

The INDEPENDENT

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"Voice of the Upper Nehalem River Valley"

January 15, 2009

Winter visitors



These two elk cows were spotted not too far from downtown Vernonia on January 2.

Wild weather triggered additional effort

Vernonia's weather did not calm down after the snow and power outages of Christmas. Beginning January 1, the first of a series of storms brought the possibility of flooding with it. The storm on January 1st had the potential of up to 15 inches of rain, plus snowmelt.

As a result of the storm forecasts, an Emergency Command center was opened at City Hall with Interim Chief of Police Mike Kay, plus Fire Deputy Chiefs Ben Davis and Dean Smith sharing command. The best estimates that Emergency Command could get indicated that the Nehalem might reach 14 to 16 feet at the gauge upriver from Vernonia, which could cause some flooding in low lying areas and near Rock Creek. The new Colum-

bia County Community Alert Network (CAN) was used to notify Vernonia residents by phone of the possibility of flooding. Fortunately, the storm did not reach its full potential and the Nehalem River rose only 10 feet, not high enough to do more than put a couple of inches in some basements or garages.

The next storm was expected to dump up to 10 inches of rain, along with high winds and warmer temperatures that would increase snow melt. On January 6, once again, the Emergency Command center opened at City Hall and joint commanders Kay, Davis and Smith started preparing for possible flooding. The forecast for this storm was more threatening than the January 1 storm,

so the commanders began marshalling supplies, crews, and equipment. Inmate crews brought in by Columbia County helped empty the school's shop building, sandbag the middle school and load food into a refrigeration truck. Providence Health Center and West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) were "shrink-wrapped" with inside-out pond liner, and WOEC moved much of their office equipment to the attic. Zodiacs with crews were on standby to come to Vernonia if water rescues were needed, and trucks, large and heavy enough to drive through flood waters, were staged around town.

A public meeting was held January 7, in the Vernonia Mid-

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Project Woodcut receives national recognition award

The Society of American Foresters bestowed the House of Society Delegates National Recognition Award on the Portland SAF chapter for the outstanding public service benefits achieved by "Project Woodcut."

When SAF member Bob Alverts learned of the extensive blowdown of trees from back-to-back storms last December, he wanted to solve two problems: The millions of board feet of downed timber that would soon become a wildfire hazard and the roughly 800 Vernonia homeowners without heat because of storm-caused power outages. His solution, dubbed "Project Woodcut," helped address both problems.

The retired Bureau of Land Management natural resource manager took his idea to the SAF leadership. They recruited volunteers to cut up the dead trees into fuel and deliver them to the remote community. He set the project goal at 100 cords of firewood.

Stihl Northwest and Precision Power Equipment, of Banks, loaned power saws and other gear to the crew, volunteers provided wood splitters, and lumber mills sent trucks to haul the wood to the stricken homeowners. Cash donations helped with fuel and other expenses. The gifts of services, equipment, supplies and money by Oregon businesses, organizations and individuals exceeded \$50,000.

In several weekends the foresters, working with Columbia County Disaster Relief coordinators and local volunteers, cut and split more than 50 cords of firewood from Weyerhaeuser Company and Bureau of Land Management lands, as

well as Banks and Vernonia landowner properties, and delivered the fuel to Vernonia residents.

Initially, much of the toppled timber proved unreachable due to forest road blockages. To keep the firewood deliveries on track, DR Johnson Lumber of Prairie City donated an entire truckload of dry pine logs. Iron Triangle Logging of John Day hauled the logs to Pendleton, where Blue Mountain Lumber completed the relay by delivering them to Vernonia.

Longview Timber Co., Green Diamond Co. and Roseburg Forest Products also donated several log truck loads of wood to help exceed the 100-cord goal.

A final forest outing of Alverts' band of volunteers on November 15 closed out the nearly year-long relief effort and earned this award.

Help is available for flood stress

Columbia Community Mental Health (CCMH) is offering free Support and Outreach for people impacted by the flooding. The open forums will be held at their office, 610 Bridge Street, Vernonia, from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. on the second and fourth Mondays of each month, beginning January 26.

All citizens from Vernonia and neighboring communities are welcome to participate. CCMH will facilitate open group discussions regarding stress management, coping skills, self care and any additional concerns voiced by attendees. For additional information, contact the CCMH St. Helens office at 503-397-5211 ext. 135.