

Cabin fever: Stir-crazy or think tank?

BY SANDY SHAFFER

A full week of being snowbound finally started getting to me. Never mind that hubby had tried going to town earlier in the week and got the car stuck in well over a foot of snow on our driveway. We'd received almost an inch of rain, the snow was melting, and the temps were up, so I took off to get some errands done.

After creeping down our hill and skidding across our bridge, I breathed a huge sigh of relief as I turned onto a plowed and rocked road. Moving towards Buncom and the Little Applegate River, I could hear the river well before I got there. Feeder streams flowing across roads, flooded pasture, debris everywhere, and it was still raining. Would our local rivers flood, I wondered?

I barely made it back home safely—got a little too close to the inside of a curve on the driveway and hubby had to come down and dig me out. On the computer I had some emails from neighbors who were monitoring and comparing the Little Applegate's rising waters at various locations. And the fire chief called me to talk about possible

breaching along the main Applegate River later that night. He'd been working with both Jackson and Josephine County Emergency Services departments, the Red Cross, the state's Department of Transportation, and the Army Corps of Engineers to be ready to set up shelters if we did see some flooding of homes that night.

To me this is what the Applegate is all about: people working together to address issues and get things done—across property boundaries and across jurisdictions. And hasn't this been the way of America—people working together for a better future—ever since our country was formed?

Because of our checkerboard landownership pattern, we here in southwest Oregon *have had to work together* with our neighbors to accomplish successful management goals. We set the trend out of local necessity, but the concept has gone national, with collaborative groups all across the country working together on local land-management issues.

And it seems to me that the next steps of collaborative work were a natural also—to plan and work together during *all* natural disasters, not just wildfires.

We now have CERT teams (Community Emergency Response Teams) popping up in many communities. We have detailed emergency evacuation plans for families via the Ready, Set, Go! program, as well as documents telling us what to include in family emergency kits in case power and other services are cut off for extended lengths of time.

We have automatic Citizen Alert systems in both of our counties, whereby all affected families receive emergency information in a timely manner so that we can appropriately react at the family level. We Applegaters also have developed many "telephone trees" to be able to alert neighbors to an emergency situation in our immediate area.

And of course much has been done to address wildfire risks in southwest Oregon, with several programs such as Firewise and Fire-Adapted Communities developed to guide homeowners in fire-prone areas (the Applegate) to

work *together* to make their homes and neighborhoods fire-resilient. While these are now national programs, they are still very applicable to our rural settings, especially right now!

A decade ago over 90 percent of the Applegate's residents had "defensible space" around their homes. But we all know that vegetation grows back (especially in wet years), meaning that we have to work annually to maintain a clean, defensible homesite. So what would that percentage be today? As you read this article, do *you* have a defensible space around your home?

It's time to take stock of the fuels on our properties and make a work list for the coming months. As we do this inventory, we should also consider those with whom we share a driveway or property line. Working together and sharing the load can create an even larger fire-resilient neighborhood.

Connecting individual properties that have lower fuel loads, healthier vegetation, safe access/egress and defensible homes *can* affect a wildfire's behavior and help make a safer area for firefighters to do their job. Maybe save lives and homes as well?

I'm in—are you?
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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. **No illegal burning!**
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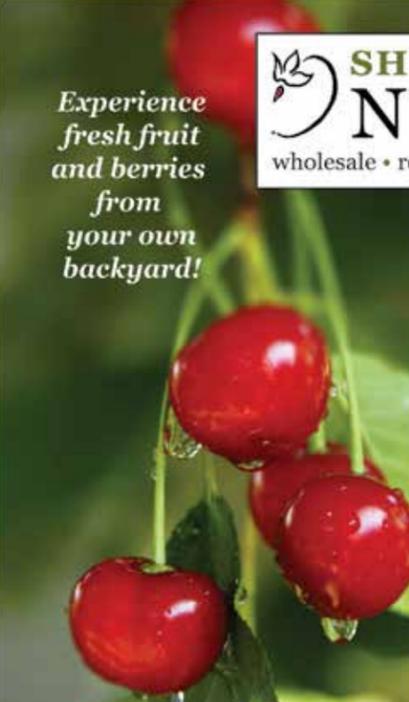
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