

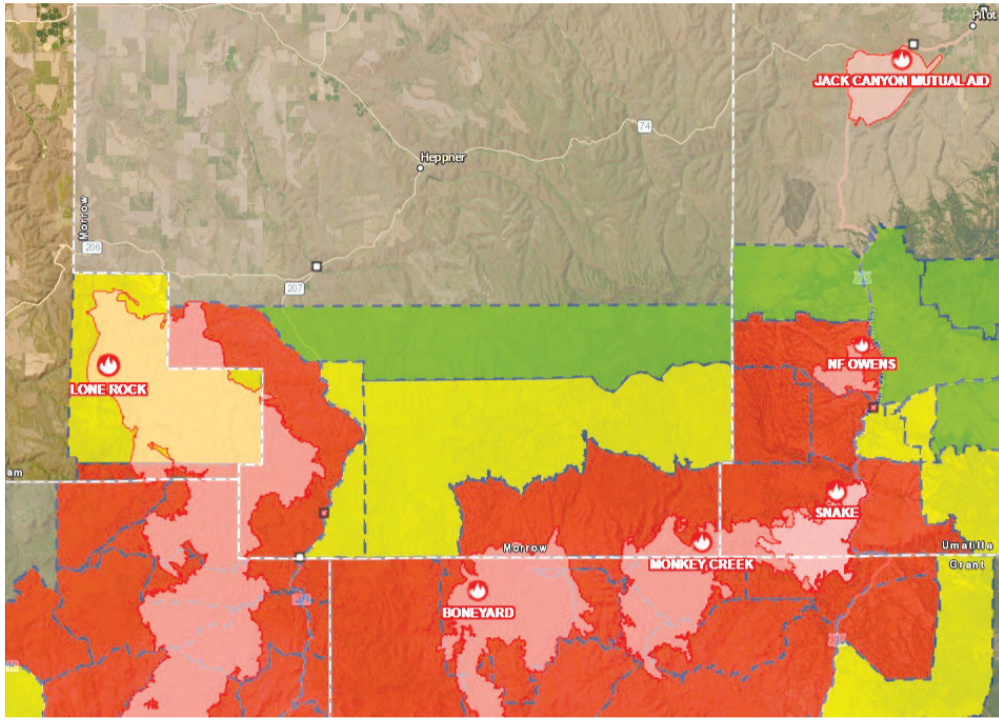


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VOL. 144 NO. 29 8 Pages Wednesday, July 24, 2024 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Multiple Fires Merge and move into Morrow County



Map of the fires as of Tuesday afternoon. -Photo contributed.

By Chris Sykes

Yesterday, the Snake Fire merged into the Monkey Creek Fire in the North Fork John Day River corridor, resulting in the 48,348-acre Monkey Creek Fire. The river corridor and other drainages are experiencing especially gusty conditions, with high temperatures, wind gusts, steep rimrock terrain, and limited visibility complicating fire suppression efforts.

“Our firefighters have been battling these fires day and night for several days amid some of the most challenging terrain and weather in the state,” said Incident Commander Tyler McCarty. “We’re so proud of the work they’ve done. We’re talking a lot about safety because there’s a lot of work ahead of us to put these fires out.”

Overnight, crews con-

tinued to line and mop up spot fires from yesterday on the northeast corner of the Monkey Creek Fire. Along the south end, where crews saw the most active fire behavior, they used defensive firing operations to burn vegetation up to dozer lines to head off the fire. Dozer lines to the east and south of the southern head of the fire proved to be effective and will be improved today.

On the southeast portion of the Monkey Creek Fire, firefighters continued to scout for positions to line and begin burn operations to head off where the fire crossed over the Middle Fork John Day River. Crews will continue defending and protecting structures along the river corridor, where fire activity remains active. On the north portion of the Monkey Creek Fire, crews continue to improve dozer

lines, looking for areas to tie together lines and place defensive burn operations.

Crews will continue mop-up operations and patrolling on the 4,485-acre North Fork Owens Fire, which stands at 20% containment (the complex stands at 3% containment). Last night, acreage increased due to more accurate GPS mapping, not from fire growth. Resources from this division will also support local initial attacks for any potential new starts from expected lightning this afternoon.

Evacuations: Level 1 (Be Ready), Level 2 (Be Set), and Level 3 (Go Now) evacuations are in effect. For updated information, visit the Battle Mountain Complex 2024 page.

The Monkey Creek Fire has now moved into the

southeast corner of Morrow County, and more information will follow regarding this development. Additionally, the Boneyard Fire is also threatening Morrow County.

Fire at a Glance: Battle Mountain Complex

Total Estimated Size: 52,833 acres

Monkey Creek: 48,348 acres

North Fork Owens: 4,485 acres

Snake: (Merged with Monkey Creek)

Containment: 3%

Cause: Under Investigation

The challenging conditions in the river corridor and other drainages, characterized by high temperatures, wind gusts, steep rimrock terrain, and limited visibility, are complicating fire suppression efforts. For more information, visit the Battle Mountain Complex 2024 page.

Lone Rock Fire Morning Briefing - July 23, 2024

Containment: 40%

Total Acres: 131,407

ODF Private Protection: 55,428 acres

BLM: 3,424 acres

USFS: 16,814 acres

Dept. of State: 1,513 acres

Unprotected Lands: -Continued to PAGE TWO

Recall effort fails, MC Commissioners retain seats



Jeff Wenholz



David Sykes



Roy Drago Jr.

ing the ASA, the new circuit court building planned in Heppner, and the county administrator’s salary, as well as Amazon tax abatements and water nitrates. The meetings allowed citizens to give comments and ask questions. At the end of the initial meeting, a vote was taken on whether to proceed with recall efforts. The vote was 26 for and 14 against.

The recall effort focused on addressing issues within the county’s governance. By June 12, 2024, Morrow County Clerk Bobbi Childers verified the signatures on the recall petition, confirming that it had qualified to be included on the ballot. The deadline for the commissioners to either resign or submit a Statement of Justification in 200 words or less, was June 17, 2024. None of the commissioners resigned, prompting the scheduling of a special recall election, which was held on July 22, 2024.

The recall election results were as follows:

For Roy Drago:

Yes: 688

No: 1508*

Over Votes: 1

Under Votes: 15

Total: 2212

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BOC approves ambulance contract with Boardman Fire

County, health district still negotiating

By Andrea Di Salvo

Morrow County is one step closer to long-term ambulance coverage for the county after last week’s board of commissioners meeting in Irrigon, but a few hurdles remain.

The Morrow County BOC approved a five-year contract with Boardman Fire Rescue District (BFRD) last Wednesday. However, Morrow County Administrator Matthew Jensen reported that, while the county had awarded Ambulance Service Areas (ASAs) to Morrow County Health District (MCHD) and BFRD, the contract with MCHD is still under negotiation.

Jensen reiterated that the ambulance provider advisory committee had not looked at financial aspects of the two applicants, but that the county had been negotiating final terms with the health district and Boardman Fire for the previous two weeks.

Boardman Fire’s contract was fairly straightforward, he said. BFRD will transition from interim provider to a five-year contract

as the Northern Ambulance Service Area provider, effective July 17, 2024, and ending June 30, 2029.

The total contract amount is \$1,375,000 plus Consumer Price Index-based increases over the five years, to be paid quarterly. The estimated cost for the first year is around \$275,000. Jensen said the contract also allows about 10 percent leeway for undue expenses.

As for the health district contract for the Northeast and Southern ASAs, Jensen said the language in the MCHD contract is similar.

“We’re just working on those final details, and specifically their requirement for the IGA,” said Jensen.

He reported the county had held multiple meetings with MCHD to clarify compensation and MCHD’s request for intergovernmental agreements (IGAs) with each of the county’s five municipalities.

“We talked with them. We went through some of those details,” he said, adding that they had developed an IGA document to take to

the cities for consideration. He said it was not a final draft, but he was looking for feedback.

“See if we can’t get that taken care of so we can get Morrow County Health District under contract,” Jensen said. “If there’s pushback on that, we’ll be working with Morrow County Health District, the attorneys and representatives from the cities, to finalize and try to figure out if that IGA is the path or if we need to come back and just bring something else to the BOC.”

In fact, it seems there might be some pushback from at least one community. Irrigon City Manager Aaron Palmquist addressed the board during public comment, asking the commissioners to provide an update and finalize contracts as quickly as possible to dispel rumors.

“Let’s get that going so it can get on the street and quiet the ‘rustling of the winds,’” said Palmquist.

However, he also said that, despite Irrigon’s support for MCHD, Irrigon will not be entering into an

intergovernmental agreement with the health district.

The city had previously passed a resolution in support of MCHD as its ambulance service provider, but Palmquist said legal counsel had recommended not entering into an IGA.

“We appreciate that Morrow County has chosen who’s going to be the ASA provider here,” he said. “We just want to see that agreement and get those

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Heppner Ranger District temporarily closed

Pendleton – Due to active wildfires in the Heppner Ranger District, compounded by extremely unfavorable weather conditions, limited firefighting resources, and concern for public safety, forest officials in the Umatilla National Forest are Temporarily closing the Heppner Ranger District.

The objective of the closure is to proactively protect public and firefighter safety as multiple Incident Management Teams continue to actively suppress large wildfires in the Heppner Ranger District, while local resources respond to potential new smoke reports. Two

large wildfires are currently burning in the Heppner Ranger District, The Lone Rock Fire is estimated to be over 116,000 acres in size, with 40% containment, and Boneyard Fire, which is currently estimated to be over 8,300 acres and 0% contained. All fires have active suppression efforts taking place and are being managed by Incident Management Teams. Lone Rock and Boneyard Fires have triggered evacuation orders for multiple towns. With multiple large wildfires burning in the Heppner Ranger District, while local resources respond to potential new smoke reports. Two

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