



June 5, 2020

To: Senate Committee On Wildfire Reduction & Recovery
Fr: Matt Donegan, Chair, Governor's Council on Wildfire Response
Re: Chair Update

Chair Golden and members of the Committee, at the request of Chair Golden, this report summarizes near-term opportunities to advance the Wildfire Council's recommendations, amid budget constraints caused by COVID-19. Please consider this a "chair report" without the full benefit of the Wildfire Council review and approval.

I. Recommendations Currently Implemented

Recommendation 1: Transmission System Wildfire Plan (Fire-Adapted Communities)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Included in Senate Bill 1536
- Included in Executive Order 20-04
- Public Utility Commission currently working with relevant parties to develop, implement plans
- Next Step: No further legislative action required; monitor progress

II. Low-Cost, High-Impact

Recommendations 2-4: Defensible Space, Building Codes, Land Use (Fire-Adapted Communities)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Included in Senate Bill 1536. Extensive negotiations, with diverse stakeholder group, resulted in successful draft language and momentum.
- Opportunity:
 - Restart discussions with stakeholders as described by SB 1536, led by volunteers and supported by state agencies as resources are available
 - Hasten progress toward legislation in future sessions
- Next Steps:
 - Establish "Land Use and Wildfire Policy Advisory Committee" as described in SB 1536



Recommendations 15-16: Near-Term Restoration Treatments, Prioritization (Resilient Landscapes)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Included in Senate Bill 1536, which contemplated State investment presumed no longer available.
- Prospects of significant federal funding (e.g., Senator Wyden's 21st Century Conservation Corps for Our Health and Our Jobs Act) to overcome foregone State investment.
- Opportunity: build upon site selection and prioritization work conducted by Wildfire Council Mitigation Committee
- Next Step: establish prioritization process

Recommendation 22: Expansion of Protected Areas (Wildfire Response)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Included in legislative drafts by Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction & Recovery
- Objectives:
 - Expand State protection to cover additional 1 million acres including "wheat fields" (from 16 million to 17 million acres)
 - Lower financial risks from large fires resulting from dearth of proactive protection
- Opportunity:
 - Leverage RFP model to lower costs

Recommendation 24: Suppression Funding Formula (Wildfire Response)

- Ranked as high priority by Wildfire Council
 - Prioritization increased due to fiscal pressures caused by COVID-19
- Included in drafts of 2020 legislation by other legislative committees
- Objective:
 - Allocate costs between State and private landowners, consistent with values derived
- Next step:
 - Proceed with third-party analysis and recommendation

Recommendation 33: Public Engagement (Systems)

- Ranked among highest priorities by Wildfire Council
- Agency action mostly requiring coordination and integration of public messaging and outreach
 - Public engagement identified among highest ROI wildfire programs
- Next step:
 - ODF lead agency coordination and integration as described in Council report



III. Other High-Impact

Recommendations 6-11: Health, Disaster Recovery (Fire-Adapted Communities)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Not included in 2020 legislative drafts
- Objective:
 - Should investments in suppression / protection decline, in the event of severe fire events, State should be prepared for increased smoke exposure, physical safety risks, emergency response and disaster relief
 - Increased health risks would interact with demands on public services stemming from COVID-19
- Next Steps:
 - Integrate 2020 wildfire plans with those of other state agencies

Recommendation 23: State Suppression Capacity (Wildfire Response)

- Ranked among highest Council priorities
- Included in legislative drafts by Senate Committee on Wildfire Reduction & Recovery (“ODF Modernization”)
- Objectives
 - Prior to COVID-19, Oregon was already determined to be under-invested in wildfire systems, driving up costs (e.g., large fires resulting from inadequate initial attack) and causing other loss (human life and health, property, ecosystem degradation). The near-term and long-term outlook is expected to worsen, owing to climate change, hazardous fuel accumulation, and population growth, particularly within the Wildland Urban Interface.
 - Further disinvestment will heighten risks, including potential loss of third-party insurance (see Recommendation 26) and other financial risks (e.g., large fires resulting from inadequate initial attack, as stated above, along with additional financial strains on public services including health and emergency response).
 - In addition, further disinvestment in ODF jeopardizes capacity for fuel treatments including projects under the Good Neighbor Authority.
- Next Steps:
 - Given realities of state budget limitations, as well as growing risks from wildfire, weigh additional financial (and human and environmental) risks of further disinvestment in wildfire against other public services
 - Seek alternatives to allotment cuts
 - Seek alternative funding sources including federal and private landowner
 - Further refine Council recommendations and priorities for 2021-23 biennium



IV. Lower Cost, Moderate Impact

Recommendations 5, 12: Property Insurance (Fire-Adapted Communities)

- Ranked as high priorities
- Recommendation 5 included in Senate Bill 1536
- Objective:
 - Recommendation 5 presents a low-cost opportunity to gather insurance companies and encourage policies that reward wildfire risk reduction
 - Recommendation 12 presents a low-cost opportunity to monitor insurance markets to ensure access and affordability continue
- Next Steps:
 - Insurance Commissioner and DCBS implement recommendations 5 and 12

Recommendations 31: Suppression Collaborative (Wildfire Response)

- Ranked as high priority
- Agency action (ODF, OSU) to assess potential create new, or leverage existing, forest collaboratives whose scope would include wildfire suppression.
- Objective:
 - Neighbor communication and conflict resolution, particularly between federal and private landowners, modeled after successful rangeland cooperative in Harney County
- Next Steps:
 - Agency implementation