

**From:** [catie faryl](#)  
**To:** [HWREC Exhibits](#)  
**Cc:** [Terry.baker@phoenixoregon.gov](mailto:Terry.baker@phoenixoregon.gov); [eric.swanson@phoenixoregon.gov](mailto:eric.swanson@phoenixoregon.gov); [Rogue Climate](#)  
**Subject:** My Fire Story to share with Oregon Wildfire Recovery  
**Date:** Saturday, February 13, 2021 1:04:39 PM

---

## My Almeda Fire Story

I was at home at 716 First Street in Phoenix, Oregon with my daughter. We'd seen the lowest level alert on our cell phones to "be ready". My daughter's friend from Talent called us and said she got up on her roof and the fire was moving very quickly towards us. I looked out my front door and down the 1st Street and could see the smoke billowing towards us from Highway 99 South.

My daughter, who was visiting from California, said maybe we should wait for the evacuation alert before leaving, but I said "We can't count on that, and the fire is very close already". So we threw some things into the car and drove west - the only one way open at that point. Coleman Creek Rd, to Voorhies Road, where traffic was already bumper to bumper. We were stuck on Voorhies travelling very slowly for about 45 minutes and we could see the fire burning the fields so close to our East. It was very confusing when we got to where Voorhies Road meets South Stage Rd. - people were trying to direct bumper to bumper traffic and people coming to that intersection from and going in all directions.

I felt fortunate that I'd lived in the Rogue Valley for over 30 years cause I knew the backroads and how to get somewhere safe. I couldn't understand why people were driving east because there was no access, ingress or egress by 3 pm that day to any roads in that direction. The only way we could go was South Stage then California St to Jacksonville, then take 238 (Hanley Road) to Central Point and I-5. About an hour and a half after leaving my house in Phoenix we received the "evacuate" text message. I felt very afraid for my neighbors who didn't leave when we did.

We got on I-5 North and drove through other intense fires to Eugene where we got a hotel room overnight and for a couple more days til we could come back and stay for 10 days, in serious smoke, with family in Ashland.

It took a week to find out if our house in Phoenix was still standing. We were very lucky and the firefighters did a good job of containing the fire just two blocks west of 99 in Phoenix. The fire spread very randomly, it appeared, due to the winds. But I also saw other evidence of why and what burned.....

From 2008 til 2012 I sat on the Phoenix Planning Commission. The City of Phoenix is famous for not retaining staff and we had at least a half dozen Planning Directors during my tenure. There seemed to be little will of the Council and City leadership to enforce building and other

safety codes on the Hwy 99 corridor in the business district and elsewhere. Many of the buildings that burned were in bad shape since there'd been no effort to force owners to clean things. Few codes had been enforced and only a couple buildings had been condemned or demolished. We have hopes that the new Mayor and City Council in Phoenix will do more to improve our town.

I think it's ironic that while I was on the Phoenix Planning Commission, I'd advanced the idea of creating a Demonstration Project by applying for State assistance that would address our water issues. (In fact the very extensive destruction of the Alameda Fire in Phoenix was due to the fact that firefighters literally ran out of water and had to engage tankers to fill up and haul back water from Ashland!) I still think Phoenix could be, with the right planners and leaders, a model community for our region. My "water project" plan was to restore the creek, create a water catchment feature between "Ys" - what we call where 99 S and 99 N diverge briefly through Phoenix, and build a system where T.I.D. (Talent Irrigation District), riparian water and captured water would be plumbed for outdoor uses like firefighting, car washing, landscape watering etc. This would preserve potable water for indoor uses - bathing, cooking, cleaning - and help reduce the cost of water to citizens. Since the water bill is the only tool the City of Phoenix seems to utilize to increase its budget revenues, this would protect residents from escalating water bills and would also make abundant water available to firefighting and other outdoor uses. Plus having a beautiful public park with a water feature downtown would do much to make Phoenix a pleasant destination.

I should mention upon returning to my home, almost two weeks after the fire was extinguished, that I smelled gas in the garage. I was lucky the Avista employee was on our street, and he came over to check it out. He shut off the gas because there was definitely a problem. He told me he'd been at the fire in Phoenix at its height and had shut off over 200 gas pipes in burning homes while they were spewing fire! We don't understand why the gas mains weren't shut off when the fire started, but probably that was impossible because of the fire's fast burning nature, though that doesn't explain why the gas to unaffected homes wasn't turned off during the subsequent two week period following the fires.

Obviously we need a better warning systems in our region, or better application of the existing ones. There was no radio, television or landline phone call alerts and that put many elderly and poor people at high risk since they simply didn't know, til the fire was upon them, how great their danger was. Thank goodness for the managers of manufactured home parks and other high density housing here who made phone calls everywhere they could think of to get transportation to take people to safety! It was a miracle and a result of community caring that so few lives were lost and that people have stepped up to help the displaced.

Finally this month we are seeing some progress being made in clearing the sad rubble from what's left of Phoenix. We lost over half our businesses and I heard that most of the families

with kids in Phoenix schools lost their homes. The Alameda Fire was one of the worst disasters in recent U.S. history for devastation to people's lives and livelihoods, especially since it took place during the Covid pandemic. How we rebuild from here is a challenge and I'd like to make some meaningful contributions to that effort. I have many ideas on how to make Phoenix a wonderful and vibrant part of Jackson County.

Sincerely, Catie Faryl

541 530-8454