

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Natural Resources Committee
Informational Meeting on
***“State/Federal Government Collaboration to Reduce the Risk of
Catastrophic Wildfire”***

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Talking Points/Remarks
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- The last several fire years have proved what many wildland fire agencies have been experiencing for more than 20 years: wildland fire activity is occurring earlier in the spring, lasting longer into the fall, and involves more intense, difficult-to-control large wildfire activity.
- Nearly a decade ago Interior and Agriculture Department wildland fire agencies began work on the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy to address the ever-increasing nature of wildland fire activity.
- The strategy is a commitment to the mindset that as wildland fire agencies we all share responsibility for managing our public lands, protecting natural resources, and creating safe communities.
- In addition to the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy, we’re hard at work implementing the recently passed Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that includes once-in-a-lifetime wildland firefighter workforce reforms, pay increases, mental health and wellness programs, and hazardous fuels opportunities.
- For BLM in Oregon there are several significant initiatives that are directly tied to the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, including: *forest management and prescribed fire in southwest Oregon; rangeland fire efforts in eastern Oregon; and the Oregon State University wildland fire degree program.*

WILDLAND FIRE WORK IN SOUTHWEST OREGON

- Currently, 51 percent of all forests in southwest Oregon are overly dense and this area has the highest need for restoration in all of Oregon and Washington.
- Approximately 61 percent of land managed by the BLM Medford District is wildland urban interface – including 32 communities at risk of wildland fire including hundreds of thousands of residences. And 22 of these communities have the highest cumulative wildfire risk in the state.
- In March 2022, we completed a landscape-scale planning effort to restore forest health and improve habitat for special status species called Integrated Vegetation Management for Resilient Lands Environmental Assessment.
- On the ground, this will translate into 70,000 acres of prescribed fire, 60,000 acres of small-diameter thinning, and 20,000 acres of commercial thinning/selection harvest. All this strategic fire work is scheduled to take place over the next ten years. Projects include: Debry Chain, Late Mungers, and Table Rocks.
- We're working with local partners like the Rogue Forest Partners and the Klamath Siskiyou Oak Network to create seamless all-lands projects to address fuel loading and fire hazard adjacent to local communities.
- In addition to our landscape-scale planning efforts, our Medford District has been actively developing prescribed fire treatments. To date our Medford District has conducted 13 years of fuels treatment effectiveness monitoring. Over this time, 232 treatments have been impacted by wildland fire.

- We've found that fuel treatments help firefighters use direct attack methods, keep fire on the ground, reduce the number of spot fires, and decrease the severity of fires.

RANGELAND FIRE EFFORTS

- In 1964, the first Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) was formed in northern Malheur County. The RFPAs are a volunteer nonprofit comprised of ranchers and farmers in remote areas, often where there may be no state, federal, or local fire department. The RFPA model is based on the motto "*neighbors helping neighbors.*"
- Oregon has a robust network of 23 RFPAs covering over 14 million acres of rangeland. The BLM partners with RFPAs to collaborate and fund fuels management projects across eastern Oregon. This collaboration informs ranchers as to why the BLM fights fire the way that we do and raises awareness within the BLM of the issues within the ranching community.
- Complementing this RFPA work is our rural fire readiness program. The rural fire readiness program is dedicated to enhancing the firefighting capabilities of our wildland firefighting partners through equipment of items like hoses, fittings, tools, and radios.
- Funds are targeted towards wildland fire training, equipment, supplies, wildland fire prevention, and fire mitigation activities.

OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WILDLAND FIRE DEGREE PROGRAM

- A truly significant innovation that we are working on with Oregon State University is a first-of-its-kind wildland fire-focused degree program.

- The proposal addresses expansion of Oregon State University course offerings; professional development and continuing education; and work experiences and internships in the wildland fire arena.
- Developed in coordination with BLM and Forest Service professional fire managers, this degree program will be consistent with agency efforts to modernize the federal Office of Personnel Management professional fire manager educational series.
- These efforts will benefit the BLM, other agencies, and the public, by preparing new students and existing agency employees to serve effectively in professional fire management and other fire-adapted community roles.

CONCLUSION

- Overall, wildfire activity is lasting longer and becoming more extreme – a trend resulting in the term “fire year,” which is used to define it as a year-round occurrence.
- I’m hopeful these innovative all-hands/all-lands approaches being deployed by Interior, Agriculture, and the State of Oregon will continue to help us stem the tide of ever-increasing wildland fires.