



OREGON SENATE DEMOCRATS

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Senate Democrats Passes Comprehensive Wildfire Legislation to Protect Communities and the Environment

Senate Bill 762 establishes critical policies and makes much-needed investments to prevent wildfires

SALEM – The Oregon Senate approved Senate Bill 762 today, landmark wildfire legislation, which makes policy changes and direct investments to improve prevention, mitigation and response to wildfires. The multipronged approach contained within Senate Bill 762 ensures our state can proactively respond to wildfire risk, protect communities and save lives.

“Wildfires in this state have become more severe and more tragic,” said Senator Jeff Golden (D-Ashland). “The entire state breathed in the smoke. Businesses and agriculture were impacted. Lives were lost. This year, wildfires have already begun to put communities at risk. At this very moment, we are facing an unprecedented heat wave, with substantial risk of additional fires. We cannot wait any longer to act.”

According to the [Governor’s Wildfire Economic Recovery Council Report](#), 1.2 million acres burned in Oregon in 2020. As a result of those fires, the cost of wildfire, wind, response and debris removal is estimated at \$1.15 billion. Additionally, more than 5,000 structures were destroyed. Most of them were homes, and more than 2,000 displaced individuals required emergency shelter. Tragically, nine Oregonians lost their lives.

“We cannot continue the status quo of how we address wildfires in our state. Without action we can count on future devastation,” added Senator Golden. “Senate Bill 762 invests purposefully in our state’s readiness and resilience. It will ensure appropriate plans are in place when it’s time to respond. It will protect health, prevent destruction and protect human health and life.

“Scores of people have worked collaboratively for years to create a wildfire program for Oregon that rises to the scale of this crisis. We worked with experts at every level including scientists and researchers as well as the boots on the ground,” said Senator Golden.

Senate Bill 762 is supported by a spectrum of stakeholders, including communities most threatened by the risk of a catastrophic wildfire event as well as the firefighters who put their lives on the line when they answer the call to protect communities across Oregon. The bill was also developed with significant input from multiple agencies, which are tasked with carrying out the policies contained within Senate Bill 762 and establishing the Administrative Rules.

Among the extensive policies included in Senate Bill 762:

- Develops statewide, publicly available, map of wildfire risk incorporating information such as risk-classes and wildland urban interface (WUI) interaction;
- Creates wildfire prevention policies, including community driven restoration of forests and rangelands, and ignition resistant materials requirements for new construction within high-risk zones;
- Directs new defensible space standards;
- Establishes electric utility systems for use prior to and during wildfire events;
- Provides wildfire smoke protections to vulnerable communities;
- Increases firefighter capacity, including air defense resources;
- Invests in youth and workforce training programs to train future firefighters and land managers;
- Updates agency business systems to ensure appropriate cost controls, prudent financial management, oversight and reporting;
- Requires stakeholder engagement from public boards and advisory committees in development and review of the wildfire map, defensible space standards, building code safety measures and land use recommendations;
- Appoints a Wildfire Programs Advisory Council composed of stakeholders and members of the public to advise a new State Wildfire Programs Director, provide recommendations on implementation and community engagement;
- Invests \$200 million for essential workforce and local communities on the frontlines, managing and mitigating wildfires.

Senate Bill 762 passed the Oregon Senate on a 22-7 vote. The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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