

Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests and
Prineville District, Bureau of Land Management
Office of Communications
Working as One to Serve Central Oregon

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Wildland Fire Use in Ochoco Wildernesses

PRINEVILLE—With multiple fires naturally ignited by lightning last week, there is now opportunity to use the “Wildland Fire Use” (WFU) tool in three wildernesses of the Ochoco National Forest.

Forest Supervisor Jeff Walter and fire managers will use the WFU tool for three small fires currently burning in the Black Canyon, Mill Creek and Bridge Creek Wildernesses. Fire managers use WFU to allow fire to play its natural role in the ecosystem when the conditions are right, and the fire is started by natural ignition. The entire Ochoco National Forest is covered by a WFU plan, providing this tool to help restore the natural role of fire to fire-adapted ecosystems.

WFU does include active management of the fires. WFU does not mean that fires are left to burn. A risk assessment is conducted to determine whether fire behavior will be historically typical for the area. A decision criteria checklist is used to thoroughly assess the threat from the fire, potential effects of the fire, and available resources. The list of considerations is long, and includes such elements as proximity to private lands, fuel types, time of year, and weather conditions. Fire managers actively manage the progression of the fires.

Since all of the fires are in wildernesses with no private land threatened, they are good candidates for WFU. In addition, all three wildernesses have portions that were recently burned, making them particularly low risk for WFU.

After last Thursday’s lightning storm, additional fires are burning on Ochoco National Forest lands outside wilderness. All of these fires are being actively suppressed at this time.