

Klondike West Fire Camp at Curry Fairgrounds

“Fire Camp came really fast,” says Nikki Sparks, Manager of Event Center on the Beach at the Curry County Fairgrounds. “The very next day after we completed posting all the major publicity for our fundraiser, placing 132 posters in Brookings, on Tuesday, August 14, we get a call from firefighters at Selma saying that they would like to meet with me and tour these facilities because they were considering it for a Fire Camp for four days. Reportedly, the weather forecast for the weekend made fire suppression increase urgent at the west edge of the Klondike fire.

The two men from the Alaska team, which is in charge of the command post in Selma, when they arrived they told us that plans had changed and that group would not be coming here, but they would recommend it most highly. After they returned to Selma, one of them called to let us know that on the next day we would likely receive a proposal for a fire camp and by the following day occupation could begin.

They knew that there we were concerned about whether Fire Camp would be actually for only four days, because of our own fundraiser that was slated for the following weekend, The Kingston Trio benefit concert to help us replace the roof on our main building, and for the other events scheduled here this fall, including the Brew Fest and the Dahlia Show.

Thursday afternoon I met with members of the California team about the facilities and they requested potential full usage of all facilities available for an indefinite amount of time, possibly eight weeks.

We had been advised that the weather was about to break, the inversion was expected to lift, and the marine layer that had been covering our skies for more than a week, was about to open to higher temperatures and the usual accompanying winds. The major concern was the infamous Chetco Effect, such as drove the Chetco Bar Fire raging toward Brookings, through residential areas upriver. Lightning strikes were a reported possibility.

On Friday we gave cancellation notice for everything scheduled for these two months, including ours and the other two events listed above. By Friday evening we had an agreement for the Incident Command Post fire camp for Klondike West and by Saturday morning it was official.

Curry Fair Friends, who had made sandwiches and served meals for at the Fire Camp here for crews for the recent Lobster Creek Fire, were on standby for meal preparations for this one, but the fluctuating population here so far makes that impractical.

The Deli at McKay’s Market has been preparing the sandwiches for the firefighter crews at Agness for several weeks.

We didn’t consider that reason for considering canceling our fundraiser or any other events scheduled for this fall in case there might arise a need for use by a Fire Camp.

The event most difficult to cancel was the Gold Beach Brew & Art Festival that was scheduled for September 8. “We offered to provide the facilities and services free of charge, for the event for an alternate weekend, after fire season.”

We have been informed, however, that the festival could not be postponed, since many of the vendors and bands could not attend at that time. Alternate fundraisers are being considered instead to provide the scholarships offered by the Soroptomists.

The Brew Fest has been challenged several prior years by fire season events. But this is the first time that there was no way to be sure of being able to accommodate their needs during the first weekend of September.

This is the fifth Fire Camp at these facilities, the first being the Biscuit Fire in 2002, followed by the Collier Butte Fire in 2014. The Chetco Bar Fire in 2017 also included facilities and services free of charge for evacuated animals and from some of their providers. Recently, shortly before the Curry County Fair, started on July 25, the Fire Camp for the Lobster Creek Fire occupied much of the grounds and buildings for several weeks.

After providing facilities for evacuees during the flood of Hunter Creek area and two Fire Camps the Curry County Fair Board approved a policy designating these facilities as an emergency facility for city, county, state, and federal agencies, and that emergency usage be the number one priority. During the flood, the facilities and services were provided free of charge for Red Cross activity and housing of evacuated residents.

We are very pleased to be able to provide highly appreciated facilities for emergencies such as the one currently managing the Klondike West Fire area.