

Oregon Department of Forestry Southwest Oregon District Annual Report 2010



District Forester Comments

Without a doubt, the biggest issue affecting Oregon and the Department of Forestry is the continued economic struggle with employment, housing starts, timber harvests and State tax revenues. The Southwest Oregon District is challenged to continue to meet its mission with limited resources. Although Oregon's defining image is one of picturesque landscapes and distinctive beauty, natural resource funding is less of a priority than other critical State services. The District must find ways to keep our highly trained and experienced workforce through these economic times

The District had a successful fire season in 2010. Weather conditions allowed Southwest Oregon to implement many cost-cutting measures such as a late start to fire season, limited training, fewer employees on during lower risk days, and minimizing travel and overtime. Light rain on three different occasions during the summer helped considerably.

Human-caused fires were below average with only one significant fire, Blackwell Road, burning 320 acres in September. Lightning fires were about average but acreage burned was well below average.

The District State Forest Program was forced to lay off its equipment operator in order to reduce costs. While the number of timber harvests in 2010 remained average, stumpage prices fell to 60 percent of normal.

The Private Forests Program is down to one stewardship forester (from what used to be four) to administer the Forest Practices Act. Very little forestry assistance is occurring except that which is

funded by grants. These grants are allowing the District to maintain several personnel that are critical to our success in the Fire Program by their availability to serve in specific roles such as aerial reconnaissance, air attack, investigation, and fire line supervision.

Despite these tough times, much good work is moving forward:

- Work on our second detection camera is progressing to operational status in early summer
- Automatic Vehicle Locators have proven successful and will be a useful component in the future to our fireline intelligence
- Critical long-term maintenance of our facilities is up-to-date (2 headquarters, the Medford Air Tanker Base, 7 guard station sites, 7 detection sites, 7 radio repeater sites)
- Our fleet of 77 vehicles and radio complement of 230 units are in excellent condition.

And finally, the Agency and the District are looking forward to turning 100 in 2011. Together with the Rogue Forest Protective Association, we plan to have a Centennial Celebration Picnic on the afternoon of Friday, June 10th at Tou Velle State Park. We hope you can make it. We only turn 100 years old once!



Protection From Fire

Fire suppression in the Southwest Oregon District was challenging on several fronts.

The fire season started July 1, 2010. The National Weather Service Station in Medford reported that the weather station in Medford was over three inches behind in precipitation at the beginning of April. By the end of June the weather station in Medford showed that it was 2.25 inches below normal for the water year. But above average rainfall amounts in April +1.61", May +.32" and June +.32" allowed for a slower drying of the fine fuels and allowed some vegetation to remain greener longer into the summer. Fire season ended October 23. Overall the District was in fire season for 115 days.

This amount of spring rainfall allowed for some budget savings. The District was hit with a budget reduction of nearly \$500,000. By having a wet spring and a late start to fire season the weather allowed the District to start the seasonal firefighters one week later than usual which assisted with the overall budget savings.

This late start compressed fire school to a little over seven days. The budget reductions also demanded that all employees take furlough time off. This was a challenge, but nearly all the seasonal firefighters were able to take their two or three days off during the week of fire school or the first week of July.

The District had 160 fires that burned 474 acres, of these fires 57 were lightning-caused that burned 95.12 acres.

Twelve days after the end of fire school a lightning storm came through the District. The storm of July 8th was very dry, little



moisture fell and 200 lightning strikes were recorded on the District which resulted in 20 fires. Many of these fires were walk-in fires. Two of these fires took extra efforts to stop. The Spriguet Fire burned 15 acres near West

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Fork of East Evans Creek. The fire started on very steep slopes in second growth. The fire was in the old Sykes Creek Fire from 1987. Eventually, ODF's dozer was able to push a road into the top of the fire that allowed crews to get hoses in to catch and mopup the fire.

The other extra effort fire was the Berry Rock Fire near Elk Creek. The fire was at the base of Berry Rock. This fire was in a very rugged, steep, poor access area. The fire was lined the first

shift but rollers across the line allowed the fire to double its 2-acre size during the night. The fire had rollers for several days the caused the fire to expand. The steepness of the terrain and the rock bluffs and rolling material stifled firefighters until the helicopters, retardant and handcrews were finally able to circle the fire, which burned 42 acres.

Another lighting event on August 17 started 34 fires. This storm had some rain with it that allowed firefighters to catch most of the fires at a small size. The largest fire was the Anderson Creek Fire that burned 11 acres. It was the first reported fire and the lightning hit just inside of the rain shadow. 19.62 acres were burned during this event.

On August 24 the Oak Knoll Fire (Roca Canyon Fire) started near Ashland. The fire started about ¼ mile from the Ashland Guard Station. The fire started on a hot, windy, low humidity day. The fire started in dry grass

and spread quickly to brush and blackberries. It jumped Interstate 5 with the wind and embers from a burning barn and mobile home. The fire quickly spread and ignited homes in the Oak Knoll neighborhood. The fire jumped from roof to roof. Helicopters were used to drop water on roofs that were burning or that had just started smoking. An individual was arrested for the cause of the fire the day after the fire started. Eight acres and 11 houses were burned during this fire.

On the 12th of September a fire was started just east of Gold Hill near Blackwell Hill. The Blackwell Fire was started when a resident was using a pickax to break



a rock in dry grass. The pickax struck a rock and a piece of hot metal came off the pickax and started dry grass burning. The fire quickly spread, burning the responsible party's home and 321 acres. Helicopters, retardant, handcrews, and engines were able to get a line around the fire by shift change the next morning. The rural fire departments called in several Jackson and Josephine counties' task forces to provide structure fire protection for the residences surrounding the fire. This fire burned in the landscape around several homes as the fire raced through the brush and grass.



The District never went to an Industrial Fire Precaution Level 3 during 2010. Again the wet start to fire season and the unusual rain events several times during the summer allowed the District to remain at a Industrial Fire Precaution Level 2 for 42 days and

Industrial Fire Precaution Level 1 for 73 days. The District has averaged 26 days in Industrial Fire Precaution Level 3 over the last 15 years. The District had 34 days of extreme fire danger and 33 days of high fire danger.

Southwest Oregon District 2010 Fire Statistics

Cause	Number of Fires			Acres Burned		
	2010	Historic: 2000-2009	Percent of average acreage	2010	Historic: 2000-2009	Percent of average acreage
Lightning	57	63	90%	95.12	4508	2%
Railroad	0	1	0%	0	2	0%
Equipment use	39	69	57%	14.47	745	2%
Recreationist	9	16	56%	8.40	31	27%
Smoker	11	16	69%	2.02	7	29%
Debris burning	19	28	54%	19.29	63	6%
Arson	1	12	8%	0.01	28	0%
Juveniles	6	13	46%	0.64	34	2%
Miscellaneous	18	30	60%	334.40	28	1194%
Under investigation	0			0		
Total lightning	57	63	90%	95.12	4508	2%
Total human-caused	103	185	54%	379.23	938	39%
Totals	160	248	63%	474.35	5446	8%

Percent of fires 10 acres or less: 96.9

Number of non-stat fires: 18

Total NFCA's: 308

Aircraft

The Oregon Department of Forestry contracted with Butler Aircraft Company for the 2010 fire season. This contract provided the State two Type 1 air tankers. One of those air tankers was again placed at the Medford Airtanker base which provided direct fire fighting support to the Southwest District and the rest of the state. Air tanker 62, a DC-7, flew on seven fires and dropped over 61,925 gallons of retardant. The Medford Airtanker Base pumped 153,637 gallons of retardant during the 2010 fire season.

The Southwest District had three exclusive use contracts during the summer of 2010. One contract involved the use of a Type II helicopter with Airlift Helicopters Inc. This was for a Bell UH-1H and started in July and ended in September. This helicopter flew 14 days on many different fires providing bucket work to

support the ground crews. The second helicopter contract was a Type III helicopter with Northwest Helicopters. This contract was for a Bell 206. It started in July and ended in October. This Type III helicopter flew 10 days and was able to provide the District with a wide range of missions. These missions included: reconnaissance, bucket work, troop transport in and out of fires in remote locations, forest health missions, and finding remote water source locations in the Soda Mt. Wilderness. The third contract was for a fixed-wing reconnaissance plane from Baker Air. The fixed-wing flew 21 days during their contract, which started in July and went through September. All of these aircraft are key assets in containing fires on the District.

On July the 9th The District was hit with lightning which resulted in many small fires and several



challenging fires in the Elk Creek and Evans Creek drainages. The aerial support helped to hold the fires in check while ground crews could get a handle on them. Without this support the fires would have grown to a considerable size.

On September 12th the air-tankers and the helicopters were dispatched to the Blackwell fire, southeast of Gold Hill. The aircraft provided a vital role in saving several homes on the top of the ridges and along other portions of the fire. Without these aerial resources, the fire could have been much larger and could have caused the loss of several homes.

State Forests

In 2010, ODF foresters began administering fuels reduction grants on State Forest Lands. Private contract crews cut and pruned thick brush and small trees, reducing the fire danger by removing understory and ladder fuels. The remaining trees were thinned to a 16-to-20 foot spacing. Reducing the competition between trees increased the available water and health of the remaining forest. In total, 426 acres were cut, pruned and piled and 150 acres of piled slash were burned.

Harvest in Fiscal Year 2010

Four sales were logged during the 2010 fiscal year, all Board of Forestry (BOF) lands sales. Approximately 1.7 million board feet was harvested, generating \$432,593 in revenue. Two new contracts were sold in 2010, Exit 80 Thin and Perkins Creek. Exit 80 is a 60-acre Common School Lands (CSL) sale and Perkins is a 120 acre BOF sale.

Reforestation

The West Windy Timber sale was planted in January of 2010. There were two units at West Windy totaling 30 acres that were planted in clearcuts, and 5 acres of multiple small patch cuts. These units were planted just months after the timber

harvest. The only site preparation was a pre-harvest hack-and-squirt, and yum yarding. At Red Hill, 25 acres were interplanted. In total, 21,443 trees were planted at a cost of \$12,822 (labor and seedlings) on 60 acres. Approximately 85 percent were Douglas-fir and 15 percent ponderosa pine and sugar pine.

Personnel

The State Forests program in Grants Pass is administered by

Chris Rudd, manager; Paul Moreno, roads and timber; Vince Pyle, GIS and systems administration; and Curtis Clark, reforestation. Curtis and Vince are partially funded by the fire program with duties across both programs. The State Forests program also received assistance from Steve Wetmore and Tyson Schultz to help administer the fuels reduction projects.

Expenditures for the 2010 fiscal year were \$303,000.



Volume and Value for fiscal year 2010 (July 2009 to June 2010)				
County	Sale Name	Vol BOF	Revenue BOF	Improvements
Douglas	Woods Creek South	141	\$8,387	\$14,425
Douglas	West Windy Thin	1,065	\$286,186	
Douglas	Cell Tower		\$26,000	
Josephine	Kennedy Gulch Thin	425	\$102,308	
Josephine	Tunnel Thin	64	\$9,712	
	District Totals	1,695	\$432,593	\$14,425

Fuels Treatment Work on State Forests, CY 2010						
Contract	County	Unit	Cut and Pile Acres	Piles Burned Acres	Cut Pile*	Pile Burn*
1723-09	Josephine	Tunnel, Kennedy, Salmon	200	150	\$60,000	\$3,750
1820-10	Douglas	Windy Crk Unit 1, 4 and 5	152		\$41,580	
1823-10	Jackson	Obenchain, Cabin Canyon	74		\$23,680	
* Grant = American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)			426	150	\$125,260	\$3,750

Private Forests

This 2010 summary may sound very similar to previous years, in that the District was once again forced to reduce staffing in the program. Bob Marcu was given the task of handling Forest Practices for both Jackson and Josephine counties, and Steve Wetmore was assigned as the "Jack of all Trades" responsible for industrial fire inspections, providing limited assistance for the Stewardship Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) and assisting Southwest State Lands with the contract administration of their ARRA fuel reduction grants.

Log prices and demand for lumber really slumped in 2010, making the management of Forest Practices somewhat doable.

The phones were busy this spring and summer as many landowners were concerned that their Madrone trees were being "killed" by a tent caterpillar or web worm. The reality is that while the devastation caused by these defoliators may seem catastrophic, most of the Madrones will grow new foliage

and only suffer some stunted growth. The Beetle infestation is still occurring, but not at the magnitude seen on the east side of the Cascades, therefore SWO District did not rank high enough in 2010 to get some of the limited

Forest Health thinning assistance money for landowners.

Despite the limited allocated time to Landowner Assistance, the District was still able to achieve the following accomplishments:

FOREST		PRACTICES		2010
County	New Notifications	Renewals	PDM Permits	Totals
Jackson	397	68	137	534
Josephine	261	44	81	386

FORESTRY	ASSISTANCE	2010	
Project	# Projects / acres Advised	# Projects / Acres accomplished	# Landowners or Audience assisted
Stewardship Plans	7 / 3570	7 / 775	14
Urban Interface Stewardship Plans	2/23	1 / 10	2
CREP projects	5 projects - 46 acres	4 / 21	5
Tax Credit	4 / 15	1 / 7	5
Educational sessions		5 (2 – International Forestry meetings)	50
OWEB & other assistance		30 projects (mostly OWEB)	15

Smoke Management

With the wet spring weather creating a problem in accomplishing any amount of under-burning, the early fall, just prior to the end of fire season, brought us some higher humidifies and events of light rain, opened the door for early burning opportunities for the Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management.

They were able to accomplish some under-burning held over from 2009 and the spring of 2010. As the fall turned into winter we had some excellent early opportunities for all the cooperators to accomplish most of their piled and landing burns just ahead of the heavy winter snows.

The numbers don't lie; you

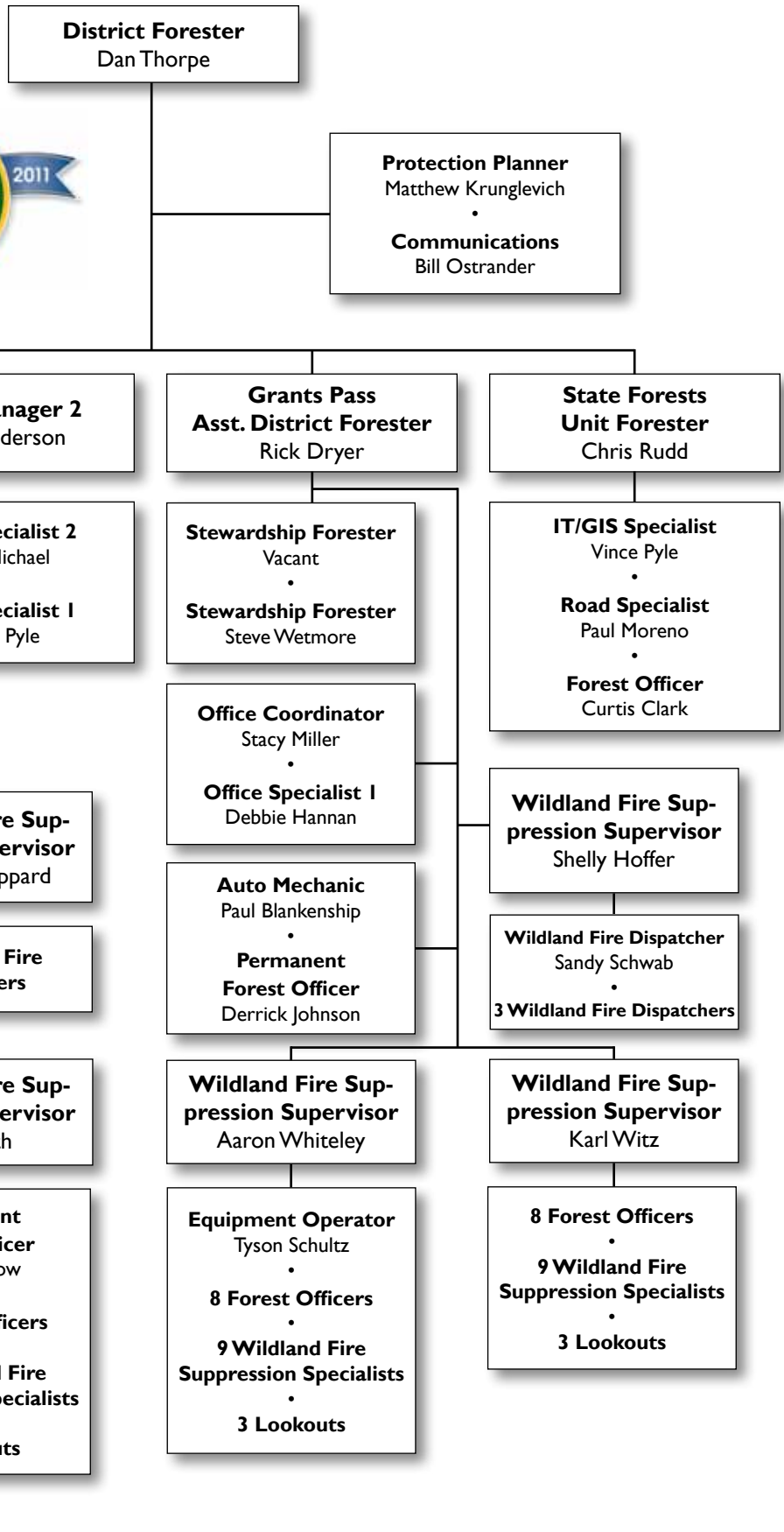
can see how burning activity is slowly decreasing across both Jackson and Josephine counties. With the majority of Medford District BLM burning activities from hazard reduction projects, we continue to see a steady reduction in the private/industry burning due to the lack of logging activity.

2010 Accomplishments	Units	Acres	Tons
Medford District BLM	83	5,225	30,472
Private/State	75	3,283	22,629
Totals	158	8,508	53,101

5-Year Average	Units	Acres	Tons
Totals	289	17,748	74,756

Southwest Oregon District Organizational Chart 2010

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www.oregon.gov/ODF/FIELD/SWO/aboutus.shtml

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