

## OPINIONS

**Kudos to Krikava**

BY ALAN JOURNET

Kudos to Aaron Krikava for an excellent article (*Applegater*, summer 2023) explaining that we need to revisit our attitude toward fire. I'd like to add a couple of points that, due to word limitation, probably prevented Aaron from noting.

1. Folks growing up in southern Oregon probably take our winter wet/summer dry climate for granted and don't realize its rarity and significance. However, across the planet this occurs only in six locations: the Mediterranean (from which it received the designation Mediterranean climate); western South Africa; southeast and southwest Australia; western South America; and here in western North America, where some of us think of it as quite normal. The consequence of this climate existing for eons is that soil and vegetation dry out during summer, and fire risk annually increases. As a result, in these regions, fire risk is an inevitable late-summer and fall reality. The biological consequence is that vegetation in these regions is almost always fire-prone and fire-adapted. Aaron acknowledged this in mentioning species that are fire-resistant or require fire to stimulate release or germination of seeds. Fire, therefore, is essential in maintaining the health of our forests.

2. Studies on factors correlating with or causing a high fire-risk year versus a low

fire-risk year reveal that warmer springs and summers and earlier snowmelt are profoundly implicated. It is probably of little surprise that these two variables are influenced by global warming. If we add to these trends the reduction in summer precipitation that is causing even greater drought, we begin to understand why global warming (which National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration data clearly indicate is happening in southern Oregon) and its consequent climate change are increasing our fire risk. Rather than trying simply to suppress or extinguish every fire, to the detriment of the native vegetation, we should be learning to live with and manage fire. Unless we collectively address the root causes of global warming, increasing fire risk here will be inevitable. Aaron's effort to encourage prescribed fire to help adapt to and, we hope, counter this forthcoming increasing fire risk is a commendable step.

The increasing threat of fire that global warming promises the Applegate Valley is one of the reasons that those of us in the climate-conscious arena argue that rural Oregonians are on the front lines of global warming. We should all be clamoring for local, state, federal, and international action to address this threat.

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**Continue local levy to maintain critical emergency services from AVFD**

BY ROB UNDERWOOD

To sustain essential firefighting, emergency medical care, rescue, and fire prevention services, the Applegate Valley Rural Fire Protection District #9 (AVFD) is seeking voters' approval for the continuation of the local levy—with minimal increase—to provide additional needed coverage. This levy (Measure 15-220), when approved by the voters, will replace the current five-year levy that is set to expire in June 2024. A yes vote on the November 7 ballot will ensure the continuation of critical services within AVFD.

AVFD encompasses 181 square miles and includes residences and businesses in the Ruch, Applegate, Provolt, and McKee Bridge areas. It plays an essential role in safeguarding the community against emergencies. This levy is a crucial funding source that enables AVFD to maintain excellent emergency response capabilities.

Without the revenue generated by the proposed levy, AVFD would face a substantial reduction in its staffing and response capability. It would lead to the elimination of three permanent shift captain positions, 12 seasonal firefighter positions, 12 student firefighter positions, and one fire marshal position. Simply put, if this levy is not continued, AVFD would no longer be able to provide 24/7 coverage at any of its seven stations.

This local option levy has been a recurring lifeline for AVFD since 1998, providing necessary funding to carry out critical operations effectively. The community has historically recognized the importance of supporting AVFD's emergency response abilities by voting yes for past levy renewals.

In 2022, AVFD responded to 768 emergency calls for service. The response demands were diverse, with medical emergencies constituting nearly two thirds of the total. Response levels continue to increase each year.

One of the key challenges AVFD faces is the occurrence of simultaneous emergency calls, which happened approximately 24 percent of the time in 2022. The strategic location and staffing of both Stations 51 and 53 (Applegate and Ruch, respectively) has been instrumental in enabling AVFD to respond promptly to concurrent emergency incidents.

Currently, Station 51 in Applegate benefits from funding through two grants, but, unfortunately, these grants are set to expire in 2026 and 2027, and they are not eligible for renewal. Consequently, this local option levy is crucial to ensure prompt emergency response by funding staffing at Station 51, as well as Station 53 in Ruch, through June 2029.

The voters' decision regarding this levy will impact the safety and well-being of the entire community. We encourage residents to understand the consequences of not continuing the current levy with the *minimal* increase. Approval of the levy will not only secure uninterrupted emergency services until July 2029, but it will also provide increased emergency services by staffing at Station 51 in the Applegate area. Denying the levy would end 24/7 coverage for AVFD as a whole.

We urge all eligible voters to vote yes on Measure 15-220.

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**Fire risk in the Applegate—Measure 15-220 can help protect our homes**

BY LIZA CROSSE

The Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD) Board of Directors and Fire Chief Chris Wolfard have made preparedness and prevention top goals for the AVFD. Why do we need more prevention? How can we be better prepared? How will the levy help? To educate myself, I talked with people who are experts in the community.

My suspicion that the Applegate Valley is an extremely high-risk area was confirmed. Nate Gehres, of the Applegate Partnership and Watershed Council, says, "Having grown up in the Applegate Valley, I have noticed that hotter, drier conditions, combined with decades of fire suppression, have stocked the landscape with fuels that are primed to burn. Recent conifer mortality dramatically increases the risks for fire crews. As someone who lives in a box canyon with one egress route, I am very aware of the dangers of wildfires. A proactive approach is needed, and the local fire district is essential in those efforts."

Unfortunately, with limited capacity and resources, property owners are sometimes overwhelmed by the scale of the problem and can't manage increased fuels around their homes. That increases risk for the whole community.

Brett Fillis, former AVFD fire chief (retired 2016), described past vegetation management and defensible space projects supported by the fire district. He worked with homeowners to create a plan to address fire risk, then with grant agencies to get funding, and hired crews to do the work. These jobs required technical knowledge and experience. By collaborating with multiple property owners, Brett and others created a big enough fire break to

give firefighters the chance of stopping a wildfire at 500 acres, not 5,000.

Wow! That sounds exactly like what we need now! However, with fewer homeowner grants available, a nationwide reduction in volunteer firefighters, and overloaded staff, there is limited capacity to address the challenge. Chief Wolfard has a backlog of requests from property owners for advisory inspections but can't get to them himself because of competing demands.

The proposed levy will fund an experienced fire-prevention coordinator, who will conduct home assessments, help property owners work with neighbors and agencies, and seek grant opportunities. Through engagement with the owners, the coordinator will identify potential hazards and suggest mitigation strategies, reducing risk and safeguarding homes and lives. In partnership with the community and other stakeholders, a network of fire-safe practices can extend beyond individual properties.

We're fortunate that a recent state grant will provide some funding, but it's only for three years. So, without the levy, the fire-prevention coordinator position will be only temporary and part-time. This job is neither temporary nor part-time. It takes a lot of time and effort to build a fire-resilient network. The small levy increase will provide the funds and the long-term capacity we need to achieve this goal.

Can we, as a community, step up to fill the gap to benefit both ourselves and our neighbors? I know we can! Vote *yes* on Measure 115-220.

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**The wallet rules: Beware of false economies for 911 response**

BY TOM CARSTENS

The Applegate Valley Fire District Board recently voted to renew the fire district tax levy. I decided to do a little arithmetic and understand the effect this would have on my wallet.

As a result of Measure 50 (a statewide property tax revision passed by Oregonians in 1998), we pay a baseline tax rate of \$1.6787 per \$1,000 of county-assessed property value for basic fire service. Because Applegaters considered this insufficient to properly fund our fire district, we voted to add a levy to augment this service. This levy enabled 24/7 coverage, improved staffing, provided better firefighting equipment, upgraded medical response, and created more fire stations. Some form of the levy has been approved by Applegaters every five years since. The current levy, approved in 2018, amounts to an additional charge of \$1.05 per \$1,000 for a total of \$2.72. The board is proposing to raise this levy 20 cents for the next five years to \$1.25 per \$1,000, to total \$2.92. In my case, the increase comes to less than 50 bucks per year.

The levy is set to expire soon, hence the fire district board's upcoming vote. In

November, Applegaters get a chance to vote on whether or not to keep the levy. This is not a vote on the 20-cent increase, but only a yes or no vote on the levy proper. If the levy's disapproved, we'll have to accept a degraded 911 response system at the original base rate of 1.6787/\$1000 assessed property value.

I decided to check with my insurance company on whether that would make economic sense. They told me that the risk associated with that level of service reduction (i.e., loss of 24/7 service and much longer response times) would probably mean an annual premium increase of 25-50 percent. That's a whole lot more than I'm going to be paying for the levy. Like hundreds of dollars more! Voting *no* would be a false economic move.

So my wallet tells me to vote *yes* for the levy. I'll get better risk protection at a lower cost. That's not a bad deal.

(Thanks to the Jackson County tax folks for helping with the tax arithmetic.)

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*Note: To figure your own tax, consult your property tax statement. Divide your assessed property value (not the real market value) by 1,000, then multiply by the tax rate.*

**We want your opinions and letters! Email to [gater@applegater.org](mailto:gater@applegater.org).**