

# Hermiston Butte burned in preparation for holiday

By JESSICA POLLARD  
STAFF WRITER

The Umatilla County Fire District 1 set fire to the Hermiston Butte Saturday in preparation for July 4.

Around 30 firefighters were at the scene from surrounding fire departments, including Echo, Pendleton, Umatilla, and UCFD1. The burn provided an opportunity for seasonal firefighters to train in fire suppression and cleanup.

*"It's already very deceptively dry. People need to be extremely careful. One errant spark could rip off an acre."*

Matt Hodge, UCFD1 Lieutenant

Long-time residents will know that the burning is nothing new,

but in recent years the controlled burn has stretched from just the north side to the south side of the Hermiston Butte as well following a 2016 fire, when firework embers set the south side on fire during the show.

The purpose of a controlled burn is to remove fuel — brush and grass — from the area to avoid future emergency fires, in part before the Fourth of July Celebration in Butte Park. Controlled burns happen all across the nation


to remove different types of fuel, said UCFD1 Lieutenant Matt Hodge.

It can be hard to tell if the July 4 weekend will result in many fire calls. UCFD1 has four stations — two staffed and two volunteer — and some years all four get called out. Other years, Hodge said, the district is dealing with as little as one fire.

But high moisture from last winter has resulted in a lot of extra fuel growth, Hodge said.

"It's already very deceptively dry. People need to be extremely careful," Hodge said. "One errant spark could rip off an acre."

According to the UCFD1 website, this time of year constitutes a "no burn period." The period excludes burns like small recreational fires, barbecues, and agricultural fires. People who have questions about the burning policy are encouraged to call Umatilla County Burning line at 1-541-278-6397.



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