

Highland Valley Ranch

May 2, 2015

Barry Point Fire Presentation to the Oregon State Senate
By the Bruce and Morris families, Jarod Bruce and Matt Morris



Before

- A diverse forest of ponderosa pine, juniper, aspen, fir, cedar, mountain mahogany, and wild plum trees.
- Red-band trout & other native fish in the creeks.
- Five separate riparian areas from seasonal and year-round creeks that were habitat for ducks, geese, deer, antelope and many more aquatic species.
- The habitat supported a pair of bald eagles, hawks, falcons, owls and other raptors.



After

- We lost 100 acres of old-growth forest. Almost all of the cedar, fir and mahogany are gone. There were cedars measuring four feet across.
- The *Barry Point Fire Fact Finding Review Report* states (page 12) that on August 11 plans were initiated to prep the Ruby Pipeline for burnout to stop the southern spread, showing that, except for structure crews, they were already planning to let the fire burn all the way to the pipeline.
- We heard at the January stakeholders' meeting, from a fire official, that backburning caused an estimated 60% or more of the total damage within the entire fire perimeter (not just on our ranch). With that kind of human intervention, this does not seem to be a true policy of allowing a forest fire to burn naturally.
- Burnout is a fire suppression technique, and by law, any land damaged by fire suppression techniques should be repaired by that agency or contractor.
- On our private land, the worst damage was caused by backburning **without consent** and during the night **after the natural fire progression had already passed by**.



Land stewardship & Ranch plan



Jarod and Christie Bruce bought the ranch in 2008. In 2010, Christie's parents, Mike and Kathy Morris, moved to the ranch into a solar-powered house. Matt Morris, their

son, has been overseeing the ranch development.

We had been searching for a mountain ranch for quite a few years before we found this 160-acre piece in 2008. We wanted our children to have a love for nature and a strong work ethic.

The ranch is the place where we find both goals realized.

In 2010, we brought our first five Highland heifers to the ranch. The

following year, we introduced Leo, our bull and a beef steer. In 2012, the five cows had their first calves, and we processed our first steer for beef.

Our cattle are 100% grass-fed. We hope to expand our herd-size and enter a new career as beef ranchers, selling our lean and flavorful beef to farmer's markets and possibly even restaurants.



From the start, we've been in love with this beautiful land -- the green trees, the grassy valleys, wildflowers, creeks, and wildlife. To fit our cattle ranch into the existing land, we fenced off riparian

areas. We invited several waterway and wildlife experts to the ranch to get their advice on how to best protect the land.

We seek to be good stewards of this good land, and even with the fire's effects, will keep on.

Before the Fire



Consultations & Visits

- *Watershed Council:* Anna Kerr
- *Watershed Council:* Marci Shreder
- *ODF Lake District Stewardship Forester:* Kellie Carlsen
- *Oregon Fish & Wildlife:* David Banks
- *Dist. 12 Watermaster:* Brian Mayer
- *Oregon Dept. Fish & Wildlife Native Fish Investigations Project, 2008-2011*
- *OSU/UO Conservation Study, 2012*

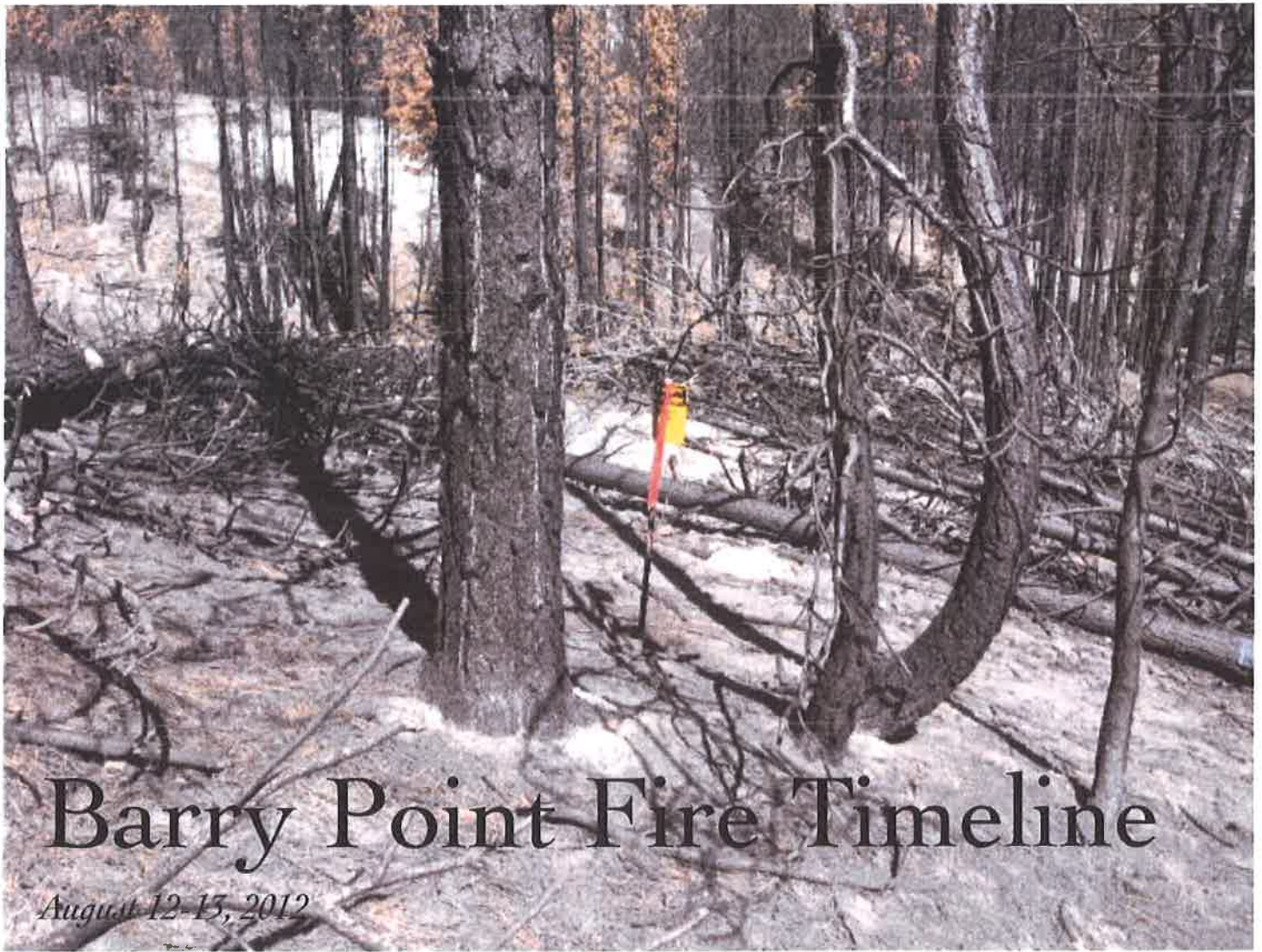
Conservation efforts

- Existing roads and driveways were used.
- Solar-powered ranch.
- Grass-fed cattle on rotated fields.
- No pesticides sprayed on our grasses.
- Creeks fenced to keep cattle out of riparian areas to protect fish and wildlife in area.
- Had already thinned trees around buildings, and had made preliminary plans to thin the forest for fire protection.

Fencing & Creeks

- Fenced off creeks so that our cattle would not disturb the riparian areas, especially to benefit the native redband trout.
- Had just begun transplanting willows along the creeks, as advised by experts.





Barry Point Fire Timeline

August 12-13, 2012



Sunday, August 12

5:53 PM

The majority of the damage that had been done to the property was isolated to the Northwest corner and the Southwest corner with a few spot fires in the central area of the west side but there were no fires down by the creeks. Kellie Carlsen of ODF was on the property between 5:00 - 6:00 PM.



Sunday, August 12

7:20 PM

This photo, a clip taken from Matt's iPhone movies, shows the white rocks on the west side of our meadow. You can see that the fire has burned by up high above the white rocks and has burned some of our ranch at the south end of the property. Matt filmed the whole day and the fire never got into the trees along the bank of our creek on the west side of the meadow. **When Matt left at 10:00 PM, there were no fires along that westside creek or white rocks area.**



Monday, August 13

1:33 AM

The picture (posted on the ZigZag Hotshot's online Flickr photo album) shows the fire at 1:33 AM. This shows the same white rock area west of the meadow. It shows an active fire, but the inversion of cooler night temperatures should have kept the fire down, unless set by a backburn. In these nighttime pictures, you can see no other fires burning except the ones lit by the Hotshots.

Before the Hotshot crew backburned that night, we estimated we had lost 20 acres. After that backburning, we lost around 100 acres.

Human intervention cost us more than the natural fire progression. This fire suppression technique burned 80 more acres.



Monday, August 13

3:27 AM

This picture from the Zig Zag's own Flickr page shows them lighting a backburn on our property next to our corral.

We are able to verify times by the time stamp on the photo itself taken by a member of the Zig Zag Hotshots, and can be seen at:

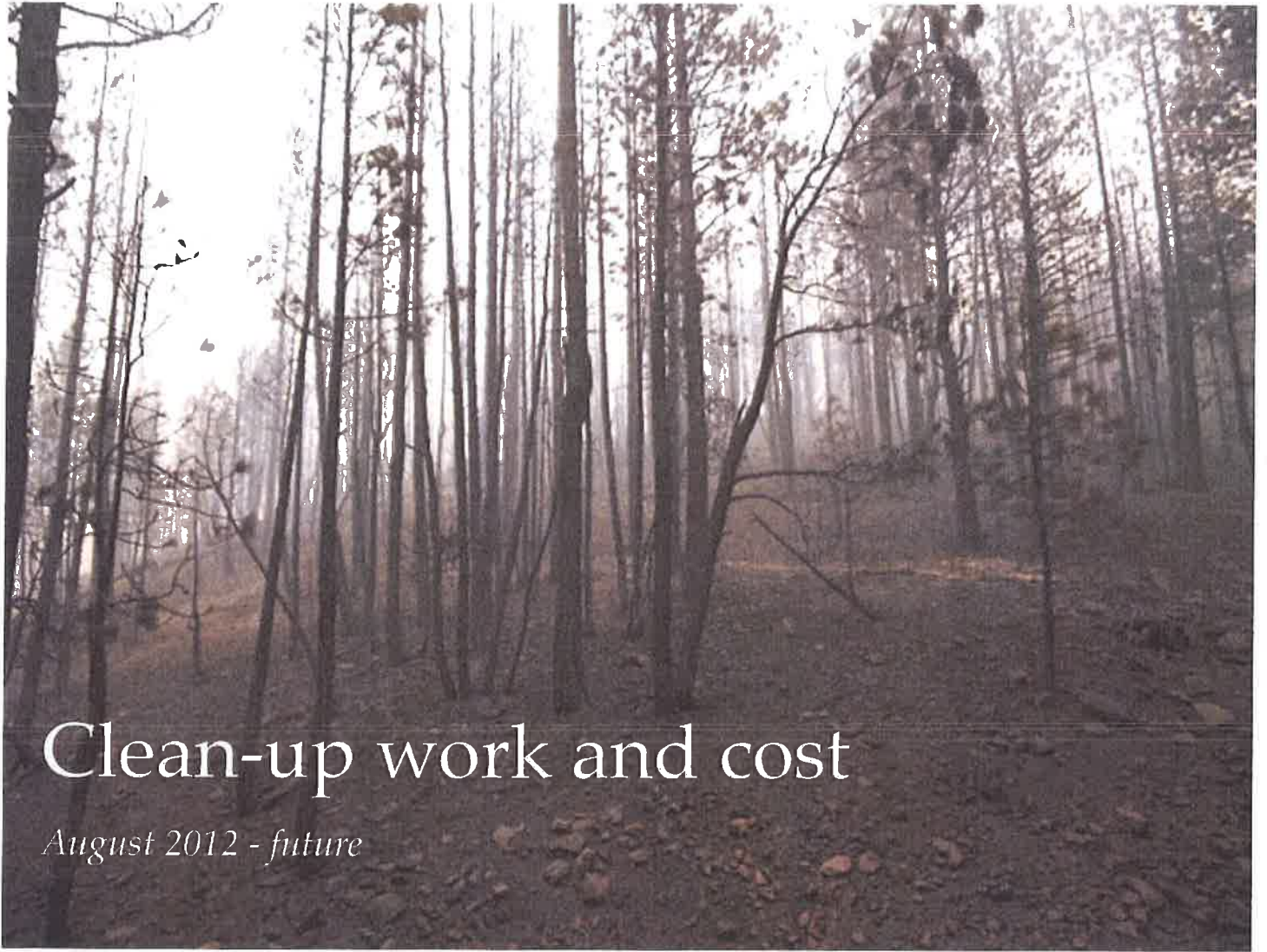
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/fremontwinemant/7820780730/meta/in/set-72157631100173900>



Monday, August 13

3:29 AM

You can see the result of this backburn by our corral in this shot taken by the ZigZag hot shot crew. The backburn unleashes a torrent of flames in the same area and burns through acres of trees.



Clean-up work and cost

August 2012 - future





103 acres of cleanup.

Shortly after the fire, we were authorized to log off the burned trees to hopefully keep beetle kill from invading the property. We salvaged 149,000 board feet of timber for a net payment of \$7,150. The logging operators were careful, but having heavy equipment on a majority of the property, and with smaller burnt trees left everywhere, we have years' worth of clean-up. This includes three slash piles that together would fill a football field. Unfortunately, even most of the trees cut for salvage were not large enough yet to get maximum compensation. As a result, we have lost 60-100 years of timber growth.

15 acres of the 103, at a cost of \$45,000, were cleaned in fall of 2012.

After factoring all the expenses for equipment rentals, labor, fuel and tool costs, we had spent over \$45,000 to just clean up 15 acres. We put these expenses on credit cards and lines of credit to pay for it, and we cannot afford to do the rest of the cleanup.

Our financial losses break down as such: \$3,000 per acre of clean-up (\$300,000); \$40,000 of future timber; \$15,000 for fencing; and loss of real market value of the land.

Riparian areas have not even been addressed yet.

The native Redband trout that used to be in the over one mile of streams winding through the property have been devastated due to the heavy runoff of ash and lack of vegetation to hold the soils in place. All of our work to preserve the habitat for these fish has been completely undermined by the results of the handling of this fire.

This is the cleanup result on the 15 acres that were completed last year.

Logging, pulling stumps, limbing trees, filling in holes from burned roots, dragging dead trees into slash piles, dragging the ground, seeding, and replacing the burned fence posts and ruined barbwire has been completed on only 15% of the property.

We reseeded the other burned acreage to control erosion after it was logged last fall.

We still have hope of ranching this property, but it is a daunting task to even try to figure out how to afford to get the property to back where it was. We are doing the best we can with the resources we have, but we don't have the money or equipment to fix the other 90 acres.

Acknowledgements

As much work as it is to restore 100 burned acres of our 160-acre ranch, we know that our losses are very small compared to our neighbors who lost thousands of acres of timber and rangeland, miles of fencing, and future income.

Thanks to the kindness of the Evanses, Felders and Albertsons, we did not lose any of our small herd of cattle, but they did lose valuable animals.

Our neighbors, Virgil and Sharon Harvey, created fire lines to slow the advance of the fire in our immediate area. Thank you.

Thank you to the community of Lakeview for supporting the all affected ranchers and landowners, and to our good neighbors who included our cattle in their emergency cattle drive, and took our evacuated cattle onto their own safe pastures.

As newcomers to this community, we felt the warmth of friendship through this experience.

Thank you, Oregon State Senate and Senator Doug Whitsett, for this opportunity to share our experience of damages and losses due to the suppression technique of backburning. We hope that this report of the damages brings us resolution.

Landowners

Jarod Bruce and Christie Bruce
62540 Eagle Road
Bend, Oregon 97701
541-390-8567

Residents

Mike Morris and Kathy Morris
PO Box 1069
Lakeview, Oregon 97630
541-848-0628

Matt Morris
PO Box 1069
Lakeview, Oregon 97630
503-504-6666

Associations

Northwest Highland Cattle Association
Oregon Farm Bureau

