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LOOKOUT NETWORK

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE FOREST FIRE LOOKOUT ASSOCIATION, INC.

- *FFLA Board Meeting January 19, Tillamook, OR*
- *Two New FFLA Chapters*
- *New Oregon Lookout Constructed*

www.firelookout.org

Hat Point Evacuation

On the afternoon of Friday the 13th (July), Rod Bacon headed back to Enterprise and Hat Point Lookout from Pullman, WA, after his days off. Going down the grade to Lewiston, he could see a fire up the Clearwater River; when he got to Asotin, locals were fighting a lightning fire in the hills around town. In Enterprise, Rod could see lightning flashes to the east. After stopping in Joseph to have one last non-home cooked meal, Rod climbed up the road out of Imnaha as the last of the storm passed to the north. After cutting three trees out of the road by headlight illumination, he arrived at the lookout after midnight.

The next morning Rod could look out the cabin window and see a large smoke in Hells Canyon. By noon his visibility was down to a few miles. The Battle Creek Fire was off and running! Across the river in Idaho, the Payette had a fire at Deep Creek and Grangeville to the northeast had a major fire. The Grizzly Ridge Fire was burning twelve miles to his northwest and the Cottonwood Creek Complex was to the north. Oregon and Idaho both had major fires burning further south.

With a shortage of firefighting resources to try and control fires, efforts were concentrated on saving structures. By Wednesday the 18th, the Battle Creek Fire was five miles to the south of Hat Point and winds were steady from the south at 20 with gusts to 30 mph. Smoke was so thick that there was very little aircraft use for suppression. With a shift in the wind for about half an hour late in the afternoon, Rod could see that the fire had spotted into Saddle Creek, the closest drainage to his south and Northeast Dispatch in La Grande said it was time to leave, since his escape road was so close to the fire.

After moving the day before into Red Hill Lookout, where he would spend the next five weeks, Rod got the Friday morning report that the Battle Creek Fire had spotted across Saddle Creek and was expected to reach Hat Point by the next morning. A structure protection team was sent to Hat Point, but were limited since aircraft were unable to drop retardant due to smoke. At 5:20 pm Harl Butte Lookout reported seeing flames at Hat Point. Later, the structure team report that flames were beyond Hat Point and that the lookout and cabin were both OK. The observation deck had fire as well as the cabin roof but both were quickly extinguished.

Rod finally got to return to Hat Point August 24. Burnt boards on the walkway to the lookout had been replaced and the roof on the cabin had been repaired, however he had three leaks show up during the first rain storm! The picnic area and overlook are also being rebuilt and the goats have returned. Rod is also expecting lots of wild flowers next season!



Bart Singley photo

Hat Point Lookout and the Battle Creek Complex

It was approaching 100 degrees in the Warm Springs Camp yurt, where I was ordering aircraft and equipment for three large wildfires on this Oregon Reservation. The phone rang and when my supervisor hung up, I was reassigned to help run a fire camp at Memaloose on the rim of Hell's Canyon. After rolling across Oregon's high desert and checking in at the fire camp in Joseph, I drove down to Imnaha and began a hazardous trip up to the Hell's Canyon Rim, by clinging to a one lane road which hit a 16% grade and dropped off, with no guard rails, 3000 feet. Temperatures at Imnaha were near 90, but making my way through turkey flocks and deer herds, I found the rim temps to be a comfortable 76 degrees. As I approached the Memaloose and Hat Point areas, I began to see and smell smoke. I was getting closer to a large column of smoke that turned out to merely be a burnout of unburned materials within the fire line.

After a few hours at camp, the camp manager suggested we drive into the fire zone which had cooled for the evening. When we approached the lookout, I was amazed by the effects of fire I was seeing. The surrounding forest had burned in

1989, making it a stand of bleached snags and a tangle of fallen snags, interspersed among new pine growth and a profusion of fireweed and other wildflowers. But the Battle Creek Fire had burned hot right up to the lookout, scorching the only large firs and pines left near the tower. As we walked up towards the base, a grouse scurried through the grass and burned places which were spot fires that had been extinguished by fire crews days before. The nearby supporting cabin had been saved with minimal damage, but the shock was a three foot wide hole burned in

the lookout's ground level deck. We nearly lost the Hat Point Lookout! Thank goodness for crews who braved the fire's passage to save the lookout and surrounding structures. We should be grateful to them!

Mike Lee



John Prendergrast photo

Double Arrow LO (MT) survived the fire that burned around it as well as threatened Seeley Lake only a month after the FFLA conference