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BURNS INTERAGENCY FIRE ZONE WILDFIRE UPDATE: AUGUST 8

HINES, Oregon – Record dry fuels and consistent late afternoon winds gave three active wildfires in Harney County an opportunity to gain additional ground yesterday evening and throughout today.

The Spear Springs fire, reported Wednesday afternoon approximately 22 miles directly north of Burns along Forest Road 31, is estimated at only 355 acres thanks to quick and consistent support from air tankers and dozers. Containment lines – by way of dozer or road – are in tact nearly all the way around the perimeter. Although spot fires across the containment lines have occurred in some areas, engine crews and other resources have been able to keep the spread to a minimum. Some private timberlands, a handful of structures and a timber sale in the area are threatened. A large section of Forest Road 31 and side roads in the Spear Springs fire vicinity are closed temporarily due to the close proximity to of active burning along the roadway. For more information on the Forest Road 31 closure, contact the Malheur National Forest office at (541) 575-3000. A Type 2 Incident Management Team will assume responsibility of the Spear Springs fire early Thursday, with fire camp and base operations in Seneca.

The Coleman Mountain fire, located approximately 15 miles northeast of Crane, was estimated around 6,327 acres this afternoon. Rough terrain and sporadic winds gave firefighters trouble late yesterday on the western flank and then to the south later in the evening. The southern most perimeter showed increasing activity throughout the day while the northeast and eastern perimeters are reported as cool and secure. Private lands, a few structures, three wind testing towers, power lines, cattle and livestock fences are threatened. Dozer lines are in place around several sections of the fire's perimeter and have been successful in limiting fire spread to the north and northeast with help from air tankers. Ground and air resources are focusing containment efforts on the south end of the fire throughout the evening.

The Juniper Ranch fire, located on the east side of Steens Mountain approximately 20 miles north of Andrews, is also most active to the south. Significant down slope winds common in the area every afternoon or early evening have made suppression efforts difficult for firefighters. Although erratic fire behavior and spot fires across containment lines were observed throughout the last two days, crews were able to protect threatened structures and a private meadow and limit the fire spread to around 4,000 acres. A Type 1 Incident Management Team will assume responsibility of the Coleman Mountain and Juniper Ranch fires early Thursday. Fire base camp will be set up in Crane.

As firefighters continue their work on area wildfires, the public should be aware of increased traffic on roadways and possible smoky conditions. Also, to help limit *new* fires to those caused by lightning or other natural occurrences, remember the extremely hot and dry conditions and the regulated fire closure currently in place within the Burns Interagency Fire Zone. The closure allows campfires only in designated campgrounds and prohibits all off-road vehicle travel, smoking out of doors, and parking a vehicle or operating an internal combustion motor in areas not free of vegetation.

The area closure in the Egley wildfire complex vicinity remains in place until further notice. Federal, state and county officials are evaluating the closure weekly and will open more of the area as conditions continue to improve. An updated closure is expected no later than Friday, August 10.

The Industrial Fire Precaution Level in the Burns Interagency Fire Zone is a Level 4 and fire danger is EXTREME. For more information on current wildfire activity or closure information, call (541) 573-4519.