

An early August update from “Big (Smoky) Sky Country”

By Fred Opperman

Well, I'm sure the west has been on the news lately with all of the fires. Our valley here has been smoke-filled for the past two weeks. Our views of the surrounding mountains have disappeared and yet the closest fire is 150+ miles away in western Montana or Idaho.

Old-time residents say they have never had the mountains disappear before . . . even when Yellowstone burned in '88 and that is only 80 miles south! The last two days you can smell the smoke, before that it looked like smog. The sun is a red ball (that one can look at due to the haze) morning and evening, and last evening it disappeared an hour before sunset. Quite a few “trophy homes,” along with others, have burned south of Missoula;

for the ones that haven't burned, the reason they were built there is no longer present.

Our weather has been hot, in the 90s most days and very dry. Humidity today is 16%. Our nights have been down in the low 60s or mid-50s. As for the mountains close to me, the grass is still green and somewhat moist. But by the end of August that all could change.

I went to a conference for Habitat for Humanity in Seattle last week; it was at the University of Washington. What a beautiful campus that is . . . beautiful, huge, mature trees of every species you can name. One morning I walked over to the arboretum and enjoyed a couple of hours walking around it.

I've been going on weekly hikes with a group of retired guys from the Montana Wilderness Association. So far I've hiked to the two tallest peaks around here, Mt. Bauldy at 8,400+ feet and Mt. Blackmoor at 10,154 feet. The hikes were about eight miles each, round trip. Another hike we took was 14 miles and that really was rough. I need younger legs and more lung capacity. Above tree line, the alpine flowers are beautiful and profuse. At some spots the snow is melting away and there is a flower blooming that you know was covered by snow only a day or two before. Nature is wonderful, thank the Lord.

That is all from “Big Smoky” for now, y'all keep in touch.

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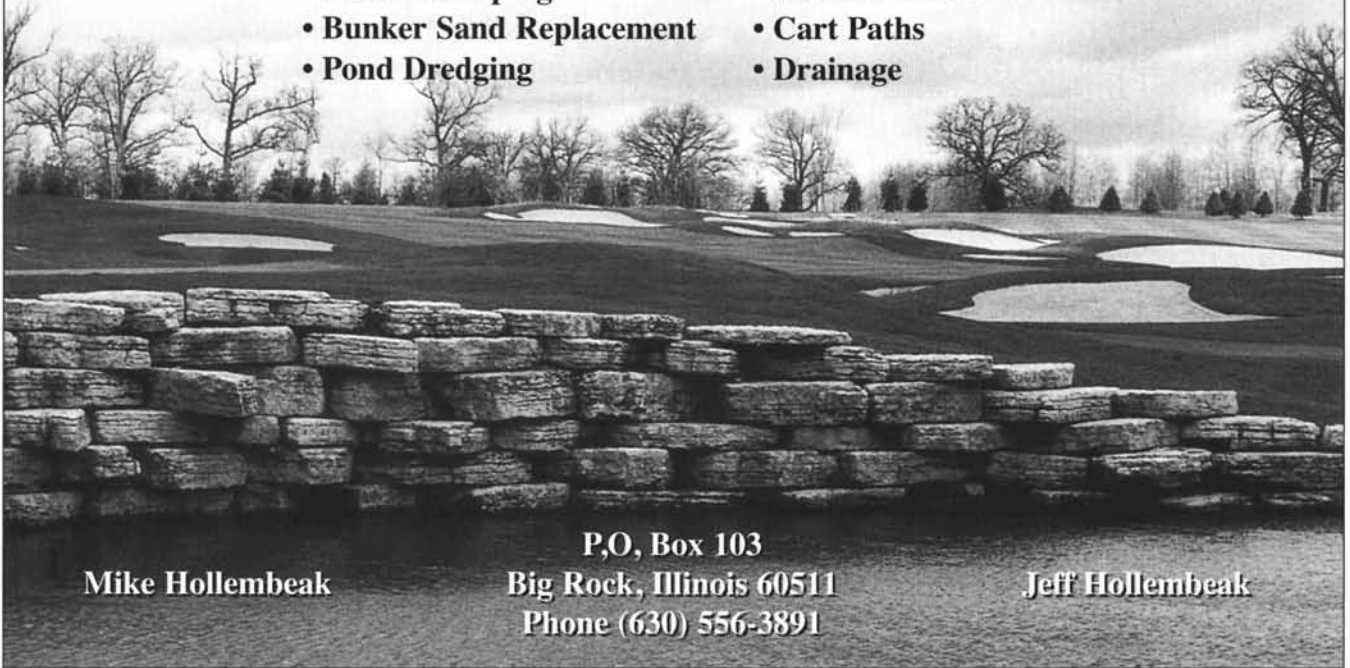
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