

Ron Carmickle
Mayor of Gates, Oregon

Oregon Senate
Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery

April 27, 2021

**Re: Possible Waste, Fraud and Abuse in the Marking of Fire
Impacted Trees in the Wake of the 2020 Wildfires**

Dear Senator Golden:

My name is Ron Carmickle, Mayor of Gates, Oregon. The Labor Day fires overwhelmed our town. Most of us had to flee from these fires with little to no warning to return to hundreds of our homes burned to the ground and buildings destroyed or heavily damaged. I lost my home and all my life's history and all my belonging, as did many of my friends and neighbors. Our roads, water systems, and utilities were all severely impacted. We were devastated and other Oregon communities suffered just as well.

I understand that Oregon has received FEMA assistance for both the clean-up of property and to address roadside hazard trees. This week I became aware of crews working in our community marking trees.

At first, I thought these folks were just doing property cleanups. After further investigation, I realized, they had been marking hundreds of trees, throughout the Canyon. Many of these trees appeared stressed, but likely to survive and did not seem to pose any hazard. The baffling element is the way these trees are being selected, and the crews who are marking them. These crews did not look like arborists. Rather they appeared to be large groups of low wage workers.



The largest portions of these trees seem to be located on private property, with huge numbers of trees tagged in these locations. At the entry to North Santiam Park, I counted over 30 marked trees in an area of about $\frac{1}{4}$ acre or less. Very few of the trees appeared to be substantially damaged. This is a consistent occurrence, I have found, all along the North Santiam Hwy.

Oregon Public Broadcasting has reported that arborists working on the project left because of issues with the project scope, tree marking and standard operating procedures. <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/04/14/arborists-say-odot-post-fires-tree-cutting-is-excessive-rushed/>

After several consultations and reading the OPB article, these markings have me deeply concerned for my community and the welfare of my State. I understand contractors are being paid By How Many Trees they Cut. This is troubling, since it opens the door to pilfering.

I believe there is waste, possible fraud and abuse on this project. What is marked and what is not marked makes no sense to me. I have attached several photos showing patches of dozens, if not hundreds of trees marked to cut. The last two photos show a corner of my property where there is a small fir tree marked for removal that poses no hazard

and although stressed, I believe it will survive just fine. However, there are several maple trees, near the road, that are a hazard and definitely need removal that is not marked. This is just a small example of the nonsensical markings of these trees in the Santiam Canyon and along Hwy 22. I fear to see what is going on in the rest of Our Beautiful State of Oregon.

I am upset to see people taking advantage of our community and destroying our natural beauty. We have already lost so much; we cannot afford to lose any more. I ask that you immediately look into these excessive markings and ask the contractors responsible to explain themselves and stop any further cutting until this can be sorted out.

Sincerely,
Ron Carmickle
Mayor Gates, Oregon







