

Time to help thy neighbor?

BY SANDY SHAFFER

In my last *Applegater* article [Fall 2014], I showed a map outlining private properties in our area that were within a half mile of federal lands. Are you one of those properties with a red around it? I am.

Many of us in the Applegate border either Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or US Forest Service (USFS) lands. So we are well aware that hazardous fuels management has dwindled lately on said federal lands. Note: While I feel there are many reasons for this lack of management, with the inactivity of Congress being foremost, this is not the purpose of my article. Our federal land managers' hands have been tied by successive budget cuts for years!

Still, slash piles that haven't been burned, ladder fuels not thinned, or roadsides not brushed—all of this inactivity *can and does* raise the risk factor to our own private properties when summer lightning strikes or someone inadvertently starts a wildfire. Do we, as neighbors, have any options?

Yes! Fortunately, our BLM Medford District has an agreement policy in place that can allow adjacent

private landowners to "remove hazardous fuels" from "identified BLM administered lands." Did you know that? It's titled "Removal of Hazardous Fuels on BLM Administered Lands Adjacent to Private Property within the Wildland/Urban Interface and/or Lands Identified within a 'Communities at Risk' Area under the National Fire Plan."

This two-page agreement is in the form of a district-wide NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) Categorical Exclusion that any of us who abut BLM lands can read online and then discuss with a Fire and Fuels Management Specialist from either the Medford or Grants Pass BLM offices. It allows work to be done on BLM land up to 200 feet in from your private property line, and it is valid for a period of two years.

However, there are many stipulations (this is the government, after all!). Getting the permit might be easy (have the fire/fuels person out to discuss and agree upon the area and scope of work, and sign the paper), but then the hard work begins. Only hand tools (including chainsaws) can be used, only small (under seven-inch diameter, depending on the

site) live fuels cut, no work in riparian zones, no herbicides, no burning, and all cut materials must be removed by hand from the BLM to your private land. Also, property markers, survey monuments and bearing trees are to be protected, as are any "objects or sites of cultural, historical or paleontological values."

And, all mechanized equipment (chainsaws, ATVs, etc.) must meet Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) spark arrester standards, and you must obtain an ODF operations permit and comply with all ODF fire restriction requirements, including keeping fire suppression tools (ax, shovel, water, bucket) at hand during clearing operations.

This all might sound complicated, but it really isn't. I feel this agreement has several advantages depending upon your circumstances, so is worth investigating. Being able to thin along a shared road for better visibility also provides a cushion of protection for your home in case someone throws a cigarette out a car window. Is the parcel of BLM land publicly accessible? Creating a thinned (less flammable) buffer zone between that BLM land and your own property could slow a human-caused wildfire's progress, giving you and firefighters more time to protect your home.

Unfortunately, I was told that our

Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest does not have a similar mechanism in place (probably because at the higher elevations they don't abut as many private properties). So, while they do have the *authority* to allow a similar agreement, the NEPA permitting process would most likely be lengthy. Therefore, if you border USFS lands and are interested in something like this, I'd suggest talking to your neighbors to see if a group effort that covered more land would be an option. A proposal could then be presented to your local District Ranger.

I hope this has given you some food for thought! My hubby and I and our neighbors worked through the BLM to treat an adjacent federal parcel some years ago, with successful results.

Given all of those redlined borders, just think how many miles we could treat if we all worked in just a few feet! So consider "helping thy neighbor" with their thinning work this winter, because who knows when Congress will let our federal land managers get back to managing their forests.

Sandy Shaffer

sassyoneor@q.com

Author's Note: To contact either the BLM or USFS, call the Medford Interagency Office at 541-618-2200, or the Grants Pass IO at 541-471-6500, and ask for the Fuels Management Specialist for your location.

New building for Applegate Valley Fire District

BY CHRIS WOLFARD

Over the past several months, you may have noticed trees and stumps being removed from a portion of Applegate Valley Fire District (AVFD) property adjacent to the Headquarters Fire Station on Upper Applegate Road. Now you are seeing site work as we make way to erect a Training and Multi-Use Facility housing several firefighter hands-on-training props.

AVFD has been planning to build this much-needed facility for over ten years. The five-acre parcel of land for this project was purchased by the fire district in 2004. During this time monies have been saved and reserved in our Capital Projects Fund in order to make this project come to fruition.

The plans are for the facility to serve all of our valley constituents. The building itself will be a one-level, 6,400-square-foot ADA-compliant metal structure with interior divisions that will accommodate our growth over the next several years. The meeting-room section of the building will be approximately 50 feet by 50 feet (2,500 square feet). Its primary function will be firefighter training. It will also be available for public meetings, large-scale operations, and public social gatherings. Groups or individuals within our valley (upon request, approval and availability) will be able to use this room. There will be workout facilities available for use by fire-district personnel. The remaining portion of the building will provide storage space necessary to relieve

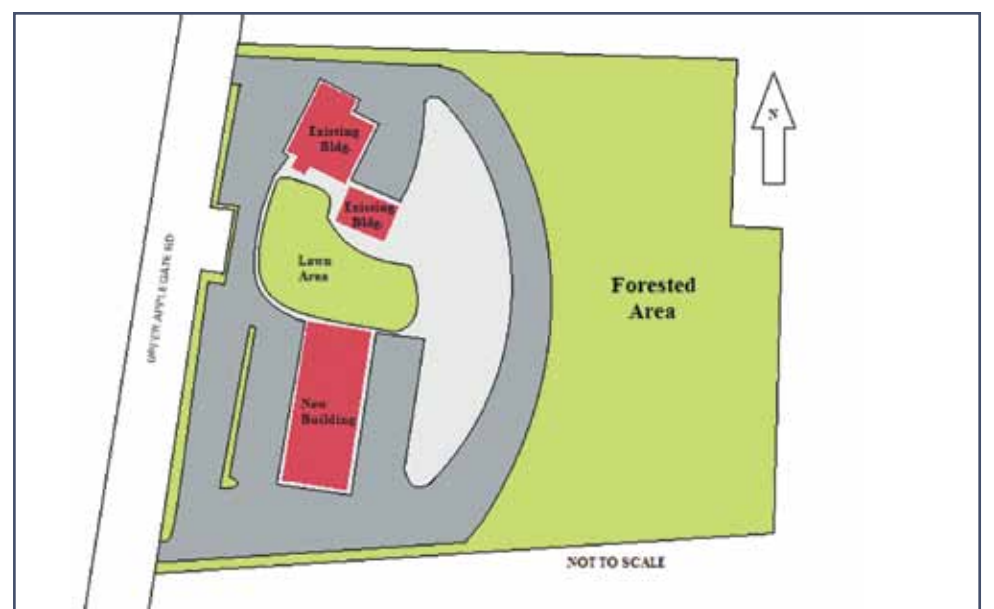
the fire station next door, which has been maximized for several years.

One of the training props planned is a series of containers that, when assembled, will provide the opportunity for "live" fire training as well as smoke, ladder and rope rescue drills. These training props are not part of the initial development. It is expected that they will be in place within two years following completion of the building, depending on our success in receiving grant funding.

At this point, we have cleared the land and completed the majority of the excavation, including cutting the building pad and installing the septic system. We will soon be pouring concrete. It is important to our Board of Directors that we continue to use local (Applegate Valley) contractors whenever feasible. To date, we have been fortunate to utilize the professional services of Tom Maddox Jr. for land clearing, Bottroff Excavation for building-site excavation, and Robert Conley Excavation for the septic system.

Anticipated completion time and availability for public use of the Training and Multi-Use Facility is late spring 2015. This much-needed and long-awaited facility will allow our Applegate Valley Fire District to continue to grow and serve our community for years to come.

Chris Wolfard
Operations Chief
Applegate Valley Fire District
541-899-1050



Top photo: Site work for new Training and Multi-Use Facility for Applegate Valley Fire District.

Bottom photo: Shows the "New Building" in relation to existing buildings.

Burn reminder



Before burning outdoors any time of year, check with your fire district to make sure that day is an official burn day and not a **NO** burn day.

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