

Information on the Holiday Farm Fire - February 21, 2021

We evacuated on the night of September 7, with embers raining down on us and the neighbor's yard on fire as well as the hillside across the highway. We are some of the few fortunate ones that still have a house. Most of our neighbors lost their homes and are still clearing trees and debris from their lots.

It's been over five months since the fire devastated the McKenzie Valley. Century Link has not fully restored landlines. We were able to connect via Spectrum last week for TV and WiFi, which we appreciate very much. The local school is trying to open March 15 for elementary students, but is still in dire need of broadband for all students. People are also trying to work from home and eventually start new businesses. Rural areas have been underserved with broadband/internet even before the fire so now would be the perfect time to move our communications into the current century. The PUC has been urging the phone companies to restore services, but they don't regulate internet companies.

Lane Electric Co-op is trying to put power underground as much as possible, but it's expensive. Lane would like to encourage other utilities to use the same conduit and has applied to FEMA to help fund this proactively rather than wait for the next disaster. We were very fortunate that LEC was able to install a huge generator to provide temporary power quickly after the fire and later able to access emergency power from Cougar Dam.

There are no incorporated towns/cities along the McKenzie River to help provide local assistance or decision-making. We rely on Lane County and the state plus a number of volunteer community groups that have been working extremely hard.

Evolving issues that need assistance:

Low income housing - our largest RV park is not reopening. Many people lived there who were working in our local tourist industry.

We need housing for those that lost their homes - including our volunteer firefighters.

Blue River Post Office is temporarily in a McKenzie High School portable classroom. It needs a permanent location - hopefully soon and on it's pre-fire site.

The McKenzie River Orchid Clinic needs to rebuild. They are currently working out of the local quilt shop in Rainbow. It would be great if they can rebuild in their pre-fire location.

The O'Brien Library is working on plans to rebuild. The Blue River Bottle Boys are collecting cans, bottles and donations for this project and others in the area.

Blue River has been in need of a sewer system and upgraded water system for years. Now might be the best time for this to become a reality while everything is under reconstruction,

Our scenic byway has been decimated. What are the plans for replanting? Will native plants be used? Will low growing shrubs be planted under power lines in right-of-ways instead of trees that will need to be trimmed? Will there be a plan to deal with the scotch broom that will inevitably sprout in disturbed areas? Is there a plan for the removal of the mountains of wood chips?

With potential landslides (and continued hazard-tree removal) occurring this winter can ODOT provide emergency routes so that the McKenzie Hwy might be closed for shorter periods of time? We need others that besides Deerhorn, Holden Creek, McKenzie River Drive.

Driving speeds on the highway are increasing because there is a greater sight distance with so many trees gone. This is leading to more drivers going too fast and passing in risky areas.

There is a lot to do to restore and rebuild our community. We need a plan, funding and agreement on how to move forward. If I can help, I will be happy to. I'm sure others have more ideas on how we can accomplish this together.

Thank you!

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