

## Idaho eyes closing some state forest lands amid fire danger

By KEITH RIDLER, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Officials need to consider closing public access to some state forest lands because of private timberland owners' concerns about extreme wildfire danger this year, Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter said.

Consultant Jim Riley told Otter and other members of the Idaho Land Board on Tuesday that a million acres of private land has been closed to the public this year due to potential wildfire.

"We think it's time that the state at least array for itself the options that you have to effect more closures of perhaps state land and other land that's adjacent or in particular volatile places," Riley told the Land Board. "Public safety is at risk here."

He said private timberland owners are concerned about human-caused fires starting on state land and spreading to neighboring timber stands.

The Land Board oversees about a million forested acres in Idaho and is constitutionally required to produce the maximum long-term return, with the money mainly benefiting public schools. Fire restrictions are already in place for most of Idaho's forested areas.

"I think we've got to do what we've got to do in order to protect not only our own lands but our neighbors' as well," Otter said, making clear that closing some public lands was an option.

He directed state officials to coordinate potential closures with agencies such as the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

"Hunting season, there's certain places where the game is," he said. "We might be able to shift some hunting seasons, delay them for a couple of weeks, and then extend them on the other end."

Tom Schultz, director of the Idaho Department of Lands, said the various agencies already coordinate activities when it came to fire restrictions. Such restrictions already cover much of the state's forested areas.

Riley, after the meeting, said that Stimson Lumber, Molpus Timberlands, Potlatch and Hancock Forest Management typically keep their lands open to the public.

"In my 30 years I've never seen a broad closure program like this," he said. "It's all because of the extraordinary fire danger."

The most destructive wildfire in the state so far this season has been the Cape Horn fire that started July 5 in northern Idaho and destroyed at least six homes and scorched about 2 square miles of mostly timberland.

Federal officials say the cause of that fire remains under investigation.

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