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Sunday, February 7, 2021

To Whom It May Concern.

My Name is Dale Weise,

Please forgive me, this is not my forte', so I apologize in advance for the rambling nature of this.

I used to live in Gates. My home, along with nearly a Hundred Others used to stand in Gates. I have questions, many many questions. Along with some observations. I will try to list in a somewhat chronological order. I lived on the north side of the Santiam River, directly across from the Gates airfield. The Gates airfield has been used many times for firefighting efforts in the 15 years I had resided at 123 E. Sorbin Ave.

For almost a week I heard helicopters at the airport, departing and returning as they fought the fire in its early stages. I think it was on Thursday, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020, I remember hearing them in the morning, then NOTHING. The following day on Friday August 28, I drove past the Gates Airport on my way in to Mill City. Gates airfield was vacant. Void of fuel tankers, radio command & support trailers, military vehicles, all gone.

- why were the 3 helicopters originally fighting the fires when its size was small pulled off the fire?
- Several days later, 4 or 5 days if I recall, 5 helicopters returned once the wind event was forecast. Only to be grounded the entire time. By this time, the fire had grown from 5-10-25 acres, to hundreds of acres. One can postulate that if they had stayed on the fire in the early small sized stages, it may have been extinguished. Even if not extinguished, it could have helped to prevent such a catastrophe. we can also postulate that by pulling the resources off the fire, certainly did not help.
- why did not Pacific Corp. Shut off the power? They violated their own procedures as I have come to understand. There is some fairly good evidence, much of the center of Gates burned due to downed power lines.
- Emergency alerts. There were not any to speak of. I had received several text alerts on my cell phone. However, they were alerting hikers/backpackers in the Mt Jefferson wilderness to get to the nearest trail head so Law Enforcement could evacuate them a week before Gates burned. The fire at this point was way off the North East Horizon. When the winds materialized and pushed the fire down the Little North Fork of the Santiam River, like a

tornado, still NOTHING for the residents in imminent danger, to evacuate. THIS HAS TO BE RESOLVED. For not just the cities impacted, but for the entire route of Hwy 22/Hwy20 over to Bend. Had we had an effective emergency alert system in place, and utilized, we might not have had loss of life in the fires. The Canyon area lost 5 lives because no system is in place, or it was not utilized.

ON Sept. 7<sup>th</sup> I had fallen asleep in my recliner about 2PM. The smoke plume was far off to the North East. About 4:30 I awoke to so much smoke, I could hardly see across the street. I walked out to talk to my Neighbor. When He exited his home, he was already packed up, ready to pull out with His travel trailer. His daughter had come over in a flat-out panic, she lived up the North Fork Canyon, and was evacuating herself. Screaming at Him he stated: "Dad, you have to go & go Now!!". The fire is barreling down the canyon like a runaway freight train. By my account, I estimate the fire moved 25-30 miles in a few hours.

I went back home, to alert my daughter to get ready to evacuate. Gathered up our dog NANUK, his food & necessities. Filled my camper with water, gathered up some food & a suitcase of cloths. That was all we got out with. I was reasonably hopeful that downtown area of Gates would be ok, and we would have a home to return to. In fact, I am told, my home did not burn until Tuesday Sept 8<sup>th</sup>.

I drove my truck & camper. My daughter drove our minivan. We were fortunate, our trip west on Hwy. 22 at about 8 PM on Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>, was uneventful. Thank God. For those that waited until 11PM or later, the trip was like driving through hell itself. I am told from firsthand accounts.

We spent the next three days at Wal-Mart's parking lot in Salem, off Turner road. On Sept 10<sup>th</sup>, we heard of the emergency headquarters for the Red Cross at the Salem Fairgrounds.

The Red Cross sent us to the Hilton Garden Inn, in Corvallis. And we were well taken care of there. The outpouring of the communities, faith base orgs., Red Cross reacted far faster and was far more effectual than either State or Federal responses. We stayed at the Hilton for 5-6 weeks. Then the Red Cross told us we would have to move. Still nothing from the state, Feds., or Fema. The Red Cross now wanted us to relocate to the super 8motel off Hawthorne. I refused. I could not trust the last few belongings, or my vehicles, I have on the planet, in the parking lot, in the heart of the unsafe environment of that area. Trauma and loss from the fire still too fresh to even consider it. The rooms stunk, the super 8 now wanted to charge us for our pet, even charging for the small room safe. The rooms lacked even a small refrigerator to keep some minimal food on hand. Even wanting to charge an additional fee for the use of the small room safe. Let that sink in, a super 8 low end motel, felt there should be a room safe, due to the area & environment, for patrons to keep an exceedingly small amount of their belongings safe. No THANKS. Not a place I would choose to stay even if I just needed a room for the night while traveling, let alone having just lost 60 years of my life's memories.

By now Insurance funds were available, and I spent thousands on lodging in a safe area. Until I could locate a reasonable priced RV to purchase, thousands more Ins. Funds gone. Just so my family and I had at least a modicum of a reasonable living environment. I am now in an RV park in Silverton. It is better, but still sucks the rear end of hard times. Being

stuck in a box as I refer to it. And the monthly cost is more than I paid for my home. All this coming out of Insurance funds for rebuilding. Legislators must realize that even the insured, are struggling 6 months after the catastrophe!!! EVERYTHING, I MEAN EVERYTHING, takes so much more effort. Just an example, laundry, seems and sounds menial. Unless you now must go to a laundromat, consumes 2-3 hours a trip, four or five times a month, & adds \$40-\$50 a month just for clean clothes. The simplest of scheduling or logistical endeavors, now become complicated & conflict with near every other important date scheduled on the calendar.

Other day to day issues, the RV, though only 2 years old, sink strainers leaked, water supply to kitchen sink leaked, toilet comes loose from the floor, The minivan (22 yrs old), our primary vech,, windshield leaks, shorts out radio, kills battery. Headaches to get those issues addressed & scheduled for repair, amid all that is going on.

If adversity can rear its ugly head, it has taken advantage of every opportunity since the fire. Mix in Covid quarantine, Un employment struggles, physical therapy from a career ending work injury, city council responsibilities, North Santiam Sewer Authority meetings, job searching, all the required efforts for Insurance and other services to survive what amounts to in my case a trifecta of life changing events: Career ending injury- Covid quarantine - The Beachie Creek Fire's destruction of my home. It can get a bit demoralizing or deflating. But the only choice is to move forward as best we can. And ask for help where & when we can. An awkward thing for me personally, I have never had to rely on public assistance ever in my 64 yrs. of life. But I do it, and with my positions I do it as well for the fellow citizens of my community.

Here is some of what I think we need to move forward & fully restore our communities.

- We need a working warning system for ALL disasters in the Canyon, be it a Cascadia earthquake, a Dam failure, or a Forest fire. Infrastructure needs to be protected & hardened all the way over to Bend. If, not if, WHEN there is another disaster, Hwy 22 may be the only viable route to get supplies from the Redmond airport, to the willamette valley. Redmond airport being the only airport outside of PDX with the ability to handle large cargo aircraft. Now post fire, there are NO SERVICES from Mill City to Sisters. An hour and a half drive at near 80 miles. with areas of no communication. This needs to be addressed too. As part of a long-term plan for rebuilding or revitalization of the Canyon, and State disaster preparedness!!!!
- We need infrastructure. Our communities have been neglected ever since the Spotted Owl decision & the termination of Timber funds. Thirty years or more, our communities have been forced and regulated into poverty & substandard job and life opportunities. We in the "Canyon", desperately need an affordable sewer system, reliable power, up to date internet/fiber optic.
- There is concern on my part as a Gates councilor, that once the cleanup & rebuilding nears completion, Gate's antiquated city plumbing system may fail. Due to the additional duress of heavy large trucks & equipment. We have already had significant system failures just due to age. Add in the increased duress of heavy trucks and equipment, surely will not help the city's aged

plumbing system. As well as damage to the streets that were never constructed to take on this much heavy traffic. Our city is just not financially able to handle so much attrition all at once having the heavy loss of revenues for Thirty years.

- Because of the spotted Owl & other environmental decisions, resulting in massive revenue losses over decades. We, cities in the canyon, need alternative methods of city revenues. We need local entertainment, recreation destinations. We need more retail, and grocery choices. We need to create reasons motor vehicle traffic wants or needs to stop in the cities in the Santiam Canyon for services or entertainment. Events like kayak competitions on the river, mountain bike trails & races, more horse camps & trails, to go beyond the area's traditional boating, fishing, camping. Even the traditional recreation will not return if infrastructure, such as lodging, retail, fuel, restaurants, sporting goods stores, and other various services are not available. Those will not return or come without a sewer first and foremost. But the other infrastructure is just as important. A truck stop for semi-trucks to stop, many use the local scales when they are closed to take a break, un-chain in the winter, some to sleep & get their down time required from driving hours. Even a small sized truck stop could be financially beneficial for so many reasons.

- Sewer is necessary as well due to home lot sizes in most of the Canyon being too small to meet current septic requirements... plus, the cost of septic will also present unaffordable obstacles in rebuilding efforts, not just for homeowners. But, also for retail, restaurants, lodging, or commercial endeavors, where commercial system requirements drive the cost more than a hundred thousand dollars.

- Renters!!! The entire emergency response seemed to have no, or little help for renters. I know of 6 just myself that did not get adequate help. Relying on the compassion of neighbors or family for housing for SIX months now. Or they just abandoned the system due to frustration. There must be a better method for helping renters, they lost their homes & personal possessions too. It is a life altering disaster for them too. We need reasonable cost rental units.

- Records required for FEMA, or Insurance companies. To evacuate and get all the sentimental, & important documents is tough. One would need a good-sized U-Haul. Compounding the issue is loss of technology to prove & provide those documents as is the standard norm of correspondence of today's world. In my instance, due to distanced learning, I had a hard time even finding a replacement computer. Let alone a printer/scanner so I could forward documents, once I spent the inordinate amount & effort of time it takes to reproduce said documents. No to mention the nightmare of existing electronic account access. Usernames, passwords lost for accounts not accessed regularly. Those too all need to be re done, on top of setting up a new computer. Like I said it is not one thing big or small. It is all the things, most simple, yet time consuming, that make the MOUNTIAN before us victims.

- FEMA. Way too slow to get in the game. Just this last Friday, were MHU's available for residents in Mill City. Once Fema got moving it went quick. It was the getting moving part that was so slow. Again 6 months post fire, & during the first half of winter weather. Thank God the winter has been mild & kind so far. And we are talking only 13 units if I recall correctly in six months' time. Fema wonders why they try to start something, then check on the people & families that initially expressed interest, to only drop the project

due to lack of interest. People cannot wait 3-4-5 months for housing. Particularly the infirmed, elderly, and those with young children, I would guess that is 60-70% of the fire victims. They cannot wait that long for housing. It ends up being a HUGE waste of FEMA dollars, and a real disservice to those in dire need in the immediate aftermath following a disaster.

- The initial donation centers & provision locations were awesome like I said. But they were moved like checkers on a checkerboard every week. Causing a great deal of confusion in the first 2-3 months post fire for evacuees. I wonder that maybe those services should have stayed centered at the fairgrounds. Or if the state should adopt & create, a regional disaster support approach, having smaller emergency centers, say in Lyons, Mill city, Or Stayton for the residents of the Santiam Canyon.
- Evacuees were & are spread out. Some evacuees 70-90 miles away, Eugene, Tigard, woodburn, Corvallis (like me). This also had an additional strain in the first few months, with exacerbated drive times & fuel expenses. Not sure how given the geographical, and existing housing situation it could be improved. But I am here to tell you, it sucked.
- NO REAL support for small cities/municipalities suffering from lost revenues. City Ins. Seems to cover physical damages, but nothing for operating expenses, or city employees' salaries. Without our city employees in Gates, our city would sink like a rock in the Santiam River.
- There needs to be clarity on available programs for disaster victim, property owners & renters alike. There are some programs or Grants that can disqualify a victim from other, possibly greater assistance programs. Right now, there is a grant for \$6,500 available. But it may disqualify a victim from some or all FEMA funds it has been revealed. The victims are the inexperienced lay people in all this. And it is the stereo typical situation, if the victim does not ask the right question, no one will divulge an answer or warning to the question we know not to even ask. Hence my previous remark, all the benevolent or Government agencies, need to be in a centralized location. So even differing agencies can interact among one another. So, victims do not get the short end of the stick.

I would like to leave you with a couple of links so you may refresh your memory or visualize the impacts these issues & fires have made to the Canyon & Gates. We as evacuees & survivors are still living these adversities every day.

I ask you please try to view them, and realize the fires were just the coup de gras from decades and policies that placed the citizens & people in a you come last approach... we fix them, or people will choose not to return... it is really that simple...

Respectfully

Dale J. wise

Please feel free email in return if you would like to speak further. It is impossible to include it all in written format. I would have to submit a Novella at the minimum.

I have submitted this early in hopes of a longer response being read. And that the links I have provided would be utilized by those participants in the Legislature as a review of the personal experiences during and after the fire. As well as the impact of decades of policy decisions have had on the Canyon as a whole. I attached just one article regarding the fire. I would ask every legislator to spend just one evening after the testimonies, searching re reading or watching videos on the various media archives of the fires. Re reading & seeing the videos, the real-life stories of destruction & lives lost... when you are not literally, physically in it every day, or must deal with the aftermath, adversity, and strain every single day...it is easy to become complacent the more time goes on. The old out of sight out of mind I think is applicable here, because it is not part of your daily routine, outside of legislating. And though

I sincerely appreciate your efforts in giving some of us a voice to testify, one hour is not nearly enough time to ripple the surface of it all. Though I certainly hope it helps you clearly see it is beyond just ONE thing or issue now post fire.

An article not long after the fires, I found it took me right back to “that place”, That day I returned to ashes of my home.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/wildfires/2020/09/locals-band-together-grieve-amid-remains-of-beachie-creek-wildfire-devastation.html>

from Aaron Scott award winning correspondent with OPB: I found these highly informative, Mr Scott has many episodes of Timber wars on the OPB web site. They are quite thought provoking for me, as did we make the right decisions on Forest management in the past? Or do we now after 30 yrs., need to readdress them?

I think so, Oregon has had far too many massive fires in the recent past. Loosing trillions of dollars in timber due to fires. All gone up in smoke, adding to the carbon footprint of the State. More pollutants produced in a week or two from the fires, than years or decades of disaster free normal life.

<https://www.opb.org/article/2020/09/22/timber-wars-episode-4-mill-city/>