

# SPECIAL EDITION

OMAK-OKANOGAN COUNTY CHRONICLE

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C Section

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY



By DEE CAMP  
*The Chronicle*

In the aftermath of the Carlton Complex fire, The Chronicle wrote several stories about four families who suffered losses.

The Carlton Complex began July 14, 2014, as four lightning-caused fires that later burned together into one blaze that blackened 256,108 acres from Winthrop to Pateros and over Loup Loup Pass into the Chiliwist and Malott. An unrelated fire, Rising Eagle, began Aug. 1 and was rolled into the complex for management purposes.

The Carlton fire burned 237 homes and 53 cabins in four school districts, plus destroyed barns, outbuildings and fences; killed livestock and wildlife, and damaged rangeland, orchards and other crops.

It left a landscape prone to flooding, which occurred that Aug. 21 when a rainstorm pummeled the fire-damaged area. Additional slides have occurred after that, including minor flooding in the Methow Valley on Dec. 11, 2014.

Now, five years later, The Chronicle is checking in again with Vic and Carrie Stokes, who lost cattle, hay and rangeland in the Beaver Creek area southeast of Twisp; Judy and Harry Himmelhaver, who lost their home at the head of Indian Dan Canyon outside Brewster; Jennifer and John Johnson, whose Chiliwist home burned, and Libby and Forrest Harrison, who lost their home in Pateros.

Libby Harrison's mother, Carol Hamshaw, also lost her rural Pateros home and her uncle, Terry Hamsaw, lost his home at Alta Lake. The Stokeses' son, Kent, lost his home.

### Rebuilding the herd

Vic and Carrie Stokes lost 50-60 percent of their herd of more than 100 mother cows and heifers and nearly 100 calves. Others suffered burns.

They lost rangeland, cattle and hay, and their son, who lived in an apartment above one of the family's shops, also lost his home.

Five years ago, Vic Stokes said he wasn't in a hurry to replace the cattle, partly because of the

high cost of cattle and partly because the range needed to recover

from the fire.

"We're still trying to rebuild," he said last week.

Some fences still need rebuilding, but he's holding off because with every strong wind, more damaged trees fall and some would fall across fences.

Flooding that came after the fire damaged his land further, especially in forested areas he leases within the Okanogan National Forest.

"Flood damage is probably the most lingering on forested lands," he said, but for the most part, "the land healed up fairly well" after the fire.

Grass came back strong - in fact, the fire actually helped the grass - and shrubs and sage have started to return, he said.

His herd is close to where it was before the fire, "but we're still probably a year or two out from having as many mother cows."

Stokes, who is active in the Okanogan County Cattlemen's Association and Washington Cattlemen's Association, said other ranchers are experiencing some of the same difficulties: Trees falling, fence maintenance and smaller herds.

His son, meanwhile, has moved to Mount Vernon, where he works for the Farm Service Agency.

"We've put some of the trauma behind us," said Stokes, but noted that the smell of smoke "really gets you going. It triggers that memory."

### Life, post-fire

Judy Himmelhaver said the aftermath of Carlton Complex was one huge nightmare and the family is only now settling into their post-fire life.

As the flames approached, they grabbed their two dogs, two cats, a few possessions and fled to the home of her husband's boss in Cashmere. Their triple-wide modular home burned to the ground.

They lived in a fifth-wheel trailer and a cabin, then rented an apartment in Cashmere and transferred their daughter, Samantha, then age 14 and an eighth-grader, to Cashmere schools. Harry Himmelhaver continued with his job in pears in Cashmere; she transferred her

## Families rebuild after Carlton Complex fire

job from the Omak Walmart to the Wenatchee store, but had to give up another job with the Brewster School District.

Insurance has been a nightmare, she said.

Their carrier refused to cover their losses, alternately saying it wouldn't cover losses from the Carlton fire and the family should deal with the state Department of Natural Resources, and then claiming the family's coverage had been canceled the previous November. Himmelhaver got in touch with the state Office of the Insurance Commissioner, but no solution came.

Meanwhile, they were still making payments on a home that no longer existed and paying rent on an apartment.

The family received some aid from various churches and agencies, but found much of the system frustrating, she said. Because the land on which their home stood is owned by their older daughter, Wendy Ediger, they were told they didn't qualify for some relief programs.

"We're slipping behind. We've depleted our savings," she said after the fire.

Five years later, Judy Himmelhaver still works for Walmart in Wenatchee.

The store "treats me well. Just like Omak did."

She said the family found Cashmere to be a safe, small town.

"We walk often. We plan on staying here," she said. "We don't plan on rebuilding in Okanogan County."

The family took another hit last year when daughter Samantha was diagnosed with stage 4 ovarian cancer. She underwent surgery in Seattle and chemotherapy in Wenatchee, and is still healing from the effects of chemo damage, her mother said.

Despite the illness, Samantha graduated from Cashmere High School this spring.

Their other daughter, Wendy, has been living in a travel trailer and hopes to rebuild next spring.

Judy Himmelhaver said she now is terrified of all fires and still misses many of the things she lost.

"Our recipes and grandparents' cookbooks cannot be replaced," she said. "Our favorite cookware and dishes. You could fit the recipe."

See Families C2

# Lightning touches off massive fire

**By DEE CAMP**  
*The Chronicle*

CARLTON — The four fires that grew together to form the Carlton Complex fire began Monday, July 14, 2014, with lightning strikes in the Methow Valley.

By the time the fire was declared 100 percent contained on Aug. 25, it had blackened 256,108 acres of land, and burned 237 homes and 53 cabins; destroyed fences, out-buildings and farm machinery, and killed wildlife, pets and an estimated 700-1,000 head of cattle.

Deaths of two men — homeowner and former state trooper Robert E. Koczewski, 67, and Gebbers Farms patriarch John "Danny" Gebbers, 84 — were related to the fire. Koczewski suffered an apparent heart attack while fighting fire on his land and Gebbers fell while defending his land on Paradise Hill.

The fire's greatest growth came during a nine-hour period July 17, when it raced across 123,159 acres of land. Its estimated speed, at its peak, was 3.8 acres per second.

The human-caused Rising Eagle Road Fire, which began Aug. 1, was added to the Carlton Complex for management purposes. It burned across 504 acres.

Meanwhile, the Upper Falls Fire burned across 8,120 acres north of Winthrop, with containment expected by the end of August. It started Aug. 5. The Little Bridge Creek Fire burned 4,958 acres west of Winthrop. It was reported in early August.

The Devil's Elbow Fire, north of Keller on the Colville Indian Reservation, blackened more than 26,000 acres.

Upper Falls, Little Bridge Creek and Devil's Elbow fires all were lightning-caused.

## Help called early

The Stokes Road Fire, which broke out the afternoon of July 14, had burned more than 500 acres of sage and grass land southeast of Carlton in the Texas Creek drainage by early the next day.

Almost immediately, crews from Fire District No. 6 (Methow Valley) put out the call for help. Fire District No. 3 (Omak, Okanogan and Malott), Fire District No. 4 (Tonasket) and the state Department of Natural Resources responded.

By Tuesday morning, Level 1 and 2 evacuation notices had been issued and a Type 3 incident management team was in place. Several other county fire districts responded, as did the U.S. Forest Service.

A call for additional forces brought in firefighters from all over the country.

The thunderstorm that rolled over Okanogan and Ferry counties that Monday afternoon and touched off a handful of fires. Those reported Monday in Okanogan County were in Bear Canyon, Gold Creek (two fires), Fuzzy Canyon, West Buck Mountain (0.1 acre), Upper Beaver Creek and Cougar Flats.

Meanwhile three fires ignited on the Colville Indian Reservation and others in Chelan County.

The Stokes Road Fire, in the Texas Creek area southeast of Carlton, and the Golden Hike Fire, on the west side of the Methow River at Carlton, merged, then later joined with the French Creek fire to the south and the Cougar Flat Fire, which began southeast of Winthrop above Pearrygin Lake.

The combined fire burned south and east across state Highway 20 and into the Okanogan Valley, where it destroyed homes in the Chiliwist Valley and along Old Highway 97 to Malott. B&O

Road through the Loup Loup Creek canyon linking Malott with state Highway 20 also was hard hit.

The blaze jumped the Okanogan River and burned eastward on the Colville Indian Reservation to U.S. Highway 97 between mileposts 271 and 274.

It also burned southward through Indian Dan Canyon, Watson Draw and along Bill Shaw Road, and heavily damaged homes in Pateros and at Alta Lake on the south side of the Methow River.

Some Pateros businesses suffered fire damage, but none were destroyed. Pateros School weathered the flames, although several homes behind the school were destroyed as the fire leapfrogged through town.

The school became a community gathering place and center for donated food, water and clothing. The town remained without electricity, although some generators were set up.

Then-Sheriff Frank Rogers, deputies and Okanogan County Search and Rescue volunteers worked all day Thursday, July 17, all night and through Friday to notify residents throughout the affected areas of the fires' approach. Embers spotted ahead, adding to the fires' advance.

They also helped people evacuate, doing everything from helping them out of their homes to assisting in rounding up stock.



**A firefighter faces the flames July 17, 2014, as the fire moves into Pateros.**

**ROGER HARNACK | The Chronicle**

Chelan and Douglas counties' sheriff's offices sent officers to help, as did Brewster and Omak police departments and Colville Tribal Police Services.

Several Red Cross shelters were set up, with some having to move as flames came closer.

Three Rivers Hospital in Brewster was evacuated the evening of July 17 to Mid-Valley Hospital in Omak, but later reopened.

## Rain, but little relief

Rain fell the morning of July 22, giving firefighters and community members hope that the Carlton Complex fire might have an end. But the blaze continued its march across the landscape.

As of that morning, more than 1,600 firefighters — plus local crews — were working 24 hours a day to build and maintain fire lines. The blaze, which had burned across more than 243,000 acres, was 16 percent contained.

On July 21, the fire was active south of state Highway 20 in the Pleasant Valley area west of Okanogan, but did not cross the highway. Residents north of the highway were on a Level 3 (highest) evacuation alert.

An aerial attack was ongoing.

To the south, rain and wind direction helped in the Black Canyon and Antoine Creek areas between Pateros and Chelan.

To the north, Carlton was under a Level 3 evacuation order Monday, but that was lowered to Level 2 on Tuesday.

A week after the fires started, Rogers said his department, which scrambled to deliver evacuation notices to a fire area that blackened more than 350 square miles, worked on confirming the number of structures lost.

By July 19, sheriff's officials said around 500 Level 3 warnings had been issued county-wide; that grew as more areas, from rural Okanogan to Libby Creek in the Methow Valley, were threatened.

The fast-moving fires, fanned by natural winds and winds created by the fire's

movement, sent firefighters dashing from place to place in attempts to protect structures. One home would be saved, only to have one next door burst into flames.

## Donations pour in

A variety of relief sites sprang up and people all over the Northwest sent supplies to fire victims.

Pateros School served as a gathering point for residents and a drop-off spot for donations. Two days after the fire roared through town, the gym was filled with donated water, food, clothing and other items.

Because power was off, residents drug their outdoor grills to the school to cook food before it spoiled. They also ate apple pies prepared for the Apple Pie Jamboree, which was scheduled for July 19 but canceled because of the fire.

Gov. Jay Inslee and a contingent of state officials visited the area on July 20, one of his three visits to the county during the fire fight.

Along with destroying homes, the fire also damaged infrastructure.

Okanogan County Public Utility District's Loup Loup transmission line went down as the fire raced across the mountains. That also cut power to customers of the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative in Winthrop.

Then-PUD Manager John Grubich said the district's lines suffered extensive damage throughout the fire area. Crews worked 16-hour days, with assistance from neighboring counties' PUDs, but were unable to get into all the affected areas for some time to assess damage because the fires were still raging.

Cellphone and land line service also was interrupted, and the fire burned a railroad bridge just outside Pateros, keeping trains from moving.

The PUD's fiber optics backbone line also was damaged along Old Highway 97 between Brewster and Malott, and an electrical transmission line between Brewster and Pateros also burned.

Gasoline also became an issue, with Winthrop stations running out and others in Twisp and Pateros hampered by a lack of electricity to run pumps.

## Helping neighbors

Neighbors helped neighbors from the start, with Pateros School, Brewster Recreation Center, Okanogan County Fairgrounds Agriplex and the Omak Community Center serving drop-off points for aid. Others arranged for displaced animal to be sheltered at the fairgrounds.

Red Cross also set up shelters.

A couple weeks after the blaze began, community volunteers, in association with various charities, private donors, local businesses and government emergency response agencies, opened a disaster relief center in a former grocery store in Pateros.

The new center initially served as a distribution site for the large volumes of donated fire relief items, including food, clothing, household supplies, baby items and so forth.

Volunteers also started a multi-agency resource center that became the Carlton Complex Long-Term Recovery Group. The next year, after the Okanogan Complex, North Star and Tunk Block fires, the effort was renamed to Okanogan County Long-Term Recovery Group.

The group became a source of information and assistance in later years as fires ravaged other parts of eastern Washington.

Federal help also was sought, with approval coming for public entities affected by the fire but denied for individuals and businesses.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency set up an office at the Agriplex to help fire victims. The office remained open for several months.

And Team Rubicon, a volunteer organization that helps with various disasters, set up shop in Pateros to help people negotiate the maze of insurance and other assistance programs, and help clear debris off their land.

A variety of faith-based and other volunteer organizations

See **Fire C3**



**AL CAMP | The Chronicle**

**Fire leaves a Methow Valley riverbend charred.**

## Families from C1

in that dish and it worked. Now, not so pretty."

A year after the Carlton fire, a blaze tore through a Wenatchee neighborhood near the Walmart store where she works.

Himmelhaver said many of her co-workers and other admitted they finally understood what she was going through.

"So many people's comments were, 'It's been a year. You should be fine now.' A lot of people I work with didn't get it. I've felt isolated for a year," she said at the

time.

The Wenatchee fire changed that.

"A lot of people came up and hugged me and said they'd had no clue, but now they got it," she said.

## Lost the battle

In the months after the fire, Jennifer Johnson also mourned the loss of favorite recipes and cooking utensils.

She and her husband lost their home of 21 years in the Chiliwist. After the Cougar Flats fire rolled from Pearrygin Lake to Beaver Creek, it headed west and south across the Okanogan

Range and into the Chiliwist Valley.

Johnson was a sergeant with the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office dispatch crew, and left home July 17 to work the overnight shift at the communications center.

By the time she'd made the 20-minute drive into Okanogan, her disabled husband, John, was evacuating with several house guests - Jennifer Johnson's sister and nephew, the couple's daughter, Jenna, and her then-boyfriend Seth Hand. They've since married.

They rounded up

Jenna Johnson's dog, the family's cat, dog and horse, and grabbed a few possessions, and headed into Malott. They later checked into a motel.

John and Jennifer Johnson lived in a couple temporary locations, cleaned up their home site, had electricity reinstalled and made sure their water worked. They had planned to move back to their property when the flash flooding hit.

Like the Himmelhavers, they also made payments on a home that didn't exist. The next summer, during the Okanogan

Complex fire, the Johnsons had to evacuate again when their Spring Coulee rental was threatened.

Then, on Nov. 9, 2018, Jennifer Johnson, 62, lost a battle with cancer.

Her daughter, Jenna Hand, could not be reached for additional comment.

## Home rebuilt

Libby and Forrest Harrison rebuilt their Pateros home. After the fire, she said the family's insurance carrier "treated us real well," cutting them a check almost immediately for half their personal

property value so they could get back on their feet.

They fled the fire July 17 with their daughter, Avery, three dogs and some goats. Their cat, which they couldn't find as they prepared to evacuate, showed up after the fire.

Libby Harrison was mayor of Pateros at the time, but soon resigned to deal with fire losses.

She has stayed involved in Pateros community life, and later served as chamber of commerce president.

Harrison could not be reached for additional comments.



AL CAMP | *The Chronicle*  
Smoke casts an eerie light on Brewster Flat July 20, 2014.

## Carlton Complex fire

Fire began	July 14, 2014
(four fires, later merged into one; Aug. 1 Rising Eagle Road later added to complex)	
Fire cause	Lightning (Rising Eagle human-caused)
Acreage burned	256,108
Forest Service	80,564
Bureau of Land Management	6,157
State	70,215
Private	99,082
Square miles burned	400
Percent of county land burned	7.6
Deaths	2
(medical conditions during fire; one a stroke, the other from a fall)	
Cattle killed (estimated)	700-1,000
Homes destroyed	237
Brewster School District	17
Methow Valley School District	36
Okanagan School District	53
Pateros School District	131
Cabins destroyed	53
Assessed value of structures lost	
Brewster School District	\$2.82 million
Okanagan School District	\$5.4 million
Methow Valley School District	\$4.97 million
Pateros School District	\$14.67 million
Greatest growth	123,159 acres during a nine-hour period July 17
Estimated speed, at peak	3.8 acres per second
Okanagan County dispatch calls, July 14, 066	
Normal month	6,000-7,000
911 calls, July	4,218
911 calls July 14	446
911 calls July 15	400-plus
911 calls July 16	400-plus
911 calls July 17	1,041
911 calls July 18	1,186
Okanagan County Public Utility District losses	
\$11.54 million-plus	
341 miles of distribution line damaged or destroyed	
1,005 distribution poles replaced	
59 miles of transmission line and 106 poles	
60 miles of fiber optic cable and 12 wireless access points	
Electricity off to Methow Valley 8 days for most, 27 days for all	



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A PUD pole is burned and askew at Alta Lake.

## PUD reimbursed for bulk of fire costs

### Utility receives last payment from FEMA in June

By DEE CAMP  
*The Chronicle*

OKANOGAN — Nearly five years after the Carlton Complex fire roared across western Okanogan County, the public utility district received its final federal payment for fire damage.

The fire, which burned from Winthrop to Pateros and across the mountains into the Chiliwist and Malott, took down electrical and fiber optics lines, burned poles and other structures, and knocked out the Loup Loup transmission line for more than a week.

An Aug. 11, 2014, disaster declaration by then-President Barack Obama paved the way for public agencies to recoup some of their losses to the 256,108-acre blaze.

Presidential approval meant the Federal Emergency Management Agency would reimburse the Okanogan County Public Utility District, Okanogan County, Colville Confederated Tribes, cities and school districts for 75 percent of eligible expenses related to damaged facilities such as utilities, roads, bridges and buildings.

Don Coppock, director of accounting, finance and administration/auditor, said the district received its final FEMA payment in June 2019.

The PUD spent \$11,543,390 on repairs and was

reimbursed \$8,249,600 by the state and federal governments, according to district figures.

That left the PUD funding \$3,293,790 of repair costs.

Initial estimate by the PUD was \$12.25 million in damage, including \$4.54 million to telecommunications and fiber network and \$7.71 million to the electrical system.

According to PUD figures, the fire damaged 44-plus miles of overhead and underground distribution lines affecting 341 miles of distribution and customers, 1,005 poles and 285 service transformers.

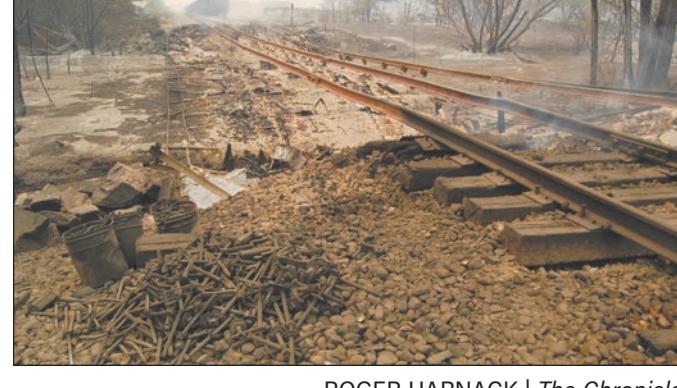
Fire damaged the Loup Loup transmission line, which was the only line taking electricity into the Methow Valley. Both PUD customers and those of the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative were without power for more than a week. Some customers were without power for several weeks.

Last year, the PUD completed its Pateros-to-Twisp transmission line, giving it two lines for getting electricity to the Methow Valley.

The transmission line between Malott and Brewster also was damaged.

Approximately 15 miles of transmission line was damaged, affecting 59 miles of the district's total of 104 miles of transmission. Damage consisted of 79 structures (118 poles), 111 large crossarms and 243 insulators.

The district's telecommunications facilities sustained damage to around 53 miles of fiber optics line and 13 wireless access points.



ROGER HARNACK | *The Chronicle*

Cascade and Columbia River Railroad also suffered infrastructure losses. Lines hang in space after a trestle burned near Pateros.



AL CAMP | *The Chronicle*  
Spot fires, such as this one up Indian Dan Canyon, were a constant concern during the fire fight.

## Dispatch calls reveal fire's breadth, rapid spread

PATEROS — In less than 24 hours from July 17-18, the Carlton Complex fire grew by 150,000 acres, often spotting ahead of itself.

Firefighters tackled the blaze on many fronts, from Pateros and Brewster to Malott, the Chiliwist, Beaver Creek, Twisp-Winthrop and Highway 153 between Twisp and Pateros.

At the time, then-Okanogan County Sheriff Frank Rogers provided a sampling of calls received by the dispatch center during a six-hour period July 17:

6:15 p.m. — Fire at Watson Draw is headed for residences and U.S. Highway 97.

6:16 p.m. — Fire has jumped Indian Dan Canyon, burning toward Harmony Heights above Brewster.

6:26 p.m. — Closing U.S. Highway 97 north of Pateros; it is going to jump the highway.

6:32 p.m. — Fire has jumped river across state Highway 153 near residence 156 on state Highway 153.

6:46 p.m. — Fire is now burning downhill behind water towers in Pateros.

6:59 p.m. — Fire is north of Pateros, jumping U.S. Highway 97 toward Brewster; closing the highway.

6:59 p.m. — Clearing radio frequency for emergency traffic only.

7:05 p.m. — Fire requesting any and all other fire agencies to assist, county wide request.

7:06 p.m. — Caller says she lives off of North Star Road, doesn't see any fire or anything but wants to know if she should be concerned. Dispatch told her have things ready to go and not wait for a deputy if she sees flames.

7:09 p.m. — House on fire on Edna Street in Pateros.

7:13 p.m. — Homeowner at 25845 B U.S. Highway 97, called a second time to report fire is 200 yards from his house.

7:15 p.m. — Caller advised they have lost power near Carlton on state Highway 153.

7:20 p.m. — U.S. Highway 97 and state Highway 20 closed. Evacuating City of Pateros.

7:24 p.m. — House on fire at 25845 B U.S. Highway 97, north of Indian Dan Canyon.

7:25 p.m. — Closing state Highway 153, per fire request.

7:32 p.m. — Caller reports a truck pulling a trailer at milepost 26 on state Highway 153; the top of the trailer is on fire and the truck just pulled over.

7:34 p.m. — Several homes on fire north end of West Ives Street in Pateros, also wind just shifted and is now blowing south toward more structures. Evacuating City of Pateros.

7:36 p.m. — Caller says he sees fire coming into the Chiliwist Valley.

8:40 p.m. — Caller advised parents are hiding in the residence off of Bill Shaw Road, were unable to leave residence, fire surrounding them.

8:40 p.m. — Brewster is wanting to evacuate hospital and Harmony House.

8:44 p.m. — Rivercom contacted Okanogan dispatch to report they have received reports that the fire is on state Highway 153 with structures threatened; no fire trucks in the area.

9 p.m. — First call that the fire is now at top of the hill and moving toward the Chiliwist, burning extremely fast, getting close.

9:09 p.m. — Train trestle north of Pateros is fully engulfed; railroad notified.

9:14 p.m. — Report of a couple trapped at their residence on state Highway 153; flames visible.

9:18 p.m. — Fire reported now in the Chiliwist. State Department of Natural Resources advised by dispatch.

9:20 p.m. — DNR advised they have no units to send to Chiliwist. Dispatch toned any other available units from Okanogan, Omak, Conconully, Coulee Dam to assist with fire in Chiliwist.

9:22 p.m. — Report of a subject trapped in their residence on U.S. Highway 97; flames within 75 yards of the house.

9:40 p.m. — Fire at the top of Harmony Heights Road, with 100 feet of structures.

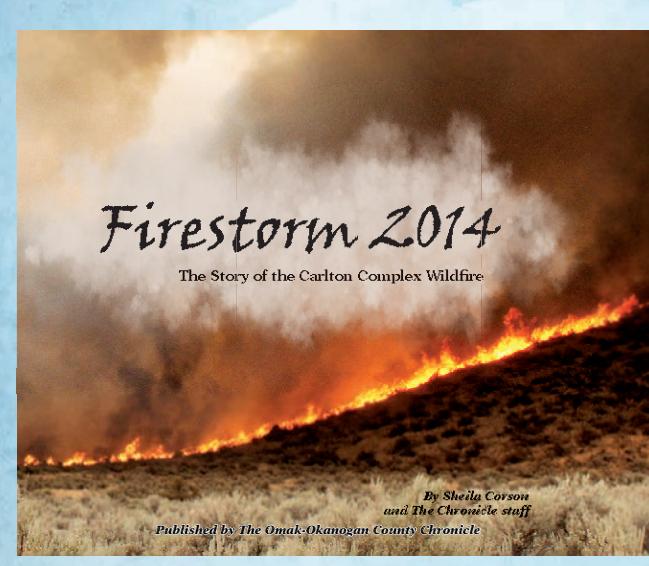
9:43 p.m. — Fire trucks and ambulances responding to Pateros from Grand Coulee Dam, Electric City, tribe, Coulee Dam, Ephrata, Moses Lake and Grant County.

9:47 p.m. — Requesting more fire equipment from Omak and Okanogan.

10:22 p.m. — Report of a fire coming up to North Star Road area, near Black Dog Road.

See Dispatch C4

## Own a piece of history

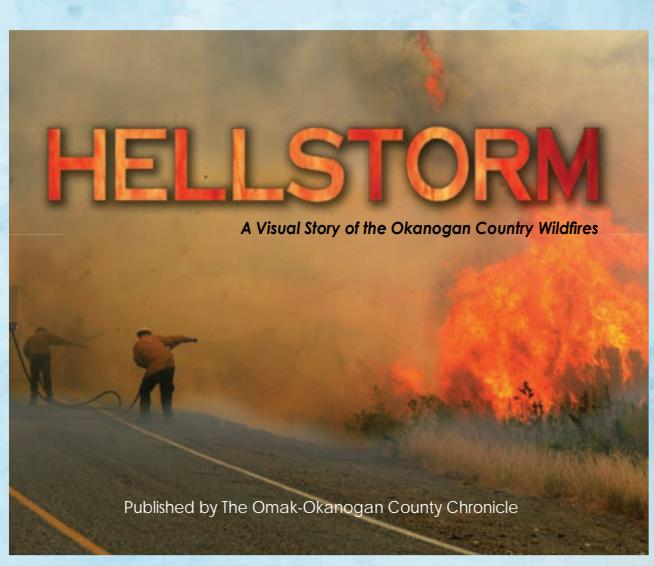


Firestorm 2014  
(The Carlton Complex Fire)  
Reg. \$43.19  
**Sale \$37.78**

Sale prices good through August 31, 2019

THE CHRONICLE

*Essential Reading*  
For Okanogan County



Hellstorm  
(2015 Okanogan County Wildfires)  
Reg. \$24.81  
**Sale \$19.40**



DOUG CAMP | Special to *The Chronicle*  
The fire left a swath of destruction, including homes in Pateros reduced to rubble.

# Landowners appeal lawsuit

## Fire lawsuit goes to appeals court

By DEE CAMP  
*The Chronicle*

SPOKANE — The appeal of a lawsuit by property owners in the Carlton Complex fire area is before the state Court of Appeals for Division 3 and awaiting a date for the docket.

Hundreds of property owners filed lawsuits against the state Department of Natural Resources seeking damages for losses during the fire. The suits were consolidated into one, but later dismissed in Okanogan County Superior Court. An attempt to get the court to reconsider was turned down.

The notice of appeal lists five plaintiffs, David Schulz, John Alexios, John Alexios, Wayne Binkley and Dagmar Devere.

"Plaintiffs request that the Court of Appeals reverse the trial court's decisions ... and remand the case to the Superior Court for further proceedings that are consistent with the decision of the Court of Appeals," said the filing.

A fall court date is anticipated, according to the appeals court.

On Oct. 24, 2018, the lawsuit against the DNR was dismissed by Okanogan County Superior Court Judge Chris Culp, who granted the state's request for summary judgment of dismissal. He also certified the matter for appeal.

The lawsuit, originally filed in November 2015, was a



AL CAMP | The Chronicle

consolidation of five suits brought by around 200 landowners against DNR over the 2014 Carlton Complex fire. The original 2015 suit was filed by three landowners — David Schulz, Dennis Schulz and John Clees — but earlier this year was combined with four other suits filed in 2017 by various landowners throughout the fire area.

In his written decision, Culp wrote that the question is whether an actionable duty was owed by the defendant (DNR) to the plaintiffs.

The landowners argued the lightning-caused complex fire, which had several points of ignition, started on DNR land and the agency had the obligation to stop the flames' spread onto other owners' lands. They argued negligence and violations of state law, and claimed liability because of DNR's "unreasonable actions and/or inactions caused the spread of fire," said court documents.

The three causes of action argued by the landowners included both acts of DNR as a landowner and in its firefighting efforts.

"There is a question about whether defendant's motion addresses DNR's actions in fire suppression or its duties as a landowner; however, this court ruling is that defendant has no statutory or common law actionable duty to any of the plaintiffs, either in fire suppression responsibilities or as a landowner," Culp's decision said.

In the suit against DNR, plaintiffs asked whether and to what extent a 1993 state law changed the state Supreme Court's ruling in a previous case, *Oberg v. Department of Natural Resources*. That case was brought in the wake of the 1985 Barker Mountain Fire east of Tonasket.

The Legislature's subsequent decision to update state law effectively overturned the *Oberg* decision by adding a new section dealing with duties owed to the general public by DNR in its fire prevention and suppression capacity, Culp wrote.

According to the law, the department, when acting in good faith in its statutory capacity as a fire prevention and suppression agency, "is

carrying out duties owed to the public in general and not to any individual person or class of persons separate and apart from the public."

"It makes no sense that the Legislature would go to great lengths to effectively overturn *Oberg* but then add back in some actionable duty to individuals," Culp wrote. "Rather, this court reads the last sentence (of that portion of the law) to impose those duties typical of landowners in general, for example road maintenance, erosion control, weed control, nuisance control, etc. By using 'nothing' in the second sentence (of the law), the Legislature rejects the idea of any duty owed by the DNR to individuals for anything related to fire."

He wrote that he interprets the law as barring plaintiffs' actions as individuals "even given the duties imposed on landowners in the sections cited as the basis of plaintiff's complaint."

At the end of his written opinion, Culp noted that the parties stipulated on Oct. 11 that certification of the decision to the state Court of Appeals is appropriate.

"The court finds this memorandum opinion granting summary judgment involves a controlling question of law as to which there is substantial ground for a difference of opinion and immediate review of the order may materially advance the ultimate termination of the litigation," he wrote.

The original suit was filed Nov. 17, 2015, by rural Twisp residents David and Dennis

Schulz, and John Clees. David Schulz is a former Okanogan County commissioner. They claimed they suffered damage to real and personal property when the Golden Hike Fire escaped from DNR land and onto their property.

The Golden Hike Fire later merged with three other fires to become the Carlton Complex, which blackened 256,108 acres of land from Winthrop to Pateros and across the mountains to Malott and the Chiliwit.

The blaze leveled 237 homes and 53 cabins in four school districts, plus barns, other outbuildings and fences, and destroyed vehicles and farm machinery. Livestock, pets and wildlife were killed, and timber, orchards, other crops, range land and infrastructure were damaged.

Two men died of medical conditions suffered while fighting the fire on their property.

The suit alleged DNR caused millions of dollars in damage by failing to use reasonable care to contain the fire.

In 2017, another 200 or so landowners filed four more lawsuits against DNR over the fire.

"Between approximately July 14, 2014, and Aug. 30, 2014, plaintiffs suffered damages to real and personal property when fires escaped from land owned and/or controlled by defendant State of Washington and trespassed onto land owned by plaintiffs," said one filing.

"At all relevant times, plaintiffs were residents and owners of real property in

Okanogan County," said the suit. "Their property included timber land, crop fields and/or land which had been improved, including fences, buildings and other structures."

All the plaintiffs sought damages for losses.

The fires originally were confined to small areas on land owned or under DNR's responsibility, the suit said.

Residents of the surrounding areas promptly notified the defendant of the existence and location of the fires, according to the filing. "Despite this early notice, the defendant was negligent in responding. When it did eventually respond, the defendant was negligent in containing the fires."

The suit alleges DNR failed to exercise reasonable care by abandoning fire lines in the evening and not returning until morning. It also refused and ignored assistance offered by local residents.

Help was not sought until it was too late to prevent the fires' spread, the landowners alleged.

In addition, the suit charges that DNR failed to rely on all reasonably available data and information to fight the fires, including weather reports.

Attorneys representing the plaintiffs on appeal are Darrell L. Cochran, Jason P. Amala and Ryan J.P. Dyer, all of Seattle, and Alex H. Thomason, Pateros. The state is represented by Patricia C. Fetterly and Alicia O. Young, Tumwater, and Randy W. Gimple and Alexander D. Cheng, San Francisco, Calif.

## Recovery group responds to losses

### Building nears end; fire prevention, readiness take the forefront

By DEE CAMP  
*The Chronicle*

PATEROS — The Carlton Complex Long-Term Recovery Group, which was formed after the fire burned across a 400-square-mile area of Okanogan County, morphed into a county-wide group the following year as fire hit again.

The organization just finished two homes on the Colville Indian Reservation, bringing the total to three dozen homes it's built for survivors of the Carlton fire in 2014 and subsequent wildfires.

Home No. 37 is going up in Chelan and the group planned to decide last week whether to take on one last home, said Executive Director Carlene Anders.

The group, formed in September 2014, had as its initial mission to collaborate with and provide coordination and recovery services to individuals, families, businesses and communities adversely impacted by the 2014 fire and subsequent mudslides. Anders was hired Jan. 1, 2015.

But in 2015, when the Okanogan Complex, Tunk Block and North Star fires hit the central part of Okanogan County, the scope was expanded.

The group also offered its expertise to other communities in Chelan, Ferry, Stevens and Douglas counties as more wildfires blackened the landscape.

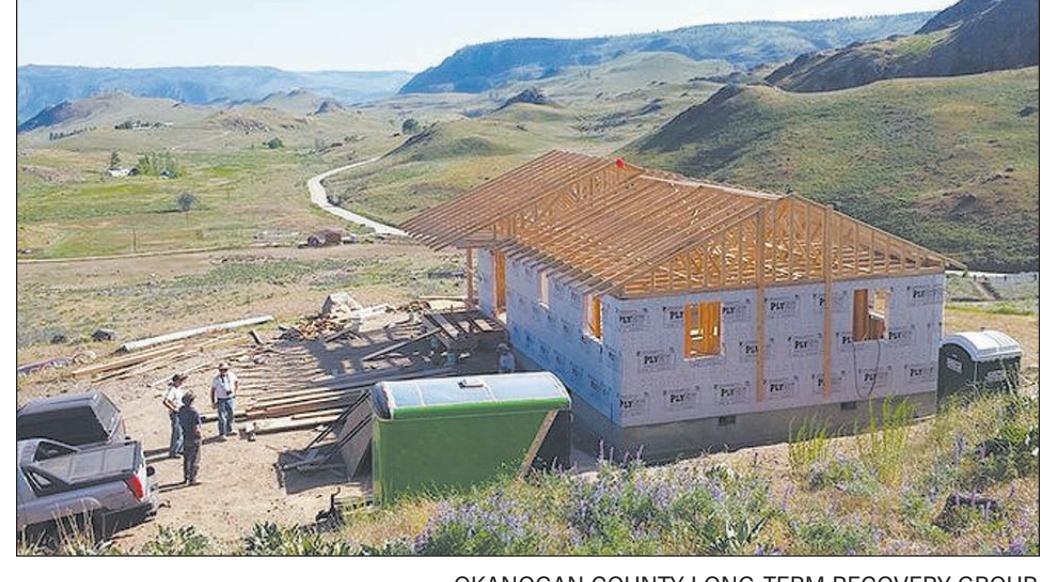
The recovery organization, with a staff of five plus numerous volunteers, donors, partner organizations and former staff members, offered case management services and assistance in dealing with government agencies and insurance.

It's worked on more than 1,200 cases between the two fire seasons.

Anders said more than 2,000 volunteers have helped the group and given more than 193,000 hours of time to its various efforts — so far.

"As we look forward to wrapping up our rebuilds and volunteer projects by the summer of 2019, we can't help but be so grateful for the thousands of generous volunteers and donors that have made this progress possible," said the group.

The group's efforts became more vital when Federal



OKANOGAN COUNTY LONG-TERM RECOVERY GROUP

A new home, built by the Okanogan County Long-Term Recovery Group and its volunteers, takes shape.



DEE CAMP | The Chronicle  
Carlene Anders, executive director of the Okanogan County Long-Term Recovery Group and mayor of Pateros, listens to music performed during a benefit concert in Pateros for fire recovery.

Emergency Management Agency aid was denied to individuals and businesses.

Of the more than 400 homes destroyed in the two years' fires, more than two-thirds were considered a primary home. About 40 percent were completely covered by insurance.

Most people who received recovery group homes were uninsured and many had special considerations, such as being veterans or elderly.

They had to fall within a certain income bracket, agree to certain floor plans and sign a five-year contract with the recovery group, Anders said.

The contract was aimed at making sure people continued to live in the homes as their primary residence and attempted to obtain insurance. The recovery group helped some people get insurance,

Anders said.

Now, as home building comes to an end, the long-term group is turning its focus toward prevention and preparation for future disasters.

A half-dozen "fire strong" workshops were held this spring, along with introduction of the "Sign to Save" program. People can get free signs with their house number on them to direct emergency responders.

Anders, also a volunteer firefighter for Fire District No. 15, said a lot of the rural landscape changed after the fire, with certain landmark trees or structures no longer there.

An American Red Cross grant is paying for the signs.

"It's for first responders to find homes quickly," she said. "There have been so many changes. As a first responder, you sometimes don't get to an area for a couple years. We want to make sure people across the country get these."

The recovery group also became certified to install free smoke detectors, again through a Red Cross program. When a detector is installed, the resident also will receive Firewise fire prevention information.

In addition to helping communities in Washington cope with the aftermath of fires, the long-term recovery group contracts with the national Disaster Leadership Team to provide mentoring services to long-term recovery groups across the nation who are dealing with fires, hurricanes, floods and other disasters.

The Disaster Leadership

Team is made up of seasoned disaster recovery leaders offering one-on-one mentorship and support to help disaster communities establish and operate long-term recovery organizations," said the team's website, www.thedlr.org.

"Our goal is to speed recovery by supporting community leaders through sharing our knowledge and experience of disaster recovery," according to the team.

Anders said the team currently is mentoring 18 long-term recovery groups across the nation, and has responded to hurricanes Michael in Florida and Harvey along the Gulf Coast and eastern United States, and flooding in Nebraska.

It may provide assistance to those rebuilding after the 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise and surrounding areas in California. She recently spent five days in the Paradise and Chico areas.

Assistance can range from physical things to sample contracts or emotional and mental support.

Anders said the recovery group plans a mobile museum piece that can be taken to various locations and serve as a call to action for people to use Firewise prevention techniques, Sign to Save home identification and other measures.

It will be on display during the July 19-20 Apple Pie Jamboree in Pateros.

"Maybe it will trigger people to make a difference," she said, noting help can come not just from government groups but from individuals and communities.

## Dispatch from C3

10:41 p.m. — Another report of fire on 756 North Star Road.

10:47 p.m. — Deputies and park rangers at Alta Lake State Park ... everything is fine no sign of fire.

10:47 p.m. — Report of a fire on North Star Road and Davis Canyon Road; deputies en route.

10:58 p.m. — Caller called back says there are now two fires on Eagle Road. Deputies in the area trying to get them. No fire equipment in the area, asking if any available.

11:04 p.m. — Deputies advise fire is at Old Highway 97 and Davis Canyon. They are going to start trying to evacuate everyone on Old Highway 97; asking for any additional units to assist.

11:05 p.m. — We have tribal units en route to assist in the Chiliwit, Old Highway 97 and Malott area.

11:05 p.m. — Aero Methow trying to get patient to hospital. At this time unclear if any roads are open; state Highway 153 is closed. Dispatch advises that state Highway 20 is closed; trees and rocks across the road.

11:06 p.m. — Deputies report flames on both sides of state Highway 153. Road is impassable at this time.

11:07 p.m. — Fire has jumped North Star Road and is headed for Valley Road.

11:09 p.m. — Fire crews are now advising that the fire is all the way to the Silver Spur Road on Old Highway 97. Fire crews are asking that Old Highway 97 be closed from Brewster to Malott.

11:10 p.m. — Deputies on Valley Road trying to issue evacuation notices. Fire is at milepost 3 on Valley Road.

11:11 p.m. — Residents at Benson Creek advising that their house is minutes from being set on fire.

11:13 p.m. — Report of another fire in Pateros on Riverside Avenue, 20 feet from the residence.

11:18 p.m. — Deputies advise that they cannot get to North Star Road from Valley Road; blocked by fire at milepost 7.

11:18 p.m. — Caller reports to dispatch that he is surrounded by fire at 211 Gold Creek, doesn't know if he is going to be able to make it out.

11:19 p.m. — Deputies advise they cannot get to Alta Lake from state Highway 153, Twisp side; they are blocked by fire and debris in the roadway at milepost 6.

11:19 p.m. — Alta Lake State Park advises they evacuated everyone earlier.

Deputies trying to get to Alta Lake from Pateros side to make sure everyone is out.

11:24 p.m. — Caller advised she lives on Black Canyon Road and she sees fire all around her, she says she is surrounded by fire and there are no fire trucks in the area.

11:24 p.m. — Deputies arrive at Alta Lake again. Report structures are on fire now.

11:33 p.m. — The server at dispatch is overheating from all the calls. Techs called in to deal with it.

11:33 p.m. — Dispatch receives call that three structures are now threatened with fire on Burma Road.

11:40 p.m. — Deputies able to get to Black Canyon. Doing evacuations. Family just called; they just lost their home at 681 Old Highway 97. Instructed to head north from their location, toward Malott.

11:51 p.m. — Deputies advise state highways 153 and 20 are both blocked and impassable. Deputies advising all other units not to respond toward Twisp side, both sides are now cut off from each other.

11:53 p.m. — Fire units are now requesting evacuation notices on Monroe Road. Deputies and civilians are beginning the process.

11:53 p.m. — Deputies doing evacuations on Squaw Creek Road.

11:56 p.m. — Deputies advise they could only make it part way up Squaw Creek Road. It is now blocked by fire on both sides of the road.

# Carlton Complex: Remembering, moving forward unified

**By HILARY FRANZ**  
Commissioner of Public Lands



Carlton Complex destroyed more than 350 homes and did millions of dollars in damage to properties in rural Okanogan

**T**he anniversary of the Carlton Complex Fire, which five years ago this week inflicted so much pain and destruction on northeast Washington, is a time of reflection and recommitment.

The fire was caused by a burst of lightning strikes in the region from July 13-16, a time when the weather was hot and dry, and the wind was high. The lightning sparked four fires that ultimately combined to form what we know as the Carlton Complex fire.

The Carlton Complex burned 256,108 acres, the largest wildfire in state history — even topping the 1902 Yacolt Burn in Clark County.

County and around the towns of Pateros and Brewster. Suppressing the fire cost the state upwards of \$60 million.

Those who lived in and around Omak at the time will never forget the fear, flames, and the charred homes and landscapes. The ultimate cost to our economy and people's sense of safety and security is incalculable.

During this time of danger, we saw the best of Okanogan

County when the community banded together to support their neighbors and firefighters on the front lines containing the blaze. There were also important lessons learned.

When I was elected commissioner of public lands in 2016, I visited Okanogan County to learn first-hand from the people I represent. The agency I lead — the Department of Natural Resources — is our state's wildfire fighting force. Not surprisingly, the Carlton Complex fire was a frequent topic of conversation.

Today, we continue to improve our firefighting strategy.

A critical part of this effort is the growth and popularity of DNR's interagency wildland firefighter training — three across the state — which serves

to consistently improve upon our successful partnerships.

The multi-agency wildfire training academies allow all wildland firefighters to train together before peak wildfire season so that when a wildfire hits, they are prepared to work as a team — across agency and jurisdictional lines.

This year alone, the three academies trained 1,000 firefighters from 20 different agencies across the state, including local fire districts.

Each year, we recommit to working together — state, federal, tribal and local wildfire suppression organizations — to be effective and together leverage our resources to protect and preserve our landscapes and residents.

We are also building a 21st century wildfire fighting force. Working with local leaders like

Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda, we successfully made the case that more investments are needed. This year, the Legislature added nearly \$50 million in new funding for wildfire suppression and preparedness, and forest health work.

These new resources will allow us to hire more firefighters, add two more helicopters, provide specialized training, and restore to health tens of thousands of acres of forestland in central and eastern Washington, making them more fire resistant.

This funding will also allow DNR to expand our multi-agency wildfire training capacity.

Finally, we are investing in local fire districts, which are critical to our initial attack

efforts, by establishing a program to surplus DNR wildfire equipment. In the past three years, we've granted local fire districts 30 surplus fire engines.

It has been a long road back for your communities, our firefighters and the economy in northwest Washington.

Today, five years later, I am writing to thank you for your strength, your resilience, and your candid conversations. Your feedback and support have helped DNR better protect your communities, and the natural resources we all rely on, which is always our foremost duty.

*Commissioner of Public Lands  
Hilary Franz leads the state  
Department of Natural Resources,  
Washington state's wildfire fighting  
force.*

## Lessons are learned from fire

**Legislation helps with response, fire prevention**

**By BROCK HIRES**  
*The Chronicle*

OLYMPIA — Many lessons have been learned from the Carlton Complex and Okanogan Complex wildfires in 2014 and 2015.

Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda, has also taken note of ways to improve firefighting tactics and forest management practices.

"We had problems," Kretz said, adding Carlton Complex was a really bad time with short resources. "Very little available."

In July of 2014, a couple of stumps were smoldering in the Methow Valley. Kretz said Gebbers Farms — which own a lookout station — reported them six times to incident command. He said Gebbers offered to extinguish them, but was told, "Nope. It's on our ground. We'll do it."

He said smokejumpers were then assigned from the Twisp area to a 4,000-acre grass fire in Idaho.

Meanwhile Kretz' then-legislative assistant Jessica McCarthy's husband — who is a smokejumper — also radioed the fire to incident command — to no avail. The McCarthys would later lose their home in the 256,108-acre blaze.

Kretz has introduced several pieces of legislation following the blazes to help to address critical response effort and proactive forest management practices.

"One of the problems was putting fire lines in," he said. Property owners with boundaries that are adjacent to state managed property would "call the state and ask



**DOUG CAMP | Special to The Chronicle**  
**Rep. Joel Kretz (left) shakes hands with Gov. Jay Inslee after a fire briefing July 20, 2014, in Okanogan.**

for permission (to construct a fire line) and they'd say, 'we'll get back to you.' And five hours later, they'd get back to you with a 'yes' or 'no.'

"Five hours later, the fire's down the canyon," he said.

Kretz said one of his bills that has been signed into law addresses those issues, affording landowners the opportunity to take preventive action without the liability of being sued.

Training is another area Kretz has diligently worked to address.

"We've provided direction and resources for increased training for both our DNR folks and cross training with our local department," he said. "Does the coupler on your hose fit my truck? They used to do it that way, but it's gotten more siloed in recent years."

Kretz said another issue he witnessed was people in Okanogan and Ferry counties with the necessary equipment and skill set to fight fires being denied because they were not up to date on current trainings.

He said a local resident called him during a fire and said he had a D7 Cat on a lowboy trailer and was ready

to go. But he was denied because his red card had lapsed a year prior.

"We turned around too many people," Kretz said.

A new bill allows people with background in firefighting to take a 15-minute refresher course so they can be put to work quickly.

"I've had so many frustrations with things that happen," he said. "There were way too many things falling through the cracks."

During the 2015 blaze, Kretz said resources were sought, and after a Facebook post on his personal page, a list of equipment and operators was provided to fire officials.

"We did deliver a list to DNR with about 40-some pieces of equipment and operators around Okanogan County," he said.

During that blaze, it was recognized that a properly managed corridor of forest land can prove successful in creating a forest break.

"What I'm trying to do is direct our land management agencies, let's look at a landscape management to go out and manage the whole

still have a ways to go to get to a state that will be similar to pre-fire conditions, which will likely take years. Grasses and shrubs have returned to most burned areas and trees are starting to return in some places as well."

While the fire still raged, district personnel met to plan their response and ways to help people affected by the fire.

The district ultimately worked directly with 230-240 landowners who were visited on their properties. Nelson said 99 percent received fire damage assessments with custom recommendations on what to do after the fire.

Concerns included damaged irrigation systems, livestock water systems and pumping equipment; forest tree reseeding, road drainage systems and riparian restoration; erosion; damaged livestock and deer fences, and fire damage itself to buildings and farming equipment.

Nelson said he doesn't have a specific number of miles of fence destroyed, although his office was told more than 900 miles of fencing was lost or damaged.

forest right now," he said.

Kretz recommends creating corridors that slow fires instead of 100-acre prescribed burns.

"It's just being more strategic with the resources we have," he said. "I'm really interested in the preventive-end, and then the first strike capabilities. Everybody knows if you hit it when it's small... (there's a) really good chance of avoiding mega fires."

Looking to this fire season, Kretz said he's impressed with the tactics he's seen so far.

"I believe that they used air assets aggressively," he said. "I think in the past there were elements in the firefighting community that really didn't want that out," he said, noting out-of-area fire crews "really didn't care if a million acres burned if they could get six hours of overtime."

Kretz said he's glad to see the progress that's being made and credits state

Commissioner of Public Land Hilary Franz for her efforts.

"I think we've done a better job," he said. "Hilary Franz, she really gets this. She has been really helpful in breaking down some of those barriers. I think we're much better prepared."

"We've just had a good relationship; she's interested in getting our forests back into shape, quick first response."

He said in 2015 he took the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee for a tour of the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area, where extensive management has been performed.

"See where fire came through, then it hit that refuge, in many places it went out just because the fuel wasn't there," Kretz said. "He said, 'I get it. I finally get it.'

"We were able to get quite a bit of money for thinning and prescribed burn permits."

**AL CAMP | The Chronicle**  
**A volunteer carries donated items through the Pateros High School gym July 20, 2014.**

## Pateros School fire damage prompts statewide disaster law

**By DEE CAMP**  
*The Chronicle*

OLYMPIA — Damage to the Pateros School during the Carlton Complex fire prompted a call for legislation to help school districts know where to turn for help in times of disaster.

A bill calling for such policies was approved by the Legislature in 2016, signed by Gov. Jay Inslee and became law June 9, 2016.

Sen. Brad Hawkins — then a representative from the 12th District, was the prime sponsor. A bipartisan group of legislators signed on as co-sponsors. They included 7th District Rep. Joel Kretz, R-Wauconda, 12th District Rep. Cary Condotta, R-Wenatchee, and current Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal, then a Democratic legislator from the 22nd District.

Much of the Carlton Complex fire area is within Hawkins' district.

The bill called for the Washington State School Directors Association to develop by Aug. 31, 2017, a model policy addressing restoration of the safe learning environment disrupted by natural disaster impacts to school district infrastructures.

According to the law, the model policy had to take into consideration guidance on infrastructure recovery developed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Washington emergency management division.

Schools would be given an infrastructure recovery checklist it could use to restore its essential physical and organizational structures, services and facilities; a list of offices or state agencies districts could contact for help; examples of state and federal emergency funding sources districts might tap if they are impacted by a natural disaster; a model plan for continuity of operations.

Participations included the conservation district, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Mule Deer Foundation, Yakama Nation Fisheries, Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, Bonneville Power Administration, Trout Unlimited, Okanogan County

million in damage and had less than a month to get ready for the school year," Davies told legislators when she testified for the bill in January 2015. "Everywhere I asked, 'Is there a checklist?' Everyone gave us support, but we didn't have a resource list from anywhere. This would provide a consolidated, coordinated effort to come up with a model policy."

Davies, who has since retired, said she later received calls from superintendents across the state who asked what to do and who she called for support. Her goal with the bill was to save superintendents and school board members time and anxiety after a disaster.

When the fire burned into Pateros on July 17, 2014, the school was threatened by flames, saved four times and then became a community resource center. The district's only school also was heavily damaged by smoke, heat and falling embers.

Once recovery services were moved elsewhere, and with just a few weeks until the school year was scheduled to begin, school administrators had to scramble to replace the roof, carpeting, ceiling tiles and more, while obtaining funding, working with the district's insurance carrier and obtaining a waiver from the state to start school five days late.

In late August 2014, Davies told The Chronicle that burning debris that fell all over town caused thousands of pin-prick holes in the barrier fabric on the school's roof. The fire also melted low-voltage electrical systems and led others to be "fried" when transformers blew up, she said.

Among the systems damaged were those that protected the computer servers, ran sprinklers and the security system, and performed other functions.

Outside, underground sprinkler pipes and football field benches melted because of the intense heat.

The building required a thorough cleaning to rid it of smoky smell and to clean up 15 days worth of traffic in and

## Conservation district addresses damage

**By Dee Camp**  
*The Chronicle*

OKANOGAN — Some 230-240 landowners received direct assistance from the Okanogan Conservation District in addressing damage done by the 2014 Carlton Complex fire.

Countless others were counseled through phone calls and other methods of information sharing, said Craig Nelson, district manager.

"What is beautiful is the comments that landowners make about how appreciative they are to have gained knowledge about what to expect, that there are resources available, even if they aren't perfectly what they want," he said. "The beauty is in the resilience of our natural resources and communities when faced with such an adverse condition."

In the case of one family, "they were able to finally sleep after having the emergency watershed program dike constructed around their home," Nelson said.

Carlton Complex dealt a double whammy to landowners, first with fire

damage itself and then, in some areas hardest hit by fire, with flooding and mudslides.

Nelson said scientists have known for a long time that the ecosystem is dependent upon fire to renew and regenerate many tree, shrub and grass species.

But, until Carlton Complex, most residents had not had to deal with such a blaze "so we had to teach and educate many folks with a quick lesson in natural resources and flora biology," he said. "We also learned from each other what it means to help each other in a time of need."

The conservation district now is working collaboratively with organizations outside Okanogan County "to continue to learn and to help educate, based on our experiences, so other communities will be better prepared and so we can bring others' knowledge to our communities to be prepared for the next time fire reaches us," Nelson said.

"Most of the Carlton Complex burn scar is healing as expected," he said. "The areas such as upper Frazer Creek that burned the hottest

still have a ways to go to get to a state that will be similar to pre-fire conditions, which will likely take years. Grasses and shrubs have returned to most burned areas and trees are starting to return in some places as well."

While the fire still raged, district personnel met to plan their response and ways to help people affected by the fire.

The district ultimately worked directly with 230-240 landowners who were visited on their properties. Nelson said 99 percent received fire damage assessments with custom recommendations on what to do after the fire.

Concerns included damaged irrigation systems, livestock water systems and pumping equipment; forest tree reseeding, road drainage systems and riparian restoration; erosion; damaged livestock and deer fences, and fire damage itself to buildings and farming equipment.

Nelson said he doesn't have a specific number of miles of fence destroyed, although his office was told more than 900 miles of fencing was lost or damaged.

"We could not verify that without each individual landowner giving us permission to inspect," he said.

"Direct reported losses to our partners barely exceeded 300 miles of lost or damaged fence."

According to a July 2015 report by Terri Williams, then the district's conservation planner, the district drew on its then-75-year track record of working with landowners, including agricultural producers, to protect and conserve natural resources.

During the fire, district staff began organizing meetings with local resource agencies and organizations to determine what services each agency could offer and who landowners should contact, said the report.

Participations included the conservation district, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Mule Deer Foundation, Yakama Nation Fisheries, Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, Bonneville Power Administration, Trout Unlimited, Okanogan County

**See District C6**

"We had more than \$2

**See Schools C6**



**A trio of houses survives amid a sea of black off Highway 153 near Carlton.**

## Property values bounce back after fire

OKANOGAN — Property values have bounced back after the Carlton Complex fire.

Okanogan County Assessor Larry Gilman said a large number of people rebuilt their homes and other structures after the fire, but his office has not tracked them so he doesn't have any statistics on how many rebuilt.

Most of those who rebuilt constructed larger homes than what they lost.

Former Assessor Scott Furman, who has since retired, said at the time that 237 homes and 53 cabins were lost, along with 94 shops or detached

garages and 152 other outbuildings.

Assessed values of structures lost were \$2.82 million in Brewster School District; \$5.4 million in Okanogan School District; \$4.97 million in Methow Valley School District and \$14.67 million in Pateros School District.

The fire destroyed buildings on 353 taxable parcels of land, said Furman.

The state Office of the Insurance Commissioner said as many as 45 percent of homeowners and renters didn't have fire insurance.



**ROGER HARNACK | The Chronicle**  
**Firefighters size up the Rising Eagle Fire on Aug. 1, 2014.**

## Schools from C5

out as the school served as a community relief center.

"More than 2,000 people came through," tracking in dirt and ash, Davies said at the time. "We served three meals per day for 15 days out of our kitchen."

The two-year-old gym bleachers were replaced because of damage they suffered while the gym was being used to store relief supplies.

In addition to the cleaning and repair work, the district lost stored food because the electricity was off for eight days.

Along with insurance coverage, the district received more than \$1.5 million from the state urgent repair pool. The fund was set up in 2013 to help districts in such situations.

Federal Emergency Management Agency money also helped repair the damage.

Hawkins said he visited the school several times and saw

the damage. He heard Davies express her appreciation of all the support she received from various groups and state agencies, but also heard her confusion "about who to call and how to handle various situations to get the school up and running in a very short amount of time," he said.

At the heart of the situation was the fact that school officials "know how to leave in an emergency, but there is no (policy) on how to return," Davies said told legislators in testimony the following January as Hawkins made another attempt to get the bill passed.

In addition to damaging the school, the Carlton fire also leveled many students and staff members' homes. According to the Okanogan County Assessor's Office, 131 homes in the Pateros School District were destroyed in the fire.

Davies said Hawkins and then-Sen. Linda Evans Parlette, R-Wenatchee, were extremely helpful in assisting the district in the fire's wake.



**DOUG CAMP | Special to The Chronicle**  
**A family sifts through the remains of a home in Pateros on July 19, 2014.**



**DEE CAMP | The Chronicle**  
**By the end of September 2014, new growth was showing amid charred trees above Davis Canyon.**



**BROCK HIRES | The Chronicle**  
**A smoke cloud from the Carlton Complex fire could be seen from Tonasket the night of July 17, 2014.**



**AL CAMP | The Chronicle**  
**A chimney, car and rubble are what's left at an Alta Lake home.**



**AL CAMP | The Chronicle**  
**Post-fire flooding, caused by rain from a thunderstorm, takes out Chiliwist Road.**



**AL CAMP | The Chronicle**  
**An exhausted firefighter grabs a nap at the fire camp in East Side Park, Omak, during the Carlton Complex fight. Another fire camp was at Liberty Bell High School.**

## District from C5

Planning Department, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, state Department of Ecology, Colville tribal fisheries, National Weather Service, state Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Okanogan County Department of Public Works, Washington State Conservation Commission, Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board, Washington Governor's Office, Methow Natives, Methow Conservancy, Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board and Washington State University Extension.

Most did not have resources they could apply to the situation rapidly, said the report. The conservation district obtained emergency funding from the Washington State Conservation Commission to make resources available immediately, and also became a centralized place for landowners to contact and receive a site visit for quick assessment of conditions.

Methow Conservancy and DNR had programs that could respond during the initial stages of assistance, Williams' report noted.

In the aftermath of large fires on federal lands, the U.S. Forest Service conducts a burned area emergency response assessment — known as BAER — to evaluate areas of varying

burn intensity and develop recommendations for emergency resource protection actions.

But the Carlton fire area was comprised of about 39 percent private parcels and 27 percent state lands. Nelson contacted the Forest Service to propose that a group of federal, state, local and private organization experts be trained by the Forest Service BAER team to conduct the assessments.

Participants included the conservation district, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington State Conservation Commission, National Weather Service, BLM, state Department of Fish and Wildlife, Yakama Nation Fisheries, Bureau of Reclamation, DNR, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

"In nine straight 12-hour days, the team collected an analyzed information on soils, hydrology, vegetative cover, burn intensity, effects of the fire on key infrastructure and cultural resources, and other factors," said the report. "The team produced a final report detailing recommendations to address the critical needs for action to protect human lives and critical infrastructure, and included a detailed GIS map of soil burn severity."

After that, the district let landowners know how to contact the district about fire

losses, and also conducted a series of workshops to get information about post-fire risks and recovery to landowners.

The district used an intake process modeled after one created by the Kittitas Conservation District after the 2012 Taylor Bridge Fire. Two other districts lent employees to help collect information.

Eventually, the conservation district hired four temporary staff members to accommodate the increased workload.

"One unexpected aspect of the site visit work was the informal support we provided to the landowners, who were in very stressful situations and often needed a listening ear," said the report. "Many staff feel that the most valuable work was to serve as a sounding board for landowner who needed to talk to someone about what had happened."

A week after the fire's most intense day — July 17, 2014 — conservation district and Natural Resources Conservation Service staff determined which homes were at high risk of flooding and mud or debris flows. They decided to pursue funding for an emergency watershed protection program.

Thirteen structures were identified as "indefensible," meaning no constructed improvements could be installed to reduce risk to the structure because of site

conditions and physical restrictions, said the report. Landowners were contacted and the staff offered basic emergency preparation advice.

Another 39 were identified initially as being at high risk for flooding or mudflow damage. Improvements were suggested. Some were removed from the list and others added, leaving the list at 43.

The report said most landowners initially were eager to have protective practices installed, but some later withdrew.

By the next spring, a final list of 13 projects with a total of 17 landowners was approved for funding.

The district also was involved in the National Weather Service's installation of rain gauges to warn residents of downpours that could cause flooding. Radar coverage from the service's Airway Heights office is spotty and often misses very localized storms in the area, the report noted.

"The gap in coverage became even more concerning on Aug. 21, 2014, when a localized storm cell that was part of a larger thunderstorm complex parked itself over the severely burned Finley Canyon area, dumping nearly an inch of rain within one hour," Williams' report said.

Three drainages were affected — Benson Creek, Frazer/Beaver creeks on the Methow side of the Okanogan

Range and Chiliwist Creek on the Okanogan Valley side.

"It was later determined that the five-year rain event had caused a 1,000-year flood in those drainages, due to the fire-caused damage to vegetation," the report said.

Nelson said the rain gauges, which communicated by satellite if certain rainfall threshold were met, are being removed this year and placed in other areas of the state affected by more recent fires.

"Without good radar coverage, weather forecasters and meteorologists at the National Weather Service only have models to warn of the possibility of thunderstorms and intense rainfall over burn areas," he said. "They have difficulty telling exactly where thunder cells are located and producing high intensity rain, which is the source of flash floods and debris flows."

In the reseeding aspect of recovery, three areas were chosen for seeding treatments: Around 375 acres in the Bill Shaw Road area of French Creek east of Methow, where fire lines on steep slopes were created during the fire fight; 700 acres in the northern section of French Creek, where steep slopes were identified as high risk and that experienced flows during the Aug. 21 storm, and around 900 acres east of Twisp in the Frazer Creek area, where homes and Highway 20 were severely impacted by Aug. 21.

flooding.

Thanks to a 2015 legislative appropriation, the district also provided cost sharing to landowners who lost agricultural infrastructure such as fencing and stock watering structures.

The district also received funding for Washington Conservation Corps crews to help with fencing.

Other concerns included damage to the Wenner Lakes impound areas, which burst during the Aug. 21 storm and sent floodwaters into homes, agricultural lands, roads and bridges; road drainage, particularly in the Chiliwist, and noxious weed control.

The district also helped the state Department of Agriculture with removal of hundreds of head of livestock killed in the fire, emergency hay feed coordination, alternative grazing areas, Methow River cleanup of fire debris, reseeding questions, seed distribution and a variety of referrals, the report noted.

Nelson said the conservation district doesn't have 2014 numbers separated from 2015 assistance figures. Some people and resources were affected by fires during both years.

"In total, we provided over \$2 million as cost-share to landowners affected by the Carlton fires and the Okanogan and North Star Complex fires," he said.