



**KEEP OUR FORESTS
SAFE FROM FIRE**

New firefighters experience practice blaze

Federal and state workers combined forces Thursday in a practice fire fight in a clearing on Wall Road not far from the Bull Prairie Reservoir.

Summer firefighters from the U.S. Forest Service, Heppner Ranger District and State Forestry Department, Fossil and Monument units, had the fire contained within minutes after officials ignited the practice blaze with drip torches, then cooled down the less-than-an-acre fire with water supplied by water pumps and a pond.

Both the state's and federal workers had undergone a week of fire school, getting them ready for the realistic fire experience. The initial attack on the fire came from the state crew which dug handline or a two ft. swath around the fringes of the blaze with polaskis, shovels and hazel hoes. Both federal and state firefighters laid out hose lines, fastened nozzles and long wands to cool down the hot spots and employees taught by supervisors to watch out for spot fires beyond the fire's edge.

Most were beginning firefighters and the practice fire designed to test their skills under actual conditions.

Larry Bowman, Fire Management officer for the Heppner Ranger District said the district has already had its first fire of the season, caused by a lightning strike three miles from Tupper and normally experiences about 32 fires a season. Ninety-two percent of the blazes are caused by lightning strikes. At the Heppner fire school, seasonal Forest Service personnel were given instruction in a variety of subjects...vehicle uses, defensive driving, fire behavior, fire organization, hand tools used to fight fires, hand or fire line construction and specialized instruction for the district's two lookouts.

The state forestry department's fire school had a number of similarities with personnel schooled in hand-tool uses, fire behavior, sizing up the blaze potential and other instructions in the most frequent of summertime emergencies.

Both officials said Thursday's fire was the culmination

of the week's training and putting the decision-making into practice.

The exercise was also a practice in cooperation between the Forest Service and State Forestry employees in combining their fire organizations. Frequently, both state and federal workers combine on fighting blazes in the Umatilla National Forest and as part of the practice, the fire was turned over to Dale Holland, a fire employee as the assigned fire boss of the practice fire.

The crews were made up of women and men and each member wore fire-resistant clothing, mostly yellow in

color. The women ate smoke as much as the men Thursday and endured the physical strain of dragging hoses and yelling hump as they swung their hand tools on the hand-line.

While personnel on the state crew are limited to fires within the state, Forest Service employees of the Heppner Ranger District may be sent to fires throughout the western states.

As a further aid to firefighting, a helicopter is based at Monument to provide additional water to the state truck pumps and gasoline-driven pumps used in ponds and rivers.

State and federal fire suppression crews protect Umatilla National Forest

**Story and photos by
Jim Hackett**

Beginning firefighters from the Heppner Ranger District, U.S. Forest Service and State Department of Forestry, Monument and Fossil units, experienced real fire conditions in a practice Thursday on Wall Road in the Umatilla National Forest. The veteran fire officials lit the blaze with drip torches, then let the firefighters contain the blaze by building a fire line around the fringes, cooling it down with hoses and providing 100 percent mop-up through the use of water, shovels and person-power. The seasonal crews will be working side by side this summer in a joint federal-state effort to stop fires in nearby forests.

