

# Issue Brief: Wildfire Policy Development 2013-2025

**LPRO**  
DATE: September 11, 2025

## Oregon's Forest Landscape

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Oregon's forests cover nearly 30 million acres, representing approximately 47 percent of its total area. About 60 percent of Oregon's forests are federally owned, primarily in the eastern and southwestern parts of the state. Of the remaining forestland, roughly 34 percent is privately owned, 4 percent is owned by the state, and 2 percent by Tribal governments.<sup>1</sup> Oregon's fire season typically spans May to September, shaped by drought, snowpack, and extreme weather events. In recent years, catastrophic wildfires have become a focus of policy decisions.

Oregon's modern wildfire policy development traces back to the Tillamook Burn (1933-1951), a series of catastrophic fires that burned around 350,000 acres.<sup>2</sup> The state responded with large-scale reforestation, shared stewardship models, and investments in fire suppression capacity. Over time, mitigation actions such as fuel management, risk reduction, and cooperative response have continued to evolve into Oregon's modern wildfire policy.

The [Oregon Department of Forestry Fire History Timeline \(1911–2022\)](#) depicts more than a century of wildfire events, policies, and milestones that have shaped Oregon's approach to forest protection.

## 2013-2025 Wildfire Policy Development

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### 2013: The Wildfire Protection Act (House Bill 2050)

The Wildfire Protection Act ([HB 2050](#), 2013) restructured Oregon's wildfire response system and established its current cost-sharing model, in which landowners and the state each cover 50 percent of the costs for basic fire protection. The act expanded suppression efforts through contracted resources and paired public investments with new landowner funds to increase firefighting aircraft availability, supporting wildfire

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Forest Resources Institute, *Oregon Forest Facts (2021-2022 Edition)*, [https://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/OFRI\\_2021ForestFacts\\_WEB3.pdf](https://oregonforests.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/OFRI_2021ForestFacts_WEB3.pdf) (last visited September 4, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> The Oregon Encyclopedia, *Tillamook Burn*, [https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/tillamook\\_burn/](https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/tillamook_burn/) (last visited September 4, 2025).



prevention and response. It also continued support for landowners in fire-prone areas of eastern Oregon through the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund, which pays for emergency fire insurance, statewide suppression resources, and non-routine fire prevention.

Oregon’s 2013 wildfire season began early due to drought, low snowpack, and high temperatures. Lightning storms were the main ignitor of over 500 fires, including the 13,400 acre Douglas Complex Fire, which garnered national attention for 11 days. Despite a 94 percent suppression rate, over 300,000 acres burned. With a response involving over 6,000 personnel and collaboration among landowners, state agencies, contractors, 35 other states and Canada, as well as federal agencies such as the Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Guard, suppression costs set a record.<sup>3</sup>

## Substantial Costs of Fire Suppression 2013-2019

From 2013 and 2019, Oregon experienced a wide range of wildfire activity, from severe seasons to the mildest in recent history. In this period, wildfire costs and acres burned were generally high and fluctuating, with the 2016 and 2019 seasons being comparatively mild. In 2019, the Governor’s Council on Wildfire Response concluded that Oregon’s system was inadequate for the growing risk.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 1: Fire Season Cost and Acreage Burned Per Year 2013-2019**

Fire Season Year	<u>2013</u>	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016*</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018*</u>	<u>2019*</u>
Gross Cost to ODF (in millions)	\$75	\$75.5	\$76.6	<u>\$17.5</u>	\$38.9	<u>\$101.8</u>	<u>\$32.9</u>
Approximate acres burned	319,441	950,000	633,048	<u>219,509</u>	680,000	<u>897,263</u>	<u>79,735</u>

Source: LPRO

Data: Oregon Department of Forestry annual reports on fire season, hyperlinked for each year. Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC) for approximate acres burned for 2016, 2018, and 2019, hyperlinked for each year listed.

\*Notes: Gross cost and acreage burned figures are sourced from the Legislative Fiscal Office Department of Forestry Annual Reports. For the years 2016, 2018, and 2019, two separate sources are shown: the Department’s reports provided cost data, while total acreage burned was obtained from the Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC) Annual Fire Reports, as the Department reports did not include acreage totals for those years.

<sup>3</sup> Oregon Department of Forestry, 2013: *An Epic Fire Season in Oregon*, [http://www.orwww.org/Wildfires/References/History/ODF/ODF\\_Fire\\_season\\_2013.pdf](http://www.orwww.org/Wildfires/References/History/ODF/ODF_Fire_season_2013.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Governor’s Council on Wildfire Response, November 2019: Report and Recommendations, <https://www.oregon.gov/osfm/Documents/GovWildfireCouncilRpt-FinalRecs.pdf>



## 2020: Senate Bill 1536 and the Labor Day Fires

During the 2020 legislative session, **SB 1536** proposed broad structural changes in the state's wildfire policy regarding wildfire preparedness. The measure directed the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF), in partnership with Oregon State University, to create a Statewide Wildfire Risk Map to categorize properties into wildfire risk classes (extreme, high, moderate, low and no risk). While it ultimately did not pass, the bill provided a policy framework for SB 762 (2021). Later that year, the Labor Day wildfires burned over one million acres in Oregon, resulting in a net cost of approximately \$49.3 million, the loss of 11 lives, and damage to thousands of structures.<sup>5</sup> The 2020 wildfire season was the most severe on record.

## 2021: Wildfire Package

Legislators passed a comprehensive wildfire package in 2021 addressing response, recovery, funding, tax relief, and water access. **SB 762** required the creation of a Statewide Wildfire Risk Map and directed multiple agencies to collaborate to reduce wildfire risk, improve emergency response, strengthen community protection, as well as improve forest management and power systems response to wildfire.

A number of other measures provided direct support to Labor Day Fire victims and their communities by offering tax relief, streamlining regulatory processes, and granting property owners greater ability to begin recovery and rebuilding efforts. *See Appendix A for a list of notable measures passed during the 2021 Legislative Session.*

Oregon experienced another intense wildfire season in 2021 with approximately 800,000 acres burned, making it one of the largest on record.<sup>6</sup> The season featured multiple large fires caused by extreme drought and high temperatures, including the Bootleg Fire burning over 400,000 acres. These fires caused widespread evacuations as well as property loss and placed strain on firefighting resources statewide. Suppression costs in the 2020 and 2021 fire seasons were more severe than previous years, with an overall trend towards high acreage per year burned and higher suppression costs.

## 2022: Late and Long Seasons

During the 2022 legislative session, two wildfire-related measures passed. **HB 4026** provided grants to school districts impacted by the 2020 wildfires, and **HB 4087** ensured media access to wildfire and disaster scenes on public lands.

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<sup>5</sup> Oregon Legislative Fiscal Office, *Item 28: Department of Forestry 2020 Fire Season Analysis*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/201911/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/227139>

<sup>6</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *Item 36 Department of Forestry 2021 Fire Season Analysis*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/202111/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/250173>



Oregon's 2022 wildfire season was less severe than previous years, with an estimated 364,456 acres burned and fewer structure losses and smoke events.<sup>7</sup> However, a late start to the fire season, combined with record heat and high lightning activity, sparked several significant fires, including the Cedar Creek and Rum Creek Fires. Governor Kate Brown declared a State of Emergency in August 2022, and the State Emergency Coordination Center was activated in September 2022. Two firefighters died in action that year, both killed by falling trees.

## **2023: Firefighting Insurance, Statewide Wildfire Map and Insurance Concerns**

Measures passed during the 2023 legislative session focused on revising wildfire hazard mapping and building standards to better protect vulnerable communities. These bills were also designed to strengthen partnerships between state and federal agencies for proactive forest management and recovery, as well as to increase transparency and fairness in homeowners' fire insurance practices. Targeted financial support and resources were provided to improve defensible space, home retrofits, and emergency shelters.

In April of 2023, Oregon discontinued its longstanding wildfire insurance policy with Lloyd's of London, which previously served as a financial safety net during severe fire seasons, citing rising costs and declining value. If wildfire suppression costs exceeded Lloyd's deductible (previously around \$50 million), the policy would reimburse up to \$25 million in additional expenses. Oregon was the only state with a private wildfire insurance arrangement, which had been in place since 1973. By 2023, the deductible had risen to over \$78 million while the coverage remained unchanged, and the premium was \$4.1 million. The Emergency Fire Cost Committee recommended ending the policy, citing a decreasing Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund and a preference to use the funds for wildfire response.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *Item 38: Department of Forestry 2022 Fire Season Analysis*  
<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021i1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/257518>

<sup>8</sup> The Ashland Chronicle, *Oregon Dept. Of Forestry Passes on Firefighting Insurance Policy*,  
<https://theashlandchronicle.com/oregon-dept-of-forestry-passes-on-firefighting-insurance-policy/> (last visited September 4, 2025)



Oregon’s 2023 wildfire season burned approximately 190,500 acres, below the 10-year average. Favorable conditions including a strong snowpack, periodic rainfall, and minimal east wind events helped contain 94 percent of fires at under 10 acres. However, major fires such as the Flat, Bedrock, Lookout, and Golden Fires caused significant damage, with the Golden Fire destroying 49 homes. Suppression costs totaled an estimated \$73.8 million, reflecting high expenses despite limited acreage.

**Table 2: Fire Season Cost and Acreage Burned Per Year 2020-2025**

Fire Season Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Gross Cost to ODF (in millions)	\$130	\$129	\$35	\$73.8	\$132	TBD
Approximate acres burned	1,300,000	816,880	364,456	190,500	1,900,000	TBD

Source: LPRO

Data: Oregon Department of Forestry annual reports on fire season, hyperlinked for each year.

Human-caused ignitions led in fire starts, while smoke-related air quality issues remained a public health concern.<sup>9</sup>

Suppression costs depend not only on acreage but also on fire location and complexity.<sup>10</sup> According to the U.S. Forest Service, proximity to private lands, threats to structures, and the logistics involved in protecting communities have greater cost impact than acreage alone. This was evident in 2022 and 2023: although 2022 fires burned more than double the acreage of 2023, suppression costs were lower. Many of the 2022 fires, including the large Cedar Creek Fire, occurred in less densely developed areas. However, the 2023 fires were closer to communities, increasing costs and making 2023 one of Oregon’s most expensive wildfire seasons per acre.

## 2024: Wildfire Prevention and Response

In 2024, Oregon experienced its most severe wildfire season on record, burning over 1.9 million acres, nearly doubling ODF’s 2023 projected 10-year average. Early extreme heat and frequent lightning led to fires such as the Durkee Fire, which burned 294,265 acres. ODF incurred over \$318 million in suppression costs before federal reimbursements, depleting its budget and triggering emergency legislative relief and federal loan requests.

According to Oregon’s Legislative Fiscal Office and ODF, the 10-year averages for gross fire costs is roughly \$69 million, and for net state costs is roughly \$26 million. The

<sup>9</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *Item 21, Department of Forestry 2023 Fire Season Analysis*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/202311/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/277550>

<sup>10</sup> United State Forest Service, *Factors influencing large wildland fire suppression expenditures*, <https://research.fs.usda.gov/treearch/31571> (last visited September 4, 2025)



2024 season's gross and net costs are 4.6 and 4.7 times greater than the 10-year averages, respectively. The 1.9 million acres burned represents more than three times the 10-year average, and a 71 percent increase over the acres burned during the 2020 fire season.<sup>11</sup> Though structure losses were limited, resource strain was significant, with nearly 13,000 firefighters worldwide deployed and the Emergency Conflagration Act invoked repeatedly to manage threats statewide.

On November 26, 2024, Governor Tina Kotek called a special legislative session to allocate approximately \$218 million to ODF and the Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office (OSFM) for firefighting expenses.<sup>12</sup> With estimated total fire costs reaching \$352 million (\$212 million more than the previous record set in 2020) **SB 5801** provided funding while federal reimbursements and cost recoveries were pending. In December, the measure included \$107.9 million from the Emergency Fund and one-time General Fund appropriations of \$191.5 million to ODF and \$26.6 million to OSFM.<sup>13</sup>

## 2024: Funding Strategies Workgroup (Senate Bill 5701)

**SB 5701** (2024) directed ODF and the Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to convene a Wildfire Funding Workgroup to identify sustainable funding strategies for wildfire mitigation, suppression, and protection. In February 2025, the workgroup reported six alternative strategies for long-term funding solutions.<sup>14</sup>

## 2025 Legislative Session

During the 2025 session, legislators considered measures that proposed new wildfire funding strategies, addressed concerns with the Statewide Wildfire Hazard Map, expanded Public Utility Commission (PUC) authority over utilities, and strengthened homeowner fire insurance protections. **HB 3940** addresses wildfire funding gaps by creating a dedicated wildfire fund supported by a new tax on oral nicotine products and redirected interest from the state's Rainy Day Fund. The measure is projected to generate \$40 million for wildfire costs.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *Item 37: Department of Forestry 2024 Fire Season Analysis*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/202311/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/286816>

<sup>12</sup> Oregon capital Chronicle, *Kotek Calls Special Legislative session to Pay Outstanding Bills from Record Oregon Wildfire Season*, <https://oregoncapitalchronicle.com/2024/11/26/kotek-calls-special-legislative-session-to-pay-outstanding-bills-from-record-oregon-wildfire-season/> (last visited September 4, 2025)

<sup>13</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *SB 5801 Budget report and Measure Summary 12/12/2024*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2024S1/Downloads/MeasureAnalysisDocument/82783>

<sup>14</sup> Legislative Fiscal Office, *Department of Forestry and Department of the State Fire Marshal Wildfire Funding Workgroup Analysis*, <https://apps.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/293230>

<sup>15</sup> Legislative Revenue Office, *Revenue Impact of HB 3940 B 6/19/2025*, <https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2025R1/Downloads/MeasureAnalysisDocument/93508>



Public concern over the impact of the Statewide Wildfire Hazard Map on property values and insurance rates,<sup>16</sup> were addressed in **SB 83** and **SB 75**, which repeal the statutory requirements for maintaining and using the map, eliminating it altogether. Further addressing the public concerns, **SB 85** directs the Department of Consumer Business Services (DCBS), OSFM, ODF, and insurance stakeholders to collaborate on wildfire mitigation strategies aimed at reducing risk and improving insurance affordability. **HB 2463** further addresses consumer protection by requiring insurers to explain premium increases upon request.

Other 2025 legislation modified agency authority in wildfire management. **SB 863** allows the Oregon State Fire Marshal to recover suppression costs from individuals responsible for fires due to negligence or malice. Several utility related measures were introduced but not passed, including **SB 926**, **HB 3666**, and **HB 3984A**, which addressed utility liability, safety certificates and standards, and wildfire risk reporting.

## Staff

Alexa Piscanio, Legislative Analyst

## Legislative Policy and Research Office

Oregon State Capitol | (503) 986-1813 | [www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro](http://www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro)

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<sup>16</sup> The Associated Press, *Oregon's Wildfire Risk Map Emerges as New Climate Flashpoint*, <https://apnews.com/article/wildfires-science-fires-oregon-evangelism-8342f786db7850a2aca3163acb6d5574> (last visited September 4, 2025)



## Appendix A: Oregon's Wildfire Legislation 2021-2025

Measure ID	Description
<b>2021 Measures</b>	
<a href="#"><u>SB 762</u></a>	Required the creation of a Statewide Wildfire Risk Map, the establishment of defensible space and updated building code standards, identification of potential land use changes, and updates to Oregon's emergency response and smoke preparedness plans. It also directed electric utilities to develop wildfire mitigation plans addressing risk modeling, system hardening, vegetation management, and Public Safety Power Shutoff strategies. To reduce hazardous fuels, SB 762 established a large-scale fuel treatment program across public and private lands, created the Oregon Conservation Corps for youth-led fuel reduction, and funded grant programs for small forestland owners and prescribed burn efforts. It also enhanced suppression capacity, equipment, and agency resources, while requiring baseline wildfire protection in every county. Oversight of these initiatives was assigned to a newly created Wildfire Programs Director and Council.
<a href="#"><u>HB 5006</u></a>	Approved nearly \$500 million for fire recovery, including housing replacement and Emergency Board investments.
<a href="#"><u>HB 2927</u></a>	Restructured emergency management framework by renaming and establishing the Office of Emergency Management and the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) as independent state agencies and created the Emergency Preparedness Advisory Council and the Local Government Emergency Management Advisory Council.
<a href="#"><u>SB 590</u></a>	Authorized cultivated cropland to organize rangeland protection associations to expand wildfire protection.
<a href="#"><u>HB 2289</u></a>	Provided a streamlined regulatory process for 2020 wildfire survivors to rebuild without traditional land use procedures.
<a href="#"><u>HB 3219</u></a>	Authorized local approvals, streamlined permitting, zoning flexibility, and modified construction standards for expedited manufactured dwelling park redevelopment. Also specified landlord and tenant responsibilities in the event of a future wildfire or other natural disaster.
<a href="#"><u>SB 405</u></a>	Extended the timeline for beginning home replacement for wildfire damaged properties in certain cases.
<a href="#"><u>HB 2809</u></a>	Allowed homeowners to live in recreational vehicles on damaged property for up to 24 months, regardless of the availability of water, electric, or sewer.
<a href="#"><u>HB 3272</u></a>	Required insurers to allow at least 2 years for rebuilding and additional living expenses (and up to 3 years in special cases) for losses from wildfires.
<a href="#"><u>SB 464</u></a>	Authorized wildfire-impacted counties to cancel 5/6ths of property taxes and refund overpayments. Limited to the 2020–2021 property tax year.
<a href="#"><u>HB 2247</u></a>	Authorized counties to waive interest charges on unpaid or late property taxes for 2020 wildfire or COVID-19 pandemic impacted businesses. Limited to the 2020–2021 tax year.
<a href="#"><u>HB 2341</u></a>	Authorized tax collectors to proactively prorate taxes for properties destroyed by fire or an Act of God.

[HB 2607](#) Exempted new residential construction from construction taxes when replacing homes destroyed or damaged by a wildfire or other emergency.

[SB 745](#) Created a pathway for Blue River and similar communities to develop centralized wastewater systems after the Holiday Farm Fire.

[HB 3216](#) Addressed drinking water access for a Jackson County mobile home park that lost two of its three wells to the Almeda Fire and created an expedited annexation into water districts for wildfire affected communities whose water supply demonstrably becomes inadequate or contaminated by a wildfire and who meet other specified conditions.

#### **2022 Measures**

[HB 4026](#) Provided grants to school districts impacted by the 2020 wildfires.

[HB 4087](#) Ensured media access to wildfire and disaster scenes on public lands.

#### **2023 Measures**

[SB 80](#) Revised provisions of SB 762 (2021), by shifting focus from fire “risk” to “hazard” and updating the statewide wildfire map accordingly. Allocated resources to enhance public education and prioritize resources for vulnerable areas. Further determined where building standards for fire resistance would apply. It emphasized community engagement, transparency, and coordination with local governments, while also providing financial support and grants for wildfire resilience, especially for low-income and vulnerable populations. It established new funding mechanisms and programs to support defensible space efforts, home retrofits, and emergency shelter spaces.

[SB 644](#) Tied wildfire safety standards to the approval of accessory dwelling units (ADUs) in rural residential areas.

[SB 872](#) Directed the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to expand collaboration with federal agencies via the Good Neighbor Authority Agreement to reduce wildfire risk on federal lands through forest thinning, fuel reduction, meadow restoration, and post-fire recovery. Emphasized science-based forestry to protect long-term ecological health and encouraged federal funding for statewide wildfire mitigation.

[SB 82](#) Required insurers to clearly explain cancellations, non-renewals, or premium hikes tied to wildfire risk, including property specific factors and mitigation steps that improve insurability. Required insurers to disclose discounts or incentives for mitigation and prohibited rate increases or denials based on the Statewide Wildfire Hazard Map.

[HB 2982](#) Required insurers to pay 70 percent of contents coverage on total loss claims from wildfires declared state emergencies.

#### **2024 Measures**

[HB 4016](#) Refined and expanded key fire prevention and response programs, updating the Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program to ease reimbursement for prescribed or cultural burn damages while capping payouts and clarifying eligibility. It also extended the Fire Hardening Grant Program deadline, giving homeowners more time to apply for funding to make their homes more fire-resistant, and modernized air quality terminology to reflect wildfire smoke’s public health impacts.

**SB 5701** Appropriated, modified, and established limitations on moneys from the General Fund to specified state agencies and the Emergency Board for biennial expenses. Directed ODF and OSFM to convene a Wildfire Funding Workgroup to identify sustainable funding strategies for wildfire mitigation, suppression, and protection.

**SB 5801** Provided \$191.5 million to ODF and \$26.6 million to OSFM to address costs and cash flow issues following the 2024 fire season.

**2025 Measures**

**SB 75** Removes references to the statewide wildfire hazard map and map-related provisions in statutes authorizing a county to approve ADU's and replacement dwellings in high wildfire hazard zones.

**SB 83** Repeals the Statewide Wildfire Hazard Map established in SB 762 (2021) and its application to defensible space requirements, the wildland-urban interface, the Wildfire Programs Advisory Council, agency reporting requirements and administration, seller's property disclosure agreement, comprehensive planning, accessory dwelling units and replacement dwellings, building codes, and the small forestland grant program.

**SB 85** Directs the Department of Consumer and Business Services, OSFM, ODF, and insurance-industry stakeholders to develop wildfire mitigation strategies to reduce risk and improve insurance affordability.

**SB 863** Authorizes the State Fire Marshal to recover fire suppression costs from individuals responsible for fires due to negligence or malice

**HB 2817** Removes permit closure as an option to restrict access to forestland exposed to fire danger.

**HB 3940** Establishes a dedicated wildfire fund by imposing a new tax on oral nicotine products and redirecting part of the Rainy Day Fund interest to support wildfire efforts. It removes sunset dates for certain risk reduction projects and updates forest protection laws, including revisions to the forest products harvest tax, rural fire protection zones, and the Emergency Fire Cost Committee.

**HB 2463** Requires insurers to provide a clear, written explanation for any premium increase upon renewal of certain homeowner and personal insurance policies, if requested by the insured.