

# Local Fire Danger Is “High” and Moving Towards “Extreme”

by Sherrie Kvamme  
of the Hells Canyon Journal

“Conditions are horrible right now, and they are going to get worse,” said Eagle Valley Fire Chief Dave Kingsbury. “We have had, and are still looking at temperatures, in the triple-digits in the foreseeable future.”

We are at [fire danger] level High right now, and I am expecting to hear that the Oregon Department of Forestry will raise that to Extreme this week. Everyone can pretty much expect that we will have burning restrictions until we get well into fall. Everything has been, and continues to be, drying out and doing so rapidly.”

Dave said as soon as the level moves to Extreme, there will be absolutely no burning whatsoever.

“Right now, common sense tells us that it’s not a good idea to burn from now on. We have had several fires recently in the two valleys. There was a rural structure fire that toned us out about 10:00 p.m. last week. ODF and the Forest Service along with all of our local volunteers showed up. They start easy and get out of control fast. Mutual aid is of tremendous importance.”

“We had another fire up Eagle Creek. It was a campfire and somebody called it in. It got out of control, and that happens fast. They were just enjoying a campout and surrounded by green grass, green trees and whatnot, but it’s so dry right now. Embers get caught in a little breeze

and we have an out-of-control fire so fast.

“The Forest Service was pulling a dozer on the 39 Road, and the trailer caught on fire. A couple of tires blew. It was a friction fire that caught the trailer on fire. They got the trailer disconnected and the dozer off, then used the dozer to build a fire line around it and got it out. It was another mutual aid response, which is what we all do. We can’t say enough good about the mutual aid response that happens. It matters.”

If you have burn barrel material, Dave suggests the services of a sanitation company. “Their rates are not unreasonable and they pick up regularly,” he said. “We have moved into high level for fire a little early this year and I know that people like to keep their yards cleaned up which is also good for creating that defensible space. So call a sanitary service and get on their route. They take yard debris, as well. Don’t let it pile up if you can help it. You don’t want to save fuel for a fire. Remember the importance of defensible space around your buildings.”

“If someone is burning when they should not be, I don’t mind going and talking to people to explain the fire restrictions. Usually, it’s someone who is new or didn’t realize that conditions for fire are bad. Often, it only takes a visit to get that explained. Yes, we have had offenders in the past who need more than a reminder, but for the most part people who live here know better.”



Photo by Sherrie Kvamme

“COMMON SENSE TELLS US we should not be burning right now,” said Eagle Valley Fire Chief Dave Kingsbury, who expects the Oregon Department of Forestry to categorize the fire danger in northeast Oregon as “Extreme” very soon.

“We follow the Oregon Department of Forestry restriction levels. When you drive by the fire station, you will see our sign with the levels posted, which as I mentioned, will probably be moved to Extreme this week.”

Dave encourages people to access Blue Mountain Interagency Dispatch Center at: <http://bmidc.org> for more information about fire conditions and agency advisories.

“The agencies all post there, and the resources for information can answer almost any question you might have.”

At BMIDC, information included pertinent to current wildfire activity in the Blue Mountain area of northeast Oregon and southeast Washington in addition to the Oregon Department of Forestry’s Northeast Oregon District, Umatilla National Forest, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.”

In a press release issued on July 20 officials from the Malheur, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman Forests posted that Public Use Phase B began on July 21. (See full release on page 4 of this issue.)

“Common sense tells us we should not be burning right now,” said Dave. “The conditions are very bad already. Remember that we will likely move into the full burn ban of Extreme soon if not already. If you do have a fire, don’t hesitate to call 911. If you are questioning whether you need help or not, in all probability you do. Remember, we would rather be called and have to turn around and go back to the station than end up fighting a fire that gets out of control. It happens fast.” (Call 911, not the firefighters.)

# Panhandle Well-Represented at Passenger Rail Presentation

by Gail Kimberling  
of the Hells Canyon Journal

A number of Halfway residents attended a presentation in Baker City this past weekend to promote the return of passenger rail service to eastern Oregon and Idaho.

The 2023 Train Trek tour sponsored by All Aboard Northwest (AANW) and the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates (AORTA) also featured stops in Hood River, Ontario and Weiser, Idaho.

The Baker City event was held Saturday, July 22 at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center and included a tour of the old railroad depot and Railroad Square, a regular stop on Amtrak’s Pioneer passenger train between Portland and Salt Lake City. The service was discontinued in 1997.

Susan Bolgiano, member of Panhandle for Passenger Rail (P4PR), a local group advocating for the return of passenger rail service, stated, “I was delighted to see 30-plus people show up, and to hear that so many Baker City residents want the Pioneer passenger train to come back to Baker City. The tour of the present day depot located off Broadway showed that the depot is in excellent shape and just needs minor upgrades to become usable.”

According to Rick Meis, another P4PR member, “One thing that jumped out at me was the short clip AANW showed of the statement Idaho Senator Mike Crapo made to welcome the Greater Northwest Passenger Rail Summit to Boise this past week. He makes it clear that putting

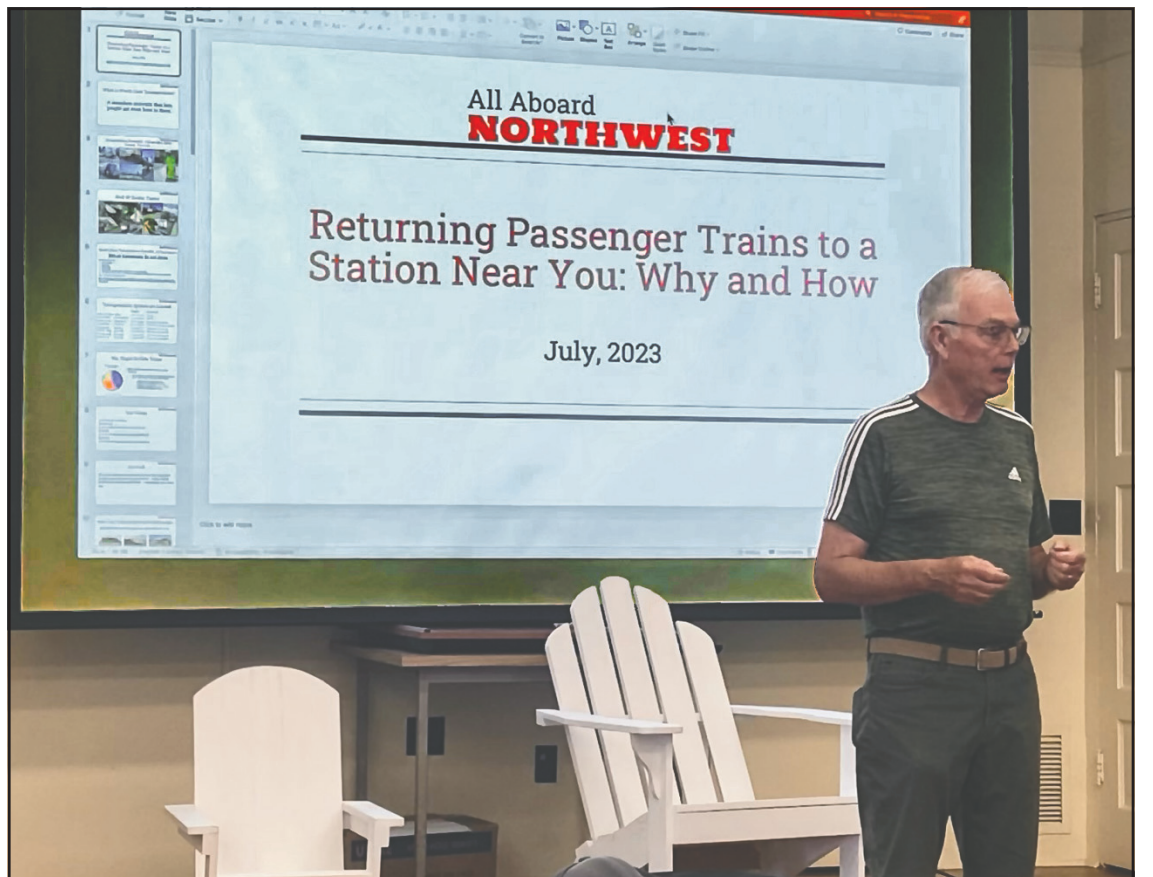
the Amtrak Pioneer back on the rails through southern Idaho [and eastern Oregon] is not a partisan issue, but one of serving the needs of rural residents – his constituents. Many of our elected officials in Baker County feel that way, too.”

“I learned things that I didn’t know and am excited to share with folks who may be skeptical about the possibilities of us ever getting passenger rail back in Baker City,” added Spring Bartlett, also with P4PR. “For example, the Pioneer Line is highly rated by the Federal Rail Administration as one deemed worthy of receiving funds available in the Infrastructure Bill for study.”

In fact, unprecedented funds are up for grabs thanks to President Biden’s 2021 bill, and the Federal Railroad Administration is currently conducting a Daily Long-Distance Service Study to evaluate the feasibility of returning passenger rail and other services.

Railroad advocates with AANW and AORTA are pushing for a “safe, robust, seamless transportation system [to] bring significant economic, environmental and equity benefits to communities of all sizes,” and, Bartlett noted, “When Wisconsin made a big noise in support of passenger rail it only took two years to put it in place.”

Bartlett went on to say, “The decision of which lines will get the money will be made this fall. One advantage we have is that the depot does not need much upgrading and it counts towards matching funds. Another point is that passenger trains legally



Submitted Photo

BRUCE NICHOLS, Baker County Commissioner, opens the Baker City stop of the 2023 Train Trek tour sponsored by All Aboard Northwest and the Association of Oregon Rail and Transit Advocates to promote the return of passenger rail service to eastern Oregon and Idaho.

take precedence over freight concerning scheduling, even though the freight companies ignore that currently. The feds are beginning to call the freight companies to account to follow the law. Shorter freight trains and more side-tracks can facilitate better scheduling.

“It takes one-third of the cost to build tracks than it does to add one lane to highways,” Bartlett continued. “Thirty percent of the population does not drive, which negates the perception that a train option is predominantly a preference for a vacation experience. What is needed is for lots of ordinary folks to

let our representatives know how great our community is and to bring back the stalled nonpartisan legislation in support of passenger rail to the 2024 session. All 15 counties of the Eastern Oregon Counties Association voted unanimously in favor of passenger rail. The funding runs out in 2026, so it is time to make a big noise.”

P4PR’s Judith Fisher said, “Two things stood out to me at the meeting. First, most of the participants present were mostly senior citizens so transport to families, medical

facilities and an alternate to winter highways came up a lot, along with the surprising fact that 30 percent of the population does not drive. Second, as cross country passenger train service already demonstrates, there is significant economic benefit to smaller communities along its path.”

“The interest in and support for the return of the Pioneer line is exciting!” Fisher said, and Bolgiano added, “The impetus to get a passenger train back to Baker City is alive and well.”

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- Aluminum
- Newsprint
- Office Paper
- Glass
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- Cardboard

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