

OREGON FOREST FIRE AND RESILIENCE INVESTMENT PACKAGE

Problem: The recent wildfires in Oregon have revealed a need for more firefighting resources and the development of community and landscape resiliency. Oregon wildfires cost a record \$514M in 2018, exceeding the record \$447M in 2017. Trends and future projections indicate strong likelihood of hotter summers and extended fire seasons, continuing a trend in more large wildfires and associated wildfire smoke. Impacts to human health and public safety are paramount. We can greatly enhance fire protection capacity within the Oregon Department of Forestry and make smart investments for reducing fire risk and smoke impacts while creating and sustaining healthy forests and communities. There are critical, near-term investments we can and must make now.

Solution: a four-part legislative package that: 1) invests in initial attack resources to keep fires small; 2) provides additional funding and staffing for the Oregon Department of Forestry to implement fire protection and preparedness in targeted, at-risk communities and landscapes, while investing in staff to protect forest resources and public safety; 3) funds and implements a “Community Resiliency and Smoke Impact Mitigation Grant Program” in at-risk communities; and 4) funds a landscape analysis of wildfire risk and develops mitigation strategies to help strategically target investments to reduce the risk to priority landscapes and associated communities.



Photo Credit: The Nature Conservancy

Enhanced Front-line Resources: Rapid suppression is vital to stopping large fires. More front-line resources are needed to get the job done. This package invests in two single-engine air tankers to be based in southern Oregon, as well as a Helitac unit that includes ten seasonal firefighters. \$1,000,000

Forestry Department Staff for Fire Fighting, Preparedness, and Resource Protection:

ODF needs more resources to lead fire-fighting, engage landowners in preparing for fire, implement restoration treatments in at-risk forests, and ensure forest resources are protected during fire season and year-round. This package includes 20 positions to help meet these needs. Critical investments include resources across the agency, as recommended by the Secretary of State’s audit. Investments include a position of deputy fire chief (1 FTE) to provide leadership; a cost recovery specialist (1 FTE) to manage and recover costs ; several wildland urban foresters (8 FTE) to address the most critical area

for public safety and lead efforts to restore at-risk forests; operations foresters (2 FTE) to contribute to federal land (“Good Neighbor”) efforts; a planning specialist (1 FTE) to help support federal efforts; resources specialists (3 FTE) with expertise in landslides, roads, and streams to protect people and resources year-round; resource, policy, and outreach positions (4 FTE) on state forests to build capacity and allow the state forest program to contribute a disproportionate portion of firefighting.

Community Resiliency and Smoke Impact Mitigation Grant Program: This grant program will provide \$500,000 from the general fund per biennium for planning (\$100,000) and implementation (\$400,000) of community smoke management plans, including intrusion exceptions and communication outreach plans, consistent with Oregon’s new smoke management rules.

- Planning grants will identify smoke-sensitive communities/populations and possible mitigation measures for affected communities and individuals.
- Implementation grants will implement a community-based public education campaign to inform community members about wildfire, smoke management, beneficial effects of prescribed burning, and science-based forest restoration to create healthy forests and safer communities.

Planning and implementation may be undertaken either directly by communities or by qualified contractors. Multiple similarly-situated communities may pool resources for a larger integrated approach across larger landscapes. Forest collaboratives associated with at-risk communities may be involved as appropriate. Program lead: Department of Environmental Quality in consultation with the Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon Health Authority.

Landscape Analysis of Fire Risk and Mitigation Strategies: This task item will provide \$500,000 from the general fund per biennium to the Oregon State University College of Forestry for facilitation, community outreach and engagement, GIS mapping, economic analysis consultation, agency staffing, and other technical assistance as needed for the completion of a statewide landscape analysis to identify communities and forest resources at risk from wildfire, with an emphasis on immediate threats to human health and public safety. Phase I (July – October 2019) would: 1) build off the Forest Service's Region 6 Quantitative Risk Assessment that mapped fire risk, firesheds, and associated high valued resources, and delineated management response units and mitigation actions that will reduce risk to human health and public safety; 2) identify science-based mitigation treatments and actions for homes and communities in at-risk areas; and 3) identify science-based mitigation for managed landscapes adjacent to at-risk communities and other identified values. Phase II (October 2019 – March 2020) would: 1) refine assessments, mapping, and treatment prioritization at the fireshed scale and around identified at-risk communities; and 2) develop an economic and operations plan for implementation of initial priority management needs and treatment types.

For More Information:

Representative Pam Marsh, rep.pammarsh@oregonlegislature.gov, 503-986-1405