

## **SJM 3**

### **Federal Wildfire Reimbursement**

Forests make up nearly half of all the land in Oregon and wildfire is a frequent occurrence across the state, particularly in southern and eastern Oregon. However, a comprehensive picture of the wildfire landscape is clouded by the mix of public agencies and private interests that, together, control more than 30 million acres. At the center of that landscape is the federal government. At a total of 18 million forested acres, Federal land accounts for a total of 60% of Oregon's forestland.<sup>1</sup>

Due to the sheer volume of federal forestland in Oregon and compounded by poor management, forest fires that originate on Federal land are all too common. The number of wildfires on federal lands in Oregon is typically greater than the number of wildfires on state or private lands.

Between 2000 and 2019, 15 of the 16 megafires in Oregon started on federally managed lands – many of them then spread to private and state lands where they were put out because of road access and better fuels management. Excluding the 2020 fire season, 86% of the forested acres that have burned in Oregon in the past decade were on Federal lands.<sup>2</sup>

The Federal lands are burning more acres and with greater frequency. The United States Forest Service lands are burning at more than twice the rate of Bureau of Land Management lands which are protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry. And Forest Service Lands burn at nearly five times the rate of other private and state lands that are protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry.

In 2020, wildfires in Oregon burned more than 1.2 million acres statewide, with some of the largest and most devastating fires worsened by a severe windstorm on Labor Day that spanned eight counties. In the aggregate, these fires destroyed more than 5,000 homes and commercial structures. The impact to communities across the state was devastating. These fires threaten mills, destroy homes and structures, take lives, displace thousands of Oregonians, blanket the state in dangerously high smoke levels and dramatically impact whole communities.

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<sup>1</sup> [oregonforests.org/Federal Forestland](https://oregonforests.org/Federal-Forestland)

<sup>2</sup> [ofic.com/wildfire-information](https://ofic.com/wildfire-information)

For 2020 alone, the cost to FIGHT these fires was high — \$354 million.<sup>3</sup> However, the TOTAL cost of these fires is much higher. Based on a Preliminary Damage Assessment conducted by FEMA, the Oregon Office of Emergency Management estimates a total cost of \$1.15 Billion in wildfire/wind damage, response costs, and debris removal.<sup>4</sup> As of January, we've only received \$32.2 Million in FEMA Individual Assistance payments to Oregonians.<sup>5</sup>

The cost of these fires is staggering. The human toll is staggering. The Federal Forestlands are severely mismanaged, and this mismanagement result in the destruction of Oregon forests and the loss of life and property. If the Federal government can't or won't address the issue of fires starting on Federal land, it's at least time that we ask the Federal government to pay for the problems that they are creating.

Notably, the current situation is plainly unjust. If a fire starts on private land and spreads to federal land then the private landowner is liable for the damages on federal land. However, the reverse is not true. When a fire starts on federal land and spreads to private land the federal authorities have no fiscal responsibility.

Senator Fred Girod

Senate District 9

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<sup>3</sup> [statesmanjournal.com/climate-change-Oregon-wildfires](https://statesmanjournal.com/climate-change-Oregon-wildfires)

<sup>4</sup> [statesmanjournal.com/wildfires-possible-expensive-disaster](https://statesmanjournal.com/wildfires-possible-expensive-disaster)

<sup>5</sup> [oregon.gov/Wildfire-Economic-Recovery-Council-Report](https://oregon.gov/Wildfire-Economic-Recovery-Council-Report)