

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY

# Southwest Oregon District 2006 Annual Report



"STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY"

## District Forester Comments

Any way you look at it, it was a good year in the Southwest Oregon District with regards to fire protection. Although we hit the average annual number of fires, the acreage was 3% of the 10-year average. Our two biggest fires of the year were actually outside of fire season (Salt Creek 25 acres in February and Naue Way 15 acres in May). This success was particularly remarkable considering the district had 37 new employees. Fortunately, some of these came with previous fire experience. As a result, the training went well, and the district was well-prepared for the fire season that quickly reached normal fire danger levels.

Three lightning storms affected the district, the most complex being on August 6 which resulted in 40 lightning fires on ODF jurisdiction and another 40 on the neighboring national forest lands. Good cooperation with field crews and fire managers from each agency resulted in all these being suppressed at less

than 10 acres. Industrial resources again played an important role in responding where additional support was needed.

Since southwest Oregon was more quiet than usual, the district was asked to provide resources to support several other districts during fire emergencies. All total, the Southwest Oregon District sent over 30 people to out-of-the-area assignments.

A few more personnel changes have occurred in the past year and a few remain. Most notably, we are pleased with Steve Wetmore's safe return from his active duty deployment in Iraq. Major Wetmore was awarded the Bronze Star for his efforts at rebuilding infrastructure and leading convoys.



Dan Thorpe  
District Forester



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Cover photos: *The Medford Unit's dispatch office was a hive of activity during the 2006 fire season's lightning busts. Airtanker 62 was used on several district fires, as well as on fires elsewhere in the state. Helicopters were used for dropping water on fires, and as aerial reconnaissance platforms. Matt Krunglevich (in the blue jumpsuit) just returned from a flight over the district, looking for lightning-caused fires.*

Above: *Callahan's Lodge, a popular attraction on the Siskiyou Summit, burned to the ground in a spectacular Labor Day weekend fire.*

## Protection From Fire Program

The fire season of 2006 was a good year for the Southwest Oregon District. The total number of fires and the number of acres burned were well-below the 10-year average.

The fire season started on May 24 and lasted until November 2, a total of 163 days. Extreme fire conditions lasted 42 days.

The early season conditions were warm and dry during most of May. Shortly after fire season started, several rainstorms blanketed the district that helped postpone high fire danger for over a month. By the end of July, the district was in high fire danger and public and industrial closures were in effect. By the end of August, the district was in extreme fire danger and Industrial Fire Precaution Level III. A long, relatively dry fall extended fire season until November 2 when fall rains finally ended the 2006 fire season.

There were several fires that challenged the district, including the Mile Marker 58 Fire (located on Merlin Hill on Interstate 5) that burned 3 acres. The fire was believed to have started from a vehicle. There were actually three separate fires that were close to each other next to the freeway.

### Southwest Oregon District Fire Season 2006 Index

Date fire season started: *May 24*  
 Number of days of regulated use closure: *91*  
 Number of days in moderate fire danger: *70*  
 Number of days in high fire danger: *51*  
 Number of days in extreme fire danger: *42*  
 Date the district went to IFPL II: *July 24*  
 Date the district went to IFPL III: *August 23*  
 Date the district returned to IFPL II: *September 15*  
 Date the district returned to IFPL I: *October 2*  
 Number of days in IFPL II: *47*  
 Number of days in IFPL III: *23*  
 Number of warnings and citations: *23*  
 Date fire season ended: *November 2*  
 Number of days in fire season: *163*

Another was the Sand Pit Fire that happened early in the season. This fire burned about 7 acres of second-growth and spotted across the creek over ¼ mile away.

There were three lightning events that came through the district. The first was the end of June and the second in early July. Each of these storms started several fires that were easily handled by the district.

The third storm was much more active. It came through the district starting August 6 and lasted several days; this storm started 40 fires. There

was a potential for severe fire problems, but initial attack efforts prevailed. One of the first fires reported during this storm was the Humbug Creek Fire which burned 8 acres on a very inaccessible ridge in Applegate area. It took a lot of coordination and great fire fighting efforts to successfully contain the fire, which burned in thick manzanita brush and a south slope that had very poor access. Another lightning fire that resulted from this storm was the Vestal Butte Fire, which burned 9 acres just south of Shady Cove. Retardant, light, medium ►



and heavy helicopters, hand crews, dozers, engines and tenders were used during this bust to suppress the fires.

All together this past fire season, the district suppressed 48 lightning - caused fires that burned 28.75 acres. A 10-acre grass and brush fire off Barnett Road in east Medford, which was started from a vehicle that ran into a roadside ditch, resulted in the largest fire during the season.

Throughout the fire season ODF received much-appreciated assistance from the BLM, USFS and local fire agencies, landowners and industry in keeping the fires in check. The district was severely short of experienced firefighters this

year because of the amount of new firefighters; however, the district still managed to support other ODF Districts by sending fire overhead and engines to assist on project fires in other parts of the state.

The district trained 37 new ODF firefighters in 2006, 18 in Grants Pass and 19 in Medford. Of the returning seasonal firefighters in the district, 14 were in positions that were new to them. Any number of new firefighters is a challenge to supervisors, with regard to safety of the crews and the successful initial attack of fires. The district was successful with these efforts based on the training the firefighters received and the

communications between experienced and new firefighters on the fire line. The Grants Pass Interagency Fire Center had two new seasonal dispatchers and Medford had one.

In addition to training ODF employees, the district trained 262 industrial and AD firefighters who were available to assist with fire suppression throughout the season.

The season did not start out very well this year with the burning of Sexton Mt. Lookout in early spring. The lookout and repeater building were a total loss. Arson is the suspected cause. The Grants Pass Unit was already short one lookout (Peavine) due to deterioration of the structure

**2007 FIRE SUMMARY**

Southwest Oregon District

Statistical Fires for District: 71 All Units Begin Date: 10/27/2006 End Date: 11/02/2006

CAUSE	SEASON TO DATE NUMBER OF FIRES BY SIZE CLASS							SEASON TO-DATE						
								FIRES			ACRES BURNED			
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	2007	HISTORIC 1997- 2006	%	2007	HISTORIC 1997- 2006	%	
Acres	<.26	.26-9.9	10-99.9	100-299.9	300-999.9	1000- 4999.9	5000+							
01 LIGHTNING	36	12	0	0	0	0	0	48	53	90%	28.75	4390	1%	
02 RAILROAD	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	63%	1.3	1	89%	
03 EQUIPMENT USE	57	16	0	0	0	0	0	73	64	114%	50.71	653	8%	
04 RECREATIONIST	13	7	1	0	0	0	0	21	11	186%	38.31	20	196%	
05 SMOKER	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	12	16	75%	0.45	7	6%	
06 DEBRIS BURNING	14	12	0	0	0	0	0	26	24	108%	22.16	46	48%	
07 ARSON	6	5	0	0	0	0	0	11	14	76%	5.48	41	13%	
08 JUVENILES	11	3	0	0	0	0	0	14	16	85%	8.27	19	43%	
09 MISCELLANEOUS	17	3	0	0	0	0	0	20	32	63%	2.79	16	17%	
Under Investigation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0			0			
TOTAL LIGHTNING	36	12	0	0	0	0	0	48	53	90%	28.75	4390	1%	
TOTAL MAN CAUSED	130	47	1	0	0	0	0	178	180	99%	129.47	803	16%	
GRAND TOTAL	166	59	1	0	0	0	0	226	233	97%	158.22	5193	3%	

NON STAT
# OF FIRES
SEASON
39

% of fires <10 ac: 99.6%

SEASON: Total NFCA's = 349

from the elements, so now we were down to Manzanita and Little Grayback on the south end of the unit and none on the north.

Plans are in the works to replace Sexton sometime in 2007, and studies are being conducted for the best location for some type of detection in the Peavine view area.

In early December, Tallowbox Lookout was vandalized. Windows were broken out, the catwalk had parts torn off and the radio room was razed. The radio room held ODF's radio repeater as well as radio equipment for BLM and Southern Oregon Regional Communications (9-1-1). It

will be late winter of 2007 until it is known if will be possible to rebuild the tower, or if the structure is damaged beyond repair.

The Grants Pass Unit completed several major projects this year. All three stair accesses to the main office and the apartment were replaced with steel components instead of wood. The exterior of the main office building was painted along with several interior rooms. Heaters in the shop were replaced; the old ones had quit working and parts were no longer made for them.

The Medford Unit was able to pave the parking lot between the dispatch

office and the main office building. Footer boards on several of the log buildings were replaced. Most of the compound's pavement was resealed, and chain link fence was repaired and put up on the compound. Also the hardwood floors in the crewhouse were resealed.

The district built four new engines in 2006.

The Grants Pass Unit was able to keep 22 seasonal employees working through most of the winter/spring doing cooperative work for the BLM and Josephine County doing fuel-reduction work and burning, thus reducing the district's unemployment costs and retaining and training the seasonal work force.

## Private Forests

### **TWO HATS FOR PRIVATE FORESTS IN SOUTHWEST OREGON**

Grants Pass Unit Stewardship Forester

Steve Wetmore is glad to be back in Oregon wearing his Safety Blue hard hat as opposed to the US Army Kevlar helmet. Steve returned to ODF



from his second call to active duty since September 11, 2001, appropriately enough on September 11, 2006.

This time he was deployed for 12 months as a military engineer for the Multi-National Security Transition Corp Iraq. He spent eight months as the base engineer on the Taji Military Training Base (largest Iraqi base).

His primary focus was to supervise the \$200 million-worth of construction to rebuild the Iraqi base for the Iraqi Army. Some of the projects included barracks, offices, latrines, warehouses, medical clinics and a helicopter hangar.

Steve also spent a considerable amount of time in harms way improving the entry control points, improving check points and doing other Force protection measures to increase the security of Iraqi and Coalition Forces and the local nationals

that worked on the base.

According to Steve he was also “sentenced to Baghdad for four months” where he was the chief engineer responsible for all of the construction of police stations, border forts, national police facilities and the management of a

staff of twelve with a budget of \$2 billion. In this capacity he logged over 2,000 miles of convoy time as the assistant convoy commander/medic in and around the Baghdad area to check on progress of construction.

### **Stewardship Forestry and Forest Practices**

Randy Van Prooyen did an outstanding job of covering the middle third of district in Steve’s absence, and has since been promoted to a permanent employee at Toledo. Matt Krunglevich has been performing as both the stewardship forester in charge of forestry assistance for the district and the district fire planner. Tyson Schultz and Bob Marcu have been the

continuity for forest practices on the district.

The presence of South Coast Lumber in Merlin increased the market opportunities for many forestland owners early in the year, but the decline in local log prices saw a dramatic slowdown in the number of operations.

The Private Forest staff looks forward to working with Plum Creek as they begin the arduous task of increasing productivity on recently purchased lands.

Matt was busy in Forestry Assistance as he helped landowners:

- Write 10 new plans (FLEP)
- Implemented over \$200,000 in cost-share

	Notifications	Renewals
Medford Unit	708	90
Grants Pass Unit	686	111

funding utilizing our Insect and Disease Mitigation grant

- Assisted OWEB in their grant choices
- 3 projects utilizing our 50% tax credit program, approximately \$25,000.
- 1 Forest Resource Trust Project, \$15,000
- Assisted Jackson and Josephine counties in CREP plans
- Coordinated the statewide internship program.

## National Fire Plan Grants

National Fire Plan Grants continue to be a success for the Southwest Oregon District. Grants remain in high demand as more landowners become educated about land management and become excited about working on their property.

Jackson and Josephine counties continue to implement and share the progress of their integrated fire plans with the communities. In 2006 two Western State Fire Marshal (WSFM) grants were tentatively awarded totaling over \$550,000 for fuel reductions and land improvements. The grants provide financial incentives for landowners to do fuel reductions and management of their properties. These grants are administered in ways to help the landowner achieve their objectives, while educating them about good forest stewardship.

The Medford Unit implemented 12 National Fire Plan grants working with landowners across Jackson County. Prescott Park received fuel reduction work from the ODF crew helping the park and surrounding landowners abate catastrophic wildfire.

The Grants Pass Unit implemented 6 grant funded projects. These projects kept crews busy assisting



landowners with their fuel-reduction projects. Josephine County recently completed their integrated fire plan. The fire plan is beginning to get on-the-ground projects recognized and work completed. The grant programs will help the surrounding communities accomplish the fuel work identified in the plan.

In late 2006 the district saw a new district fire planner. Matthew Krunglevich accepted the position that was formerly held by Teresa Vonn. Matthew transferred from a Stewardship Forester position in November 2006. He will have his work cut out for him as Teresa had a very successful grant program in the past.

## Fire Prevention

Implementation of the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act (SB 360) in the district continued in 2006. A county classification committee began meeting in Josephine County in April and its goal is to complete its forestland-urban interface lands' identification and classification tasks in 2007.

Owners of forestland-urban interface lots in Jackson County received notifications in the middle of 2005, and 308 certification cards were returned to ODF in 2006. An analysis of fires on ODF-protected lands in Jackson County during the 2006 fire season revealed that 17 fires occurred on forestland-urban interface lots. Jackson County landowners have until mid-July 2007 to return their certification cards; after that date, when a fire occurs on a lot for which a card has not been received by ODF, the landowner may be billed for extraordinary suppression costs.

General wildland/urban interface fuel-reduction education for property owners continued with exhibits at home and garden shows, and OSU Extension Service's Tree School South. Also, more than 50 property owners received on-site SB 360 fuel-reduction assessments.

## Medford Airtanker Base

In a joint operation with the U.S. Forest Service and Jackson County, the Oregon Department of Forestry played a vital role in the success of daily operations at the Medford Airtanker Base in 2006.

ODF had two Type 1 air tankers and one Aerial Supervision Module (ASM) available for fire suppression duty during fire season. One was based in Medford and the other in Redmond. Both air tankers, contracted to the state by Butler Aviation, went into service July 1. Both tankers were DC-7s capable of holding 3,000 gallons of retardant. ▶



*ODF's aerial fire-fighting fleet for 2006 included two DC-7 Type 1 airtankers (above) and an Aerial Supervision Module (right). Attacking fires from above helps the Southwest Oregon District keep most fires at 10 acres or smaller.*





The ASM arrived in Medford on July 15 from Alaska; the agreement for use of the ASM was made between ODF and the Alaska Division of Forestry through the Northwest Compact. Funding for all three of these firefighting resources were available for the department's statewide use through severity funding provided by the Oregon Legislature.

The air tankers saw use on 21 fires and dropped a total of 59 loads – more than 170,000 gallons – of retardant. Contracts for all three aircraft were terminated on September 18. These aerial resources played an important role in the success of fire control efforts throughout Oregon.

During 2006, staff at the Medford Airtanker Base, along with the help of many Southwest District fire crew personnel, were able to complete some upgrades to the base. Projects included installing a new underground sprinkler system and an underground retardant-delivery system. The latter incorporates 3-inch piping that is capable of loading out over 500,000 gallons of retardant a day. Also, an additional loading pit was added that allows this base to load two Type 1 air tankers and one Type 3 air tanker simultaneously.

## Smoke Management

This year has turned out to be a year of change for Smoke Management in the Southwest Oregon District. The spring burning season was uneventful with minimal amounts of private, state and industry burning taking place. The fall season would make up for it.

The district, in cooperation with the Medford District of Bureau of Land Management (BLM), resumed its partnership in coordinating burning activities by utilizing the Grants Pass Interagency Fire Center to provide Smoke

Management Clearance and Notifications services.

With the BLM addition, this has increased the area in which burning activities under the Oregon Smoke Management Plan is coordinated. These areas are all Medford BLM lands in Josephine, Jackson and southern Douglas counties, as well as all private, state and industrial lands within Josephine and Jackson counties and all Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest lands within Josephine, Coos and Curry counties.

### 2006 Registrations – Private, State and Industry

Units	Acres	Landing Tons	Piled Tons	Broadcast Tons
205	2,003	31,063	9,206	73

### 2006 Accomplished – Private, State and Industry

Units	Acres	Landing Tons	Piled Tons	Broadcast Tons
149	1,260	26,706	5,733	73

### 2006 Medford BLM Fall Activity (estimated)

Units	Acres	Total Tons
272	9,854	103,420

### 2006 Westside RR-SNF Activity (estimated)

Units	Acres	Total Tons
55	1,900	44,500

## Personnel Changes



**District:**

Teresa Vonn promoted to Salem on Oct 1.  
 Matt Krunglevich promoted to district fire planner on November 1.  
 Steve Strunk, office manager, resigned on Dec. 1.

**Medford Unit:**

Terry Frazier, dispatch supervisor, retired on June 30. Kristina Sheppard became her replacement on July 1.

Cody Goodnough, forest unit supervisor, resigned on May 18.

Andy Cardinal, forest officer, transferred from the Grants Pass Unit on May 15.

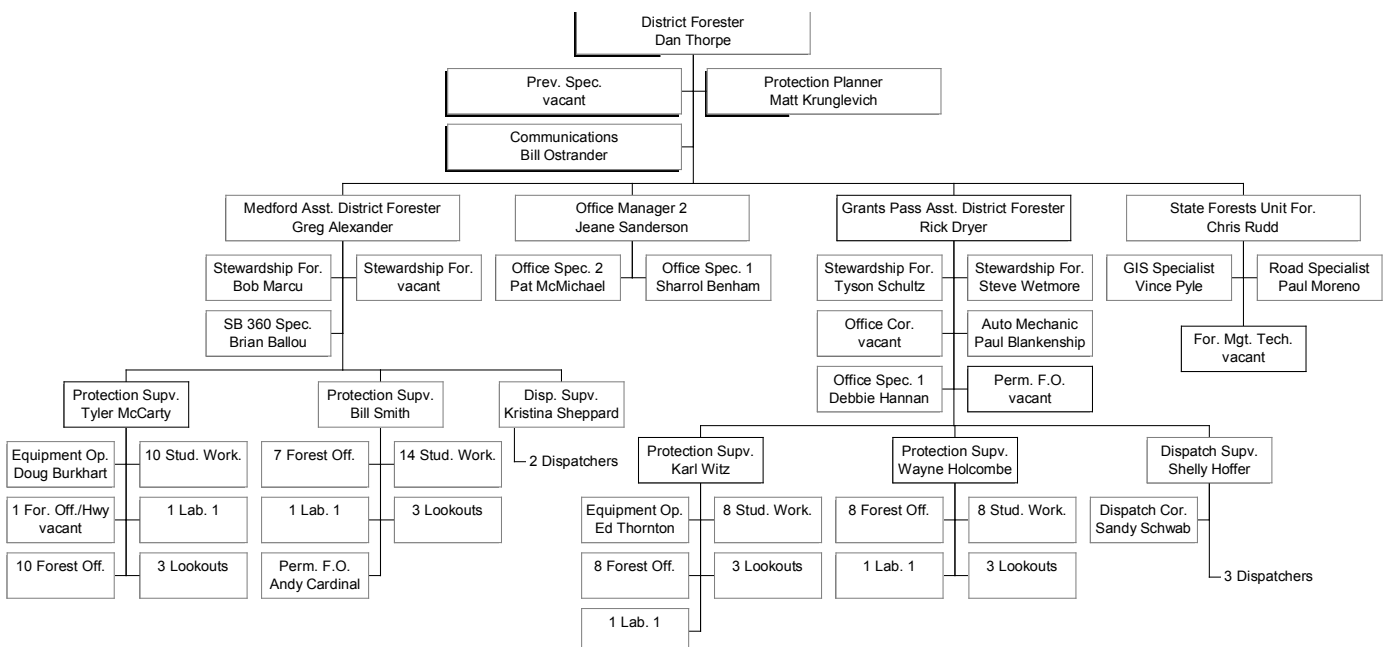
**Grants Pass Unit:**

Ed Thornton was hired as the equipment operator on August 15.

Brad Tally, forest unit supervisor, resigned on November 22.

Steve Wetmore, stewardship forester, returned from Iraq on Oct. 1.

## Southwest Oregon District Organization



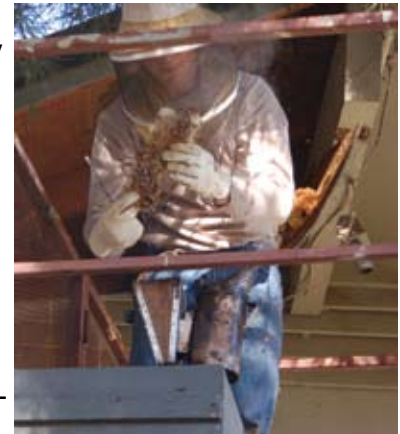
et cetera



The widening of Table Rock Road in front of the district office began in 2005 and affected the compound in several ways well into 2006. The parking lot in front was slimmed down (above), but the lot between the main office and the dispatch office was enlarged and paved (right) following an extensive excavation-and-fill project. The district also posted a new entrance sign (opposite page).



During the spring, a honey bee colony moved into the eave above the back door of the district office. A beekeeper (right) was summoned in July and the colony was moved to a more appropriate location. The beekeeper said there were probably “ten or twenty thousand bees” in the colony (below). A quart of honey was donated to the district as a souvenir.



The Sexton Mountain Fire Lookout burned in early April, destroying the lookout cab and everything in it. Additionally, radio repeaters, antennas and other equipment was damaged or destroyed. The fire was definitely human-caused. Replacement is scheduled for 2007.

In December, vandals set a fire beneath Tallowbox Fire Lookout, damaging the tower and radio repeater equipment. Windows in the cab were broken, and the handrail was torn off the catwalk. Repairs are to be completed in 2007.



## State Forests Management

The Grants Pass Unit of the Southwest Oregon District manages approximately 18,073 acres of Board of Forestry and Common School Fund lands in four counties: Josephine, Jackson, Douglas, and Curry, and three fire protection districts: Southwest Oregon, (Medford, and Grants Pass units), DFPA, and CFPA. Lands are managed according to the Southwest Oregon State Forests Management Plan for a variety of structures within the landscape, and for social, environmental, and economic values consistent with the Forest Plan for Oregon.

Current active and sold timber sales total 3.2 million board feet at a value of \$1,305,039. Completed sales and other activities for fiscal year 2006 are shown in the table below.

The State Forests Program in Southwest Oregon is intimately tied to the Protection from Fire program. There are two employees that are 100% funded by State Forests and three that share time in the protection program. This mutually beneficial arrangement

### Fiscal Year 2006 Activities:

Xroads Combo	1,078 MBF	\$248,102	Douglas, BOF	191 Acres
Wood Ck Saga	232 MBF	\$75,514	Douglas, BOF	31 Acres
Red Hill Salvage	22 MBF	\$1,509	Douglas, BOF	
Cell tower Revenue	2 towers, 9 leases	\$29,636	Douglas, BOF	
Yale Ck PCT	Reforestation	(\$12,000)	Jackson, CSL	134 Acres
Basal Spray	Reforestation	(\$21,000)	Douglas, BOF	64 Acres



*Madill Yarder set atop a Sherman tank used for Whirlybird.*

allows for a greater knowledge base of both wildland fire and forestry. The GIS specialist works in mapping and computer systems that supports fire and forest management. We have a small land base, but we are able to use the expertise of our summertime dozer operator for road maintenance and special projects such as quarry development or fish habitat improvements. A permanent forest officer position is available to the protection program and works in State Forests in sale preparation and reforestation during winter months.