

From: [Rep Morgan](#)
To: [HWREC Exhibits](#)
Subject: Almeda fire concerns, residents still suffering, homeless.
Date: Friday, February 12, 2021 2:00:52 PM

From: J.M. <greenfinger250@gmail.com>

Sent: Thursday, January 28, 2021 2:47 PM

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Subject: Almeda fire concerns, residents still suffering, homeless.

The Almeda/Greenway fire was one of the worst tragedies to ever hit Southern Oregon. In just a few hours 2 entire towns were nearly burned off the map and thousands were left homeless. The cause of this fire and other fires in Jackson county on September 8th 2020 are still under investigation. As of this writing 1/28/2021, there are hundreds of people still homeless.

The fire is now reported to have been started around 11 am near a dog park in Ashland, Oregon. This man-made fire combined with unusually high winds quickly spread across unmaintained dry grassland. This 15-inch tall dry grassland can be found all around Jackson county. Jackson county has weed abatement laws to prevent grassland fires but they are not diligently enforced. The fire, fed by ample amounts of readily available dry fuel, spread rapidly and almost immediately grew out of control. It threatened structures almost as soon as it started and appears to have jumped Interstate 5 at several locations early that day. The fire then appears to have immediately spread to Ashland Creek and The Greenway just North of Ashland Oregon.

The Greenway is a relatively unmaintained "nature path"/ bike path that runs from Ashland, Oregon to North of Central Point, Oregon. This "nature trail" runs through the heart of the Rogue Valley. It follows a naturally existing creek known as Bear Creek. In 1996 the Greenway was described as a fire hazard. In the following two decades this would prove to be a serious public safety concern over and over again. News broadcasts in 2007 talked about the fire dangers and public safety concerns on the Greenway. 2018, 2019, 2020 news articles about fire hazards and reports of illegal fires constantly. A 2019 news article stated, "hundreds of fires on the Greenway". In May of 2020, Jackson County police were, "Investigating 50 suspicious fires on the Greenway". Right now, the Greenway is a densely, overgrown, unmanaged bramble of dead and dying blackberry bushes, 20-inch-tall dry grass and other dead and dried plant life. Jackson County had been without rain for almost 2 months prior to the fire. Once the fire spread from Ashland to the overgrown Greenway it quickly grew to an unmanageable fireball. I fully believe the conditions on the Greenway directly contributed to the severity of this fire and mass human tragedy that would follow.

The fire then began to roar up the Greenway unchecked. Talent, the town next in the fire's path, wasn't even alerted to the fact that a fire was raging toward them. The residents received no official warnings, no official instructions and many had to rely on facebook posts by other residents to even understand the severity of the situation they were in. Many residents of Talent report that they had no clue what was happening and had no clue what they should do. Panic, confusion and chaos would ensue.

As the residents of Talent began to evacuate on their own volition, they found traffic on all roadways at a standstill. Many residents of Talent and Phoenix have reported to me that heavy, bumper to bumper traffic, was on all the roads in and out of Talent and Phoenix that day.

Reports of standstill traffic in and out of the evac zone on all road ways were observed from about

the time the fire started in Ashland until well after 5 pm. Many residents reported large numbers of semi-trucks on the back-county roads. This heavy traffic hindered firefighting efforts all around Talent and Phoenix. This heavy traffic made all efforts to fight the fires and efficiently evacuate 2 communities in an orderly, timely manner, impossible.

The emergency responders met such heavy traffic that they couldn't get in to evacuate facilities of senior citizens. One retirement facility was rescued by a car dealership in Ashland, Oregon when emergency crews couldn't reach them. A retirement facility in Talent, 180 seniors, was evacuated by a 4-man facility maintenance crew.

Jackson County emergency response and other emergency response officials repeatedly chose to open Interstate 5 even though the fire was being fought on both sides of the Interstate. During brief periods when Interstate 5 traffic was stopped, I suspect individual GPS units then re-routed the I-5 traffic to highway 99, county roads and surface streets. Had Interstate traffic been re-routed at the California border this would have left all roadways clear for emergency response personnel and evacuees from these communities. I feel because Interstate traffic was poorly managed this heavy flow of vehicles flooded into the burning, evacuating communities.

Jackson County Emergency Management made the deliberate choice to not use the well tested Emergency Alert System. We are all aware of this alert system. It's been in use for decades and you would recognize it as a long beep interrupting your TV and Radio followed by, "If this had been an actual emergency.." Countless residents, including many disabled seniors were not aware of evacuation orders. At least one senior woman that afternoon had no clue a fire had even started in Ashland, she got a call from her son-in-law at 3:30 pm telling her to get out.

Jackson County officials were expecting residents in the middle of panic and complete chaos to flip between facebook pages for critical updates and expected evacuees in the middle of this tragic event to sign up for a new alert system? Why was critical emergency information not disseminated across all available emergency alert platforms?

No fire hydrants were used in Phoenix, Oregon. It has been reported by Talent residents that no fire hydrants were tapped in Talent. It was initially publicly released on a local news station that due to low water pressure hydrants couldn't be used to fight the fires that day. I have since been told that the low pressure was due to the melting of widely used of PVC piping. Once that piping melted, due to the fire, it then caused the property to flood thereby lowering the water pressure available to fight the fires. I cannot confirm actual cause of this situation.

Last but not least, I return to the Greenway. If you look at arial footage of the fire zone you can see the fire's path almost completely followed the entire length of the Greenway from Ashland to Phoenix. It appears the fire then jumped from the Greenway to Coleman Creek, also unmanaged and overgrown. Coleman Creek burned almost entirely to N. Rose in Phoenix taking all the Cheryl Lane apartment complexes and all the properties North of Dano Drive in Phoenix.

Jackson county has known for decades about the fire hazards humans pose on the Greenway. Enough concern to pay police to manage the problems. Bear Creek and the Greenway should be considered wildland-urban interface. Fire prevention measures to reduce fuel sources and thin and remove dead and dying plants has not been completed in any way. Although the Greenway has now directly contributed to loss of property for thousands of people no serious measures are in place now to reduce the fire hazards on the other several miles of the Greenway. The Greenway poses a serious risk to all adjoining properties throughout Jackson County.

This wasn't a wildfire, it was an urban fire compounded by urban problems.

As of this writing, January 20, 2021 there are hundreds of people still homeless in Jackson county due to the Almeda fire. Many families may never fully recover from their catastrophic losses.

On a personal note, my daughter lost everything in the fire that day including her two cats. We spent a month searching Phoenix and her destroyed neighborhood for her cats in the hopes they escaped the burning buildings. Sadly, the cats did not make it out alive, along with the 100's of other pets that died in that inferno. I spent weeks sifting the rubble and ash of my child's apartment to confirm the whereabouts of her pets. I sifted one set of remains out of the ash of her life mid september. After the forensic biologist in Ashland was able to confirm I only had one cat, I began sifting the apartment for the second cat. I found the remains of her other cat on October 12th. The last time I

was at my daughter's apartment building was October 13th to sift and retrieve anything else I could. I begged my daughter to stay away from the sifting because I didn't want her exposed to the toxic debris of her apartment. So for weeks I dressed in full hazmat gear, gloves and a gas mask and carefully sifted through the powdered drywall, twisted mutilated metal and devastation.

This could have been prevented. As a heart broken mother, of a child that shouldn't have ever lived to see such pain and tragedy, this could happen anywhere in Oregon. To any of our kids, our families.

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