

Statement to the Oregon House Special Committee on Wildlife Recovery

From: Catherine Phelps, resident of 219 Talent Ave until September 9, 2020

The intensity of the wind the night of 9/7/20 left me picking grapes off the 50 year old vines in the backyard of 219 Talent Ave. This older home was graced with old vines, and flowers including an old daphne bush that covered the south side of the house. The rose arbor and vine were familiar land marks to local folks living in Talent.

Looking up as I went up the back porch, I saw the smoke cloud climbing higher and higher over south Ashland. I turned my radio on and found ongoing reporting from public radio 102.3 which was documenting the fires approach. It suddenly went off the air, no other information was forthcoming and the phone started to ring. Family and friends were calling to say “get out” and “get out now”.

I quickly put my dog and cat, remembering food into my small car. As I went through the house, assuming I would be back later or at the latest the next day, I grabbed phone, a change of clothes and left everything else.

On attempting to travel on Talent Ave to get to family members I was met with a line of traffic routed from I-5 that left me spending 20 minutes to travel the 4 blocks to Rapp Road where I could then get to Wagner Creek. Two blocks up was a long line of semi-trucks coming off another road through town. The delay was frightening and I questioned the decision to route interstate traffic though a small community whose members were trying to get out of the way of the oncoming Almeda fire.

My home and all in it was burned to the ground. The yards now ash and rubble. I was not informed in any way by community emergency notification and am so grateful that the loss of life, while present was as small as it was. Decisions that were made in regards to water access, traffic routing and structures saved is one that now while mute, needs examination to prevent such a tragedy from ever wiping out a small southern Oregon community.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns that may lead to wiser and more comprehensive planning. May it never be so needed again, but prevention is critical.