

Create a safe zone

BY SANDY SHAFFER

Lots of lightning, fire, and smoke in the Applegate Valley this past summer, and there's been constant discussion, finger-pointing, and blame thrown around ever since.

Jackson County politicians have been very vocal, telling state and federal land management and wildfire agencies how they want to see things done in the future. Complaints include not enough manpower and equipment resources available when a lightning strike sparks a fire here, firefighters not being aggressive enough, and not enough thinning in the off-season. Oh, yes, and the practice of "letting fires burn"!

I've spent quite a lot of my time in the past 18 to 20 years studying, learning, experiencing, and writing about wildfire in the Applegate, all while being a part of the Applegate Partnership, a co-coordinator for our *Applegate Fire Plan* (AFP), and by attending many WUI (wildland urban interface) conferences on wildfire issues.

Balancing act

I've learned that living in a fire-prone area such as the Applegate Valley is definitely a balancing act (which is actually the title of our AFP!). I've also learned how much our "checkerboard" landownership pattern plays in wildfire preparation and management: the state and the federal forestlands are managed for different outcomes! And of course, every private landowner works and manages their property differently.

It's also true that some areas such as wilderness areas or national forests are left to burn because the US Forest Service has "no-suppression" management plans for those particular types of areas. (I'm thinking that with private, state, and federal lands all intermixed in the southwest Oregon area, maybe management should be called a "juggling act"?)

In general, wildfire season in the United States begins in the southeast. It then moves west through the central states and the southwest, but then moves up to the Pacific Northwest! Finally, it moves south through Oregon, and then down the length of California.

We know that southwestern Oregon is drier than the northwest and prone to lightning storms. By the time we start getting our summer lightning fires, regions across the country have already

claimed and are still using the wildfire crews, management teams, equipment, apparatus, and aircraft. Therefore, it is often a reality that we in southwest Oregon can be left scrounging for suppression resources.

As I write this article, county commissioners are drafting a proclamation stating their concerns, positions, and desires for wildfire help in Jackson County. Any time now the American wildfire parade will begin in the southeast. I believe that now is the time when Jackson and Josephine counties should be *analyzing and planning*—with our state and federal land managers—for summer! How many fire teams do we have locally? *How many will we need?* Can we review and improve upon the contracts to get more teams if we need them?

And residents should start planning their personal preparations: update phone trees, review family evacuation plans (have at least two routes identified), locate meeting places, define individual "to take" lists, and such. *Start sooner than later!*

Winter and spring are when we private landowners in the Applegate should be starting our own fuel-reduction efforts in preparation for fire season. You never know what weather Mother Nature will send us between now and summer, so start planning what needs doing around your defensible space this month. Make lists, decide if you need to hire a crew, get a new saw, etc. And don't forget to do cleanup on and around the house itself.

We Applegaters have just as much responsibility for thinning our own properties as the federal and state landowners do caring for theirs. We want our homes to be "defensible"—so that firefighters will feel safe coming up our thinned driveways to stay and defend our homes from a wildfire.

One important note

Due to our place at the end of the fire parade, it's common to have wildfire crews from *other parts* of the country working in our area—folks who especially will rely on their first impressions of how safe your property and driveway appear.

If you want them to "stay and defend," welcome them with a "safe zone"!

Sandy Shaffer

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Update: Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project

BY DONNA MICKLEY AND KRISTI MASTROFINI

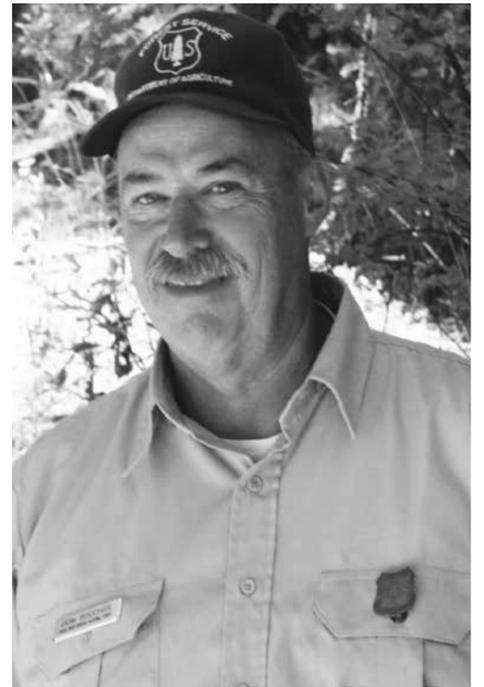
The Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project (UAWRP) is a 52,000-acre planning effort that incorporates an all-lands (federal, state, and private) approach to public land management. This is a collaborative effort between the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest-Siskiyou Mountains Ranger District (USFS), the Medford District Bureau of Land Management-Ashland Resource Area (BLM), and interested stakeholders.

An environmental assessment (EA) for UAWRP was released to the public on November 21, 2018. We are currently in the comment period and will continue to accept comments through April 30, 2019. To view the EA or get information on how to comment, please visit the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest website at fs.usda.gov/main/rogue-siskiyou/home and scroll to the bottom of the page to the Spotlight section titled "Forest Restoration and the Upper Applegate Watershed." You can also visit Star Ranger Station and request a hard copy of the EA.

Although the USFS and BLM have done a joint-agency environmental analysis, each agency has a different process for authorizing final decisions. Both agencies will review and consider comments and provide written responses with the decision document. The USFS and BLM will draft separate Decision Notices/Finding of No Significant Impact (DN/FONSI). The DN/FONSI is the decision document that accompanies an EA. The USFS plans to release the draft decision in May 2019. The BLM will issue one or more decisions for BLM actions proposed under the UAWRP beginning as early as late spring and summer of 2019. The USFS and BLM will coordinate closely on the timing of decisions to ensure ease and transparency of the decision process.

Don Boucher retires

It is with mixed emotions that we share the news that Don Boucher has retired from his long and impactful career with the USFS. We are so pleased for him but know that we will miss his expertise and local knowledge of the area. Don has an extensive background in resource management and community



Don Boucher retired after a long and impactful career with USFS.

engagement. His fire experience ranges from working as a smokejumper to leading crews as a division supervisor. With a degree in forestry, he worked first as a log scaler, then worked up to a sales administrator. He began writing NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) documents in 1982, while also honing his skills as a silviculturist. His real claim to fame was his ability to embrace and implement a community-driven alternative that reduces the risk of severe wildfire in the Ashland Watershed. Don was a true visionary in the art of collaboration, and we will do our best as we move forward with the project to bring his vision to fruition.

If you have questions about the Upper Applegate Watershed Restoration Project, please contact either of us.

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*2017 USFS Nonprofit Organization
"promoting ecological, economic and community well-being in the Applegate watershed through on-the-ground projects and strategic collaborations."

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