



STATE OF OREGON
Office of the Governor
KATE BROWN

Wildfire Response Legislative Proposal *February 2020*

Overview

Oregonians, our economy, and our environment have faced increasing threats and impacts of wildfire. With climate change, population growth, and record fuel levels in our forests, that is not expected to change. We need a comprehensive overhaul of the state's preparedness for and response to wildfires.

Addressing wildfire requires a holistic approach, including elements of mitigation, suppression, and adaptation—focusing on making the landscape and communities less susceptible to fires, improving firefighting safety and capabilities, and recovering after fire affects a region.

Governor Brown established the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response in January 2019 with the direction to review Oregon's current model for wildfire prevention and analyze whether or not the current model is sustainable given our increasing wildfire risks and costs. Upon extensive review of systems that were put to the test during fire seasons from 2013-2019, the Council developed recommendations for comprehensive change, including adjustments to land use, public health, wildfire response, and landscape management approaches. Together, these changes combine to spur a necessary course correction.

Through implementing the Council's recommendations, Oregon has the opportunity to protect its citizens and natural resources, while providing much-needed jobs and rural revitalization. Governor Brown drew from the report for her proposal to make the most urgent changes to help lessen the risk and impact of wildfire on Oregonians.

We can take significant steps in this session that will make a difference in our ability to respond to wildfire in the 2020 fire season, and set the stage for fire seasons for decades to come.

Governor's Recommended Investments

- **Mitigation**
 - Reduce fuels: Creates an ambitious program to reduce the risk of fire on the landscape through fuel reduction via thinning or controlled burns with a target to treat as much as 300,000 acres of land annually.
 - Better preparation by utilities: Creates standards for utility companies' property and procedures to ensure safe and reliable services while reducing the risk of transmission-related fire events.

- **Suppression**
 - Safe zone creation and planning: Calls for a new statewide plan to strategically and equitably create safe zones for structures. Clearing safe zones around structures, or defensible space, is critical to saving lives and property during wildfires. Much of the work of creating these spaces can be done routinely, instead of during the emergency itself.
 - First responder coverage expansion: Changes requirements for all lands to fall within a wildfire response jurisdiction, and sets a baseline level of protections. Currently, over one million acres across the state are completely unprotected during wildfires due to jurisdictional limits.

- **Adaptation**
 - Emergency designation and recovery: Treats wildfire like the emergency it is and creates an office within the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to help Oregonians survive and recover when wildfire affects their communities.
 - Improvement of building codes: Closes code gaps and prioritizes updated materials to ensure new homes are more fire resistant.
 - Air filtration systems: Provides funding for local communities to invest in smoke filtration systems, both in private homes and public spaces, prioritizing low-income residences, to help prevent health problems during wildfire.
 - Financial review of suppression costs: Creates an independent study of who pays for firefighting costs and how, comparing our revenue approach with neighboring states.
 - Continuation of Council: Extends the Wildfire Council to 2021, to continue advancing the council's recommendations and assisting with recommendation adoption efforts.

Intended Outcomes

- Reduce threats to life and structures through improvements in our ability to protect communities from fire.
- Reduce large fires — their costs and impacts — through fuel reduction, controlled burns, and landscape restoration.

Further Background

[Report from the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response](#)