

Wildfire Mitigation at WPRM

- Phil Schmierer

Bil Jackson and I started this project in 2019. We were at the museum doing another project and got to talking about how things were really in need of some tree trimming and brushing. So, we got started on those trees on the outside of the balloon track where the big cut bank is from Milward all the way to the far gate on the west end of the balloon.

We made a good nick in that fire ladder so it would not go up in the neighbor's trees in case we started a fire with our equipment. Come spring of 2020, I came back up to the museum and, I think it was Dave Roth, helped out and we made more progress. In the fall of 2020 we had another work session and chipped away at it some more. Then this spring we hit it again and cut firebreaks with the backhoe in all the tall sagebrush and scraped a wide firebreak around the city's yard. We also fell some more trees and limbing the remaining. I will be coming back up in October and keep chipping away at it.

Ethan Doty has been out there too; with weed eating and cleaning up with the backhoe, picking up and hauling brush.

My main goal is I don't want fire to get near our equipment from brush. If we do have a fire visit us, all we'll have to worry about is spotting onto the wooden equipment which has been moved away from the forest side of the property. The weeds have been knocked down between the tracks out there too.

I figure it's going to take at least 5 years total to really fireproof the grounds. I personally want our grounds to serve as a firebreak. Our equipment may get some ash on it and if spotted, maybe a little burnt paint, but that's it.

I have more chores in the fall for the inside of the balloon. Then I want to go outside the balloon to the west and scrape that down to bare dirt at least 100 feet from our tracks. I also want to take the mower out on the north basin of the balloon and mow that down to the ground. In addition, there's more "Pecker Poles"

that need to be radically thinned out by the far west gate along that cut as there's a nasty potential for a fire ladder out there too.

The goal is no accidental fire gets out of our property, nor will a wildfire get in, except for spotting and with no internal ground fuels, it will have no place to go....ballast rock doesn't burn!

So there you have it! That's pretty much what I'd like to see accomplished!

We all know that it's not fun, but if a fire visits our surrounding area, maybe our work and effort may prevent a fire from getting into the buildings of Portola from that way, and our priceless equipment won't get destroyed.



Phil hamming it up after a long day of tree trimming at the museum.

- Photo by Greg Elems