

# Wildfire and Oregon's Rangelands

Association of Oregon Counties  
Baker County  
Intermountain West Joint Venture  
Oregon Association of  
Conservation Districts  
Oregon Cattlemen's Association  
Willamette Partnership

## The problem

**Mega-fires:** Oregon's sagebrush rangelands are at increasingly high risk for frequent large wildfires. A series of "mega-fires" (greater than 100,000 acres) has burned more than 1.5 million acres in recent years.

**Fueled by Invasives:** Wildfires spur the growth and spread of invasive, non-native annual grasses that dry out early and fuel a continuing cycle of larger and more intense fires. Treatments involve controlling invasives and re-establishing more fire-resistant perennial grasses.

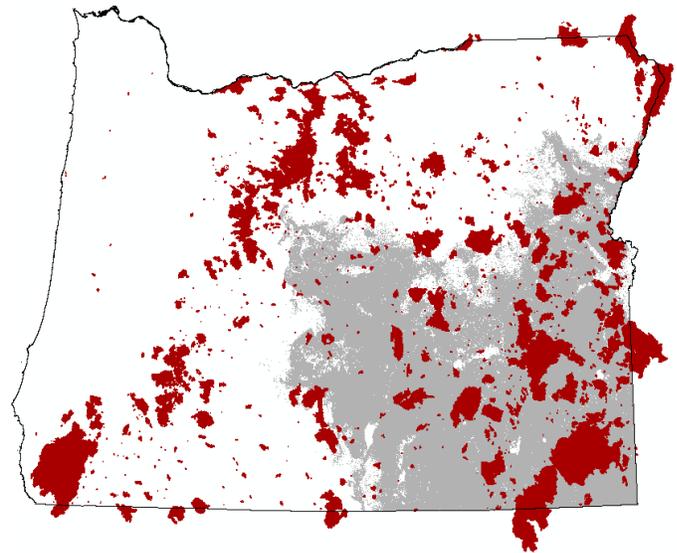
**People and wildlife at risk:** The intertwined threats of fire and invasives pose major risks to rural communities, vulnerable wildlife, and the region's traditional ranching-based economy.

## The need

**1.6 million acres:** Initial estimates to treat invasive annual grasses and restore more resilient native species in highest risk watersheds total nearly \$1 billion.

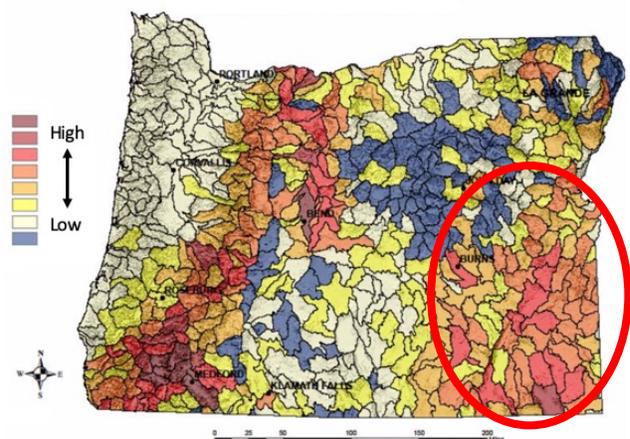
## The recommendation

**New funding to reduce wildfire risk on rangelands:** "The state should provide an initial \$1 million in 2020 for a grant program focused on reducing fuel loads associated with invasive annual grasses across Oregon's rangelands." – *Governor's Council on Wildfire Response, Final Mitigation Committee Report, December 2019*



Many of Oregon's largest recent wildfires (shown in red) have been in rangelands (gray)

## Overall Wildfire Risk by Watershed



Sagebrush rangelands in southeast Oregon are among the highest priorities (red and orange) for treatment to reduce wildfire risks

# Rangeland Fires

## a threat to rural economies



Rangelands, which cover approximately one-third of Oregon, have been hit with an increasing number of “megafires” in recent years.

In 2012 alone, three large fires burned more than 1 million acres [more than three times the size of the Tillamook Burn fires of the 1930s-1950s] of southeast Oregon rangeland, with major impacts on local communities, the livestock industry, and the state’s dwindling population of sage grouse, a species that narrowly avoided listing under the federal Endangered Species Act in 2015.

The severe fire weather conditions (high winds, low humidity, high temperatures) that typically drive large fires occur almost every year in rangeland settings. Due to the widespread invasion of cheatgrass and other non-native annual grasses into rangelands, highly flammable and continuous fuel is now present throughout much of the landscape and can burn rapidly and severely under the right conditions.

Long-term investments in treatments to reduce invasive annual grasses and re-establish perennial bunchgrasses are needed to create more fire-resistant and resilient rangelands. Initial estimates of rangeland treatment needs in QRA [quantified risk assessment] high-risk priority watersheds total 1.9 million acres and just over \$1 billion. Improved seeding technologies, local capacity, and outcome-based grazing strategies may lower costs in the future, but implementation will require the development of a new programmatic framework for investment at the state level to support effective and efficient action through community-based partnerships.

-- Governor’s Wildfire Response Council, Final Mitigation Committee Report, December 2019

**No state agency or program currently addresses wildfire mitigation needs on rangelands.**

**Initial 2020 funding for new grants program through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board would support local project development and implementation.**

Post-fire: Miller Homestead (2012)

