



# The Blue Mountain EAGLE



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## Where there's smoke

### Fire officials explain process of reporting, finding fires after blaze near Prairie City erupts two days after being reported

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Though thankful for fire crews' quick and aggressive response, some residents believe a now fully contained fire 3 miles north of Prairie City could have been avoided.

According to Oregon Department of Forestry, a passing thunderstorm ignited the Dixie Creek Fire on July 1. The fire was "smoldering" and "unobserved" until wind and scorching heat allowed it to explode on July 3, ripping through upwards of 500 acres and prompting Prairie City officials to scrap the fireworks show. The wind kept the blaze from tearing through structures, according to ODF.

Ricolla Voigt, Grant County deputy district attorney and a landowner near Dixie Creek, said she reported smoke coming from the Ricoh Ranch on July 1, a little before 4:30 p.m.

She said she made a second call a little after 6 p.m. and told dispatch the smoke was coming from the other side of Dixie

Creek after riding about a mile and hiking to a higher elevation to get a clearer view of the smoke and its location. She said she snapped a photo of the smoke and shortly after saw a plane directly above the smoke but could not determine what fire agency it

The next day, she said she did not see any smoke.

"I assumed that it had been taken care of," Voigt said.

Voigt said two days later, when the fire blew up, she checked the online fire log and saw someone had tagged her smoke report as a "false alarm."

She said that was "weird" and that she saw from a map of the fire that it started within the "legal description" ODF had documented for the report she made.

#### Tracking, lightning strikes and 'holdover fires'

Christie Shaw, ODF public information officer, said over 250 lightning strikes hit the John Day Unit from June 30 and July 1. Those lightning strikes created "holdover fires," which are dampened by rain or burning in fuels that don't produce a visible column of smoke. Shaw said they go undetected for a time before they gain enough intensity to dry nearby fuels and spread across the landscape.

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The Dixie Creek Fire smoke plume is seen Saturday, July 3. The smoke was originally reported July 1, but firefighters were unable to locate it.

belonged. Nonetheless, she said at the time it appeared they were on it.

A short time later, she said, a fire engine arrived at her house, and she described where she saw the smoke and pointed out what was in the photo before texting it to them, and they left at 6:30 p.m.

"After that," she said, "I don't know what happened."

## Fugitive at large after rollover

Jason Skinner, 43, is a white male with a felony warrant for his arrest

Blue Mountain Eagle

A man with a felony warrant is at large after a rollover crash in a stolen vehicle Saturday near the border of Grant and Harney counties.

Jason Skinner, 43, is a white male who has a felony warrant and appeared

to avoid searchers and trackers responding to a crash reported at 1 p.m. Saturday near the Grant and Harney county line, according to a press release from Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley.

McKinley advised anyone traveling on the Burns-Izee route — near County Road 68 and Forest Road 47 in the Alsop Mountain area — to call 911 if Skinner is seen.

He said two different parties reported seeing someone who matched the description on the Izee Highway in Crook County at 11 a.m. Sunday.

"The report to us was delayed by about three hours," he said, "... so more than likely he is out of the Izee area."

McKinley said the vehicle Skinner was driving was reported stolen Sunday when the owner from Harney County discovered it missing.

John Atkins of Burns called 911 Saturday to report he had been in a rollover crash and didn't know where he was. He stated he and the driver, later identified as Skinner, were taking the back roads from Burns to Bend.

Through the efforts of Grant County Sheriff's Office, Grant County Search and Rescue, Grant County Air Search, Grant County Emergency Communications Center and multiple other agencies, Atkins was located at 5:30 p.m. from an aircraft. Deputies made it to his location at about 6:50 p.m.

Atkins reported he was uninjured and was transported to Harney County. Skinner's whereabouts remain unknown.

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A helicopter emerges from the smoke of the Dixie Creek Fire July 3.

Contributed photo/Cheryl Hoefler

## Dollar General opens its doors

New store one of five planned in Eastern Oregon this year

By Steven Mitchell  
Blue Mountain Eagle

John Day's new Dollar General opened its doors for a "soft opening" Monday.

Torry Mayfield, Dollar General district manager, said Saturday the goal is to open and hire more employees.

According to Mayfield, the store plans to have a total of about 10 employees. Currently, he said, they have hired four.

Mayfield said filling open positions and "freight logistics" have been two challenges in getting the store ready for



The Dollar General store in John Day had a soft opening Monday.

The Eagle/Steven Mitchell

its soft opening.

Mayfield said Dollar General plans to open four more stores in Eastern Oregon this year. He said they would mostly be along Interstate 84.

Currently, the company's webpage lists 65 stores in Oregon and upwards of 17,000 across the U.S.

According to Dollar General's 2020 annual report, the



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From left, Dollar General's Torry Mayfield, district manager, Shelley Reilly, general manager, and Jennifer Guido, training manager, pose at the store Saturday.

company plans to open more than 1,000 additional stores in 2021.

In addition, the company touts that roughly 75% of

Americans live within 5 miles of a Dollar General.

The store's hours of operation will be from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

