

Support SB 928

Leverage ODF's Firefighting Expertise on USFS Land

- Formalizes ODF's role in jointly planning firefighting response with the U.S. Forest Service
- Gives ODF authority to fight fire on USFS property under existing federal laws

In the past ten years, Oregon has suffered several incidents of wildfire that originated on USFS property and, following predicted weather events, exploded into catastrophic fires with devastating loss of life and property (e.g.: 2022 Cedar Creek fire, 2020 Beachie Creek and Lionshead fires, 2017 Chetco Bar fire). Had the initial attack in the early days on those fires gone differently, it's possible the outcomes would have been significantly less disastrous, saving lives, property and air quality for all Oregonians.

ODF is renowned for its ability to keep fires small during times of the year when fire on the landscape is dangerous – 98 percent of fires on ODF-protected land are extinguished in ten acres or less. During the 2022 fire season, only eight percent of the acres burned in Oregon were on ODF-protected land. Historically, ODF maintains good working relationships with USFS field staff, allowing them critical access to consultation and strategic planning for fires that originate on USFS property. This gives ODF the opportunity to make recommendations and leverage their expertise to help prevent USFS fires from becoming catastrophic, 100,000-plus acre fires. Most of the time this relationship works well, but that access is predicated purely on personal relationships. Nothing requires USFS to consult with or involve ODF in their wildfire response planning process, even though they often do.

Why it's necessary

SB 928 formalizes, strengthens, and clarifies the role ODF plays in USFS fire response planning to prevent history from repeating itself. The bill creates a foundational expectation that no matter what relationship exists between USFS personnel and ODF personnel, ODF will have a seat at the table when USFS is discussing how to attack a fire.

SB 928 also brings USFS into the same firefighting ethos that already exists in Oregon: when a fire starts on private land, landowners are required to make an effort to contain the fire. If ODF determines a landowner's efforts are inadequate, they are legally allowed to enter private land to fight fire. SB 928 would extend that same expectation for USFS-owned property in Oregon. As a result, if ODF thinks initial attack on a fire should be done differently than the approach USFS is taking, there is an expectation ODF could exercise their legal right to step in and attempt to put the fire out themselves.



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