

Oregon News

WILDFIRE RISK MAP

[Why lawmakers are seeking to kill Oregon wildfire risk map for second time](#)

Statesman Journal | By Zach Urness

Oregon Republicans held a press conference Monday laying out plans to repeal the risk map, which was [released earlier this year](#), and the stricter building codes and requirements it places on about 100,000 properties in the name of wildfire prevention.

Republicans touted different pieces of legislation — such as [Senate Bill 678](#) — that would eliminate the map.

A "peaceful protest" is planned to support eliminating the wildfire risk map beginning at noon on Feb. 25 at the Oregon Capitol.

[Gov. Kotek halts wildfire map appeals, prioritizes legislative action for transparency](#)

KPIC | By Bobby Corrsen, Vasili Varlamov

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek has ordered the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) to continue to accept all appeals of the Oregon Wildfire Hazard Map up to the Mar. 10 deadline but to pause sending the appeals to the Office of Administrative Hearings until after the legislative session, which must end no later than June 29.

[Oregon House, Senate Republicans want to do away with statewide wildfire risk map](#)

KGW | By Alex Jensen

Senator David Brock Smith said he appreciates the governor taking this step, but "Unfortunately it falls short of any substance."

The bulk of more rural land in Oregon under the map has been designated as a high hazard area for wildfires, which Republican lawmakers have said is a "real problem."

Senator Noah Robinson, who hails from Cave Junction in southern Oregon, said the maps were the wrong approach. He's introduced [Senate Bill 678](#) as way to repeal the provision in the 2021 bill (SB 762) that required the maps be created.

Bill sponsor **Senator Daniel Bonham** also opts for a more local decision-making approach to wildfire risk management, rather than a statewide risk classification system. This would be done through county classification committees made up of members from the state fire marshal and forestry agencies as well as a land owner within the boundary as a preference over a more one-size-fits-all state system.

[Oregon lawmakers seek repeal of wildfire hazard maps citing property value insurance concerns](#)

KEZI

Response from residents is largely negative, with many raising concerns about their property values and insurance. Republican lawmakers are now leading a push to get rid of the maps entirely. On Monday, Governor Tina Kotek announced that residents should continue submitting hazard map appeals to the Oregon Department of Forestry by the March 10 deadline. However, the governor is putting a pause on the appeals process until the legislative session concludes to allow lawmakers to deliberate potential changes and address public concerns. Republican lawmakers said a pause on appeals isn't enough to protect rural homeowners who are uncertain about the future of their properties.

[Gov. Kotek, Legislature want to pause action on wildfire hazard map to quell public frustration](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Alex Baumhardt

Oregon House and Senate Republicans called for the Legislature at a news conference Monday to repeal the entirety of [Senate Bill 762](#), the package of wildfire actions and funding priorities passed in 2021 as a response to the devastation of the 2020 Labor Day Fires that killed nine people and became the most expensive natural disaster in state history. **State Sen. Noah Robinson, R-Cave Junction**, is sponsoring [Senate Bill 678](#) to undo the wildfire protection provision of that 2021 package, including requiring electric utilities to create wildfire protection plans, requiring state agencies to develop new

defensible space and building code requirements to protect homes and communities and creating programs to mitigate the impact of wildfire smoke on public health.

House and Senate Republicans at the press conference said the burden of wildfire mitigation should be on state and federal agencies, not private landowners.

But mass firings last week of federal workers ordered by the Trump administration have led to a loss of about 10% of the U.S. Forest Service's workforce and about 4% of the workforce at the U.S. Department of the Interior, including 800 employees of the federal Bureau of Land Management. Slightly more than half of all land in Oregon is owned by the federal government and managed by the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management — including 60% of Oregon forests.

An ongoing federal funding freeze is also threatening wildfire investments going into the 2025 fire season. In Oregon, it's already stopped or slowed the work of the Ashland-based Lomakatsi Restoration Project, a nonprofit that helps with hazardous fuels reduction work on federal land in Oregon, California and Idaho, according to [reporting](#) from The Guardian.

Drazan said she and Oregon Republicans are not worried about how those cuts will impact the state's ability to prevent and respond to wildfires this year.

"I have every confidence that our federal partners are as committed as we are to ensuring that our federal lands are managed and that we do negate the risk of wildfire here in the state of Oregon," she said.

POLITICS

[INSIDE DOUGLAS COUNTY 2.17.25](#)

KQEN News Radio

State Senator David Brock Smith joins us live from Salem for an update on the Wildfire Hazard Map issue.

[Oregon fights wrongful conviction payouts. A new bipartisan bill aims to end that –](#)

OPB | By Ryan Haas

The concept of a 2022 bill to address wrongful convictions in Oregon was simple: Pay people \$65,000 for each year they spent in prison if their convictions were later overturned due to likely innocence. That hasn't happened in reality.

"That's certainly not how we intended it," **Republican state Sen. Kim Thatcher of Keizer** said.

Thatcher is co-sponsor on a bipartisan bill before Oregon lawmakers this session that aims to get money to wrongfully convicted people faster. It would set stricter guidelines for when the state Department of Justice should challenge payouts and require the agency to acknowledge new evidence of innocence rather than simply reviewing the original prosecution. In **Thatcher's** view, that will get money to people faster if they've been harmed by the criminal justice system.

In 2022, no Oregon lawmaker voted against the compensation bill. This year's bill so far has no legislative opposition either, according to **Thatcher**, and a wide array of Republicans and Democrats want to see changes.

In many cases, exonerees in Oregon leave prison with little to no support. Johnson, for example, [received zero dollars when he was released](#) from the Marion County Jail in 2023. Despite an appeals court overturning Johnson's conviction in 2021, prosecutors kept him imprisoned for roughly two years longer while they debated taking him back to trial. The 64-year-old now lives in Arkansas and makes ends meet with part-time work and Supplemental Security Income payments from the federal government.

"I still don't think it makes up for all of it, but it would help a person who has been wrongfully incarcerated to get back on their feet," **Thatcher** said.

Thatcher agreed, saying Oregon's approach to wrongful convictions defies typical red-state, blue-state expectations when compared to Idaho on this issue.

"It's like they're fighting it at every turn," Thatcher said, "which I think is very odd for Oregon."

Thatcher said lawmakers are currently in discussions with the state Department of Justice to shape the bill in a way they could support, and she believes it has a high likelihood of passing this legislative session.

[Oregon governor encourages lawmakers to expand drug treatment, increase worker wages](#)

KATU | By Wright Gazaway

Oregon lawmakers [have a chance to expand access](#) to critical care to address [the drug crisis playing out in Oregon cities](#) at a time when the state ranks near the top of the U.S. in addiction rates and near the bottom for access to care.

A 2022 study by OHSU found Oregon has a 35% shortage in outpatient treatment facilities, a 60% shortage for inpatient treatment, and a 27% shortage for residential detox facilities.

“The legislature definitely has within their authority to make policy changes to where we could increase that. We just don’t,” state senator **Cedric Hayden**, R-District 6 – the vice chair of the senate health care committee – said.

Hayden said it’s a topic he’s willing to work across the aisle with Kotek on. A staffer for the state senator said he’d like to see even more funding towards expanding treatment and detox.

“It just isn’t a priority here in Oregon to do that. It’s almost like we’ll decriminalize everything. Put it to the side. We’ll make it voluntary, but the problem continues and grows,” **Hayden** said.

[Under growing political pressure, Providence agrees to resume negotiations with striking nurses](#)

OPB | By Alex Zielinski

Officials at Providence Health and Services have agreed to return to negotiations with a union representing nearly 5,000 nurses across multiple hospitals, according to a press release from the Oregon Nurses Association. Providence representatives said they will meet with the union for mediation on Tuesday and Wednesday after a number of public officials, most recently 11 Portland City Council members, urged them to return to negotiations. Nurses have been on strike for 39 days. Bargaining had been stalled for two weeks.

[Greater Idaho movement wants a seat at the table](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Barabara Klein, Kay Kerriden, Beth Upshaw

Those living west of the proposed line may be inclined to ignore the concerns or the purpose of the plan. There may be a tendency to ridicule the proposal as a joke, but the concerns are not a joke. Supporters have noted a variety of issues including water rights, agricultural regulations, rural broadband, spikes in unsheltered homelessness, public land use, solar priorities, protocols for ranchers, undue burden of estate taxes, media, housing, health care deserts and more. The League of Women Voters has positions on most of these issues, but more importantly, we strive to ensure all voters are represented whether east, west, north or south.

[Oregon union asking lawmakers to pass worker safety bills](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin

Oregon union leaders and workers said the state needs to put more safeguards in place to protect employees from harm when they work in dangerous jobs in corrections, behavioral health and others. They are backing several bills they say would help. [Senate Bill 24](#), for example, would set minimum staffing standards for health care workers in prisons and another proposal not yet introduced would limit mandatory overtime for Oregon Department of Human Services workers in group homes. And [Senate Bill 606](#) would broaden workers compensation benefits to automatically cover post-traumatic stress-related conditions for Oregon State Hospital employees and DHS group home workers. Those proposals are backed up by a survey released Monday by the Oregon American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees.

[Hundreds gather at Oregon State Capitol to protest Trump on Presidents Day](#)

Salem Statesman Journal | By Isabel Funk

Several hundred people gathered at the Oregon State Capitol State Park on Monday afternoon as part of the second protest in a series of nationwide demonstrations against the Trump administration.

[Oregon educators rally for special education funding reform at Salem hearing](#)

KATU | By Sana Aljobory

Hundreds of educators from across Oregon gathered in Salem to advocate for House Bill 2953, which aims to lift funding caps for special education services in the state's public schools. The bill, discussed in a packed hearing room, seeks to address the gap between current funding and the actual needs of students requiring special education.

Currently, Oregon caps additional funding for special education at 11% of the State School Fund, while the average number of students needing these services is closer to 14.8% per district. Some districts report even higher numbers, leading to a mismatch between funding and actual needs.

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

[With surge in K-12 student homelessness in Oregon, advocates and students share perspective](#)

KPTV | By Adrian Thomas

The number of Oregon K-12 students experiencing homelessness has reached its highest levels in more than a decade, according to recent state data. Rising living costs, the end of pandemic aid, and a lack of resources have contributed to the increase, according to experts, leaving more children in unstable housing situations.

According to the Oregon Department of Education, more than 22,000 students statewide were classified as homeless during the 2023-2024 school year—about 4% of the state's total K-12 population.

Additionally, over half of those students did not attend school regularly, highlighting the broader impact of housing instability on education.

[Moving beyond addiction: Clatsop County's deflection program shows some success](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ben Botkin

To tackle its drug problem, Clatsop County has embarked on an experiment stemming from [House Bill 4002](#) passed last year. Lawmakers gave counties the option — and funding — to develop voluntary deflection programs that steer willing drug users into treatment and other services and away from jail. The law gives each county the flexibility to set up their programs and requirements.

[Emergency shelter operators sound off to Oregon lawmakers after winter storm](#)

KGW | By Blair Best

Multnomah County last week opened emergency shelters for the first time this winter, when a winter storm began arriving in the region. In all, county officials opened eight warming shelters from Portland to Gresham.

But the hearing Monday also included providers from rural Oregon, and their concerns differed from those in the urban parts of Oregon. Their biggest challenge comes down to transportation; the Community Action Program of East Central Oregon, or CAPECO, covers more than 8,000 square miles, which makes it difficult for them to reach people.

The rural Oregon organizations also don't have enough shelters. And the ones they do have can only offer limited services.

TRUMP

[Trump administration gives schools a deadline to end DEI programs or risk losing federal money](#)

OPB | By Collin Binkley

The Trump administration is giving America's schools and universities two weeks to eliminate [diversity initiatives](#) or risk losing federal money, raising the stakes in the president's fight against "wokeness" and sowing confusion as schools scramble to comply.

In a memo Friday, the Education Department gave an ultimatum to stop using "racial preferences" as a factor in admissions, financial aid, hiring or other areas. Schools are being given 14 days to end any practice that treats students or workers differently because of their race.

Republicans worry GOP-led states will suffer from Trump's firings of federal workers

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Jennifer Shutt

Some Republicans are raising concerns about how reducing the federal workforce by potentially hundreds of thousands of people and canceling spending approved by Congress will affect the country — especially the regions filled with loyal GOP voters.

U.S. Education Department threatens yanking funds for schools that use race in decisions

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Shauneen Miranda

The U.S. Department of Education is threatening to rescind federal funds for schools that use race-conscious practices in admissions, programming, training, hiring, scholarships and other aspects of student life, according to a [Dear Colleague letter](#) sent to schools.

The letter offers a sweeping interpretation of a [U.S. Supreme Court ruling](#) in 2023, which struck down the use of affirmative action in college admissions.

Though the ruling “addressed admissions decisions, the Supreme Court’s holding applies more broadly,” wrote Craig Trainor, the department’s acting assistant secretary for civil rights.

Trainor said that “federal law thus prohibits covered entities from using race in decisions pertaining to admissions, hiring, promotion, compensation, financial aid, scholarships, prizes, administrative support, discipline, housing, graduation ceremonies, and all other aspects of student, academic, and campus life.”

‘Slap in the face’: Oregon, Washington Forest Service employees speak on layoffs

KPTV | By Karli Olson

The United States Forest Service and the National Park Service is starting to see layoffs due to the Trump administration’s attempts to cut back on federal spending.

Employees on probationary periods tell us they received phone calls and letters on Friday and Saturday, informing them of their terminations.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Dead body found on Sauvie Island; investigation underway

Oregon Live

A dead body was discovered on Sauvie Island on Monday, the Multnomah County Sheriff’s Office reported.

ENVIRONMENT

New data confirms contaminated wells in Crook County, but doesn’t point to source

OPB | By Emily Cureton Cook

[A state report](#) released this month confirms contaminated water in more than two dozen Crook County home wells, some of which contain high levels of heavy metals and other pollutants that put human health at risk.

Their homes are near a sand and gravel mining site that has long been under scrutiny for its potential role as a polluter. The site’s operator, Knife River Corporation, denies it’s to blame, and is seeking state authorization to expand work in the area.

After two of McCormick’s three young children developed severe rashes following a bath, she decided it wasn’t worth the risk.

“I have [my kids] bathe at either my mom’s house or my grandma’s house,” she said.

This has been the status quo for years now while McCormick and many of her neighbors haul in bottled drinking water to avoid the taps. She said it’s exhausting, expensive work to keep the household running, and it no longer feels like a home.

In the meantime, the state is telling residents with contaminated water about potential health risks and [pointing them to resources](#) like filtration systems. The price of installing such systems can run into the tens of thousands of dollars, and the state isn’t helping with those costs, said OHA’s Environmental Public Health Section Manager Gabriela Goldfarb. “The policy in Oregon, and in the rest of the country, is typically that domestic well owners are responsible for their own water quality,” she said.

There are exceptions, such as [in the Lower Umatilla Basin](#), where nitrate pollution due in part to commercial agriculture has sparked state financial support for residents left to grapple with unsafe drinking water.

[Are octopuses smarter than pigs? Should we eat them? Oregon bill to ban octopus farms stirs controversy](#)

Oregon Live / By Aimee Green

Octopuses have nine brains, use tools, have the ability to recognize people and are so bright and brilliant it'd be cruel to farm them for human consumption.

And so the bill has launched a wide-ranging discussion that has stirred deeper and sometimes uncomfortable questions about the intellectual abilities of the animals Oregonians eat and the industrial production of meat in a society in which many are resolving to up their daily protein intake.