals and conservatives have diverging viewpoints on the existence and causes of climate change, more than 85% of Oregonians of all social and economic ideologies agree that fires are likely to become more fre-

quent and more severe.

Two-thirds of young adults (aged 18 to 29) in Oregon said wildfires are a serious threat to their family (66%) and nearly three-quarters said they are a serious threat to their community (73%). This is a significant increase (19 and 17 percentage points higher) compared to people 65 and older.

Oregonians have more faith in private landowners compared to governments when it comes to preventing wildfire.

Around half of respondents (49%) think that private landowners are doing “very

OREGON VALUES AND BELIEFS CENTER

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Center is committed to the highest level of public opinion research. To obtain that, the non-profit is building the largest online research panel of Oregonians in history to ensure that all voices are represented in discussions of public policy in a valid and statistically reliable way.

Selected panelists earn points for their participation, which can be redeemed for cash or donated to a charity. To learn more, visit oregon-vbc.org.

or somewhat well” at managing forests on their lands compared to 33% who say the state is doing “well,” and 27% who say the federal government is doing “well.”

Nearly two-thirds of Ore-

gonians think that wildfires should be fought, even if they are far from homes and development (72%). This figure is 7% points higher than in August 2019, suggesting that the Labor Day fires in Oregon caused an increased urgency to fight fires.

The survey revealed that Oregonians are concerned about the unpredictable nature of fires, the air pollution caused by wildfire smoke and the safety of wildlife.

What do Oregonians think they can do to protect themselves? Eight out of 10 (81-86%) respondents said that clearing vegetation around homes and hardening them against fires are top-tier strategies.

Two-thirds of Oregonians (72-76%) said controlled burns, thinning of weak trees and purchasing more firefighting equipment are top strategies to prevent wildfire.

More divisive is logging. Some 38% of respondents said logging is a strategy to reduce wildfire while 37% said they are against logging to reduce wildfire.

John Day

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