



SAM STEIDEL/FOR CANNON BEACH GAZETTE

Firefighters responded to a blaze in Cannon Beach Sunday.

## Woman escapes fire that destroyed home

By R.J. Marx  
Cannon Beach Gazette

Fire swept through a two-story North Larch Street residence Sunday, Feb. 12, in a blaze that could be seen for miles.

There were no reported injuries and one woman was assisted safely from the second story after two passersby heard the building's smoke detector sounding from parking lot across street and saw smoke coming from building. They assisted the occupant from the second story down the stairs to safety.

The call was received to dispatch via telephone at 3:31 p.m. on Saturday, Cannon Beach Fire Chief Matt Benedict said. Cannon Beach was first to arrive at, followed by Seaside and Gearhart. "Additional units were dispatched to move-up as part of our mutual aid agreement for a 'second alarm' within Clatsop County which included Warrenton Fire, Hamlet Fire, Nehalem Fire, Lewis and Clark Fire," Benedict said.

The apartment building was almost fully involved when local police and fire arrived first to the scene. The top units of the building were destroyed; the bottom units had some smoke and water damage.

In the fire's early phases, there was risk of it spreading, Benedict said, until firefighters used a water hose

and extinguished the blaze from the outside in.

"We have two ladders here, Seaside and ours," Benedict said. "We used ours from up top to squirt down — most of it was on the second story of the house."

Firefighters did not enter the building because of the risk of collapse. "If you look at the wall from the other side, you can see that it's bowing out," Benedict said. "We're not going to put anyone in there in that danger to put it out."

All units were back in service by 9 p.m. Sunday.

In Seaside, members of the City Council praised the efforts of firefighters.

"We responded down to that fire and we were right in the middle of that," Seaside's City Manager Mark Winstanley said at a Seaside City Council meeting on Feb. 13, the day after the fire. "We are certainly always willing to help our neighbors in these situations. We're very proud of the fire department, and I want to make sure I recognize those people on the fire department."

The fire was determined to be accidental, Benedict said.

"The volunteers did an amazing job of getting the fire out, no one was injured," he added. "Special thanks to Cannon Beach PD for their assistance. It was much appreciated."

# Landowners fume over fire fee

## Hundreds face new assessments

By Jack Heffernan  
EO Media Group

Landowners in Clatsop County are challenging a fee assessed by the state for fire protection, citing improper classification and a lack of advance notice.

In early January, roughly 2,300 landowners in the Astoria Forest Protection District were notified that their properties, designated as forestlands in July, would be assessed an annual fee for fire protection as part of their property taxes. But some argue either that their properties should not qualify as forestland or they had not received proper notice.

The Oregon Department of Forestry provides fire protection to forest and grazing lands through money from both the state general fund and fees it collects from forestland property owners.

Overall, roughly 4,750 lots were added as forestlands, while 1,200 lots — including 600 owners — were removed from the list.

The current annual tax rate in the Astoria district is \$1.21 per acre, and owners of forestlands are charged a minimum assessment of \$18.75 each year. A \$47.50 surcharge can be added if property owners build additional structures on their land.

### Wildfire efforts

The money collected from these fees fund wildfire efforts in the state. Rates could vary each year based on the number of wildfires the Department of Forestry responds to in a given year and the number of people paying into the system, Astoria District Forester Dan Goody said. The department does not receive any additional revenue from the assessments.

While many of these property owners also pay taxes to local fire districts that respond to structural fires, the Department of Forestry's assessment is based on lands it would protect during a wildfire, Goody said. Therefore, many property owners who don't have many trees or vegetation on their land may also be subjected to these taxes.

But some property owners have been confused about the



DANNY MILLER/EO MEDIA GROUP

Tim Mancill walks on his property on Wednesday in Seaside. Mancill is appealing the added fire protection fee on his property.

distinction. Tim Mancill, who has owned a 2.36 acre lot on North Wahanna Road in Seaside for almost 13 years that also includes his home, was assessed \$66.25 for his property. Much of his property includes wetlands, which are submerged underwater for much of the year, along with some willow trees.

"I think they're out for a money grab," Mancill said. "Don't they have better things to do with their time?"

Goody said people would be surprised about the kinds of land that allow wildfires to spread quickly. In his experience, even lands such as cranberry bogs have caught fire, he said.

### Astoria district

In October 2013, a fire assessment committee began its review of the Astoria district. The six-member committee included appointments made by the Department of Forestry, the Oregon State Fire Marshal, the Oregon State University Extension Service and three by the Clatsop County Board of Commissioners. Following a review, the committee made recommendations about what areas could be reclassified as forestlands.

"I don't mean any disrespect to any of the folks living on the lands, but there is over 100 years of experience studying fire risks on the committee," Goody said.

Two public meetings and one hearing in May in Astoria and Seaside produced no oral or written public comments, Goody said. The final classification was recorded by the county in July.

### Surprise

The problem: some property owners whose lands were reclassified were completely unaware that this process took place.

"I was surprised and was like, 'What the heck is this?'" Mancill said about the moment he received the notice in January.

Mancill was one of about 70 landowners who attended a town hall meeting in Seaside on Saturday, Feb. 4, to discuss the issue. The town hall, organized by state Sen. Betsy Johnson and state Rep. Deborah Boone, featured local officials and members of the Department of Forestry, as well as concerned landowners. At times, the town hall became disorganized with attendees shouting out of turn, multiple people who were there said.

"There were so many questions," said Coral Rose Shipley, a Seaside property owner. "It was very hard for the people presenting to make their presentations. They had one outlook and the audience had another outlook."

Goody said he was surprised to hear that many property owners were not aware of the classifications in 2016. The state had sent postcards 10 months prior to the letter sent in early January, so residents may have disregarded them as junk mail, he said.

"They get a lot of mail, a lot of junk mail, and a lot of that gets overlooked," Goody said. "It definitely was not the intent to blindside people."

### Appeal process

The classification process is now final, but the Department of Forestry received 29

appeals of the assessment prior to Monday's deadline. The appeal process will likely last until sometime this spring, Goody said. Once the process is completed, the reclassified land will be added to the Forest Patrol Assessment Roll in July.

While the state sent out postcards, held public meetings and sent notices to newspapers, it typically sees little involvement from the public until late in the process, Goody said.

"We typically don't get much public involvement until it starts hitting the pocketbooks," he said. "Our honest intent is to make forestland assessment honest and equitable to all."

County Manager Cameron Moore said at the Feb. 8 Clatsop County Board of Commissioner's meeting that the county was not notified in advance about the letter sent out in January. He also said ODF officials apologized to the county for the confusion during a meeting on Friday, Feb. 7.

Sen. Johnson said she had preliminary discussions with top officials at ODF earlier this week about making adjustments to the assessments in Clatsop County. Adjustments would be based on the apparent failure of communication, she said.

"The number of people who attended the town hall meeting gave rise to the fact that there was some kind of failure to communicate," Johnson said. "If we had this kind of disconnect in communication, something is wrong."

# GoFundMe, fundraising by Community Church aid those who lost their homes

Fire from Page 1A

Coaster Theatre Executive Director Patrick Lathrop was among those who lost his home.

"I had just left and was shopping in Seaside and got a phone call and came back down," Lathrop said Wednesday. "I witnessed it. I was very lost — that's the only thing I can say. I was just so confused, I didn't know what to do."

Lathrop said in addition to his own living space, an apartment used by Coaster Theatre for guests artists, rehearsals and meetings was also destroyed in the blaze, which was ruled accidental.

### 'Loving and caring'

"I've only seen good," church administrator Nancy Giasson said on behalf of Pastor David Robinson and congregants. "It's just been beautiful the way people want to help."

Giasson said after the fire "a flood of people, members and friends of the church" came to the church with offers of assistance.

"Extraordinarily loving and caring — this is the way this community is," Giasson

said. "We care about each other. We're just happy to serve and to be a flow-through for their gifts."

The church coordinated with other efforts to establish a fire relief fund. Money will be disbursed equally by those displaced by the fire.

Whatever people give goes 100 percent to the victims, Giasson added.

"I'm still a little loss to be honest," Lathrop said. "I keep going back to compared to what the women above me lost. I don't have anything to complain about."

## You can help

To donate, visit [www.gofundme.com/3d-mwfsf](http://www.gofundme.com/3d-mwfsf) or contact **Emmas Lindsay at Dogs Allowed, 503-440-8740.**

To donate to the Cannon Beach Community Church Fire Fund, go to [www.beach-community.org](http://www.beach-community.org).



CANNON BEACH FIRE AND RESCUE

Police Officer James Jordan at the scene of the fire on North Larch Street in Cannon Beach.

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