

ANALYSIS

Item 36: Department of Forestry 2021 Fire Season

Analyst: Matt Stayner

Request: Acknowledge the receipt of a report on the 2021 fire season and the preliminary report of losses on private lands of timber, building, fencing, livestock, and grazing land capacity.

Analysis: The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is reporting on the 2021 fire season and on preliminary report on private property losses as required by HB 2501 (2015).

Report on the 2021 Fire Season

ODF's 2021 fire season report details a rolling, by district, beginning of the fire season in March, with all districts reporting the closing out of the fire season by the first of November. As in recent years, the fire season has extended well past historical time frames, spanning both the 2021 and 2022 fiscal years. The report indicates that the fire season activity accelerated quickly, and the peak of the season lasted for 65 consecutive days. Statistics provided in the report indicate that the ten-year average for the number of fires on ODF protected lands, the number of acres burned, and the number of human-caused fires.

Gross fire costs for the 2021 season are reported at \$129.17 million. After subtracting anticipated Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants of \$25.6 million, anticipated federal agency cost reimbursements of \$33.4 million, and local fire district cost-shares of \$1.08 million, net emergency fire costs to the state are estimated to be \$69.09 million.

The state secured an insurance contract against the net state cost of large fires in excess of \$50 million for the 2021 season. This policy covers fires occurring after April 15, 2021, the effective date of the policy. There were approximately \$150,000 in net fire season costs that were not covered by the policy and are, therefore, assumed to be allocated to the General Fund. The residual anticipated claim against the insurance contract is \$18.94 million. The remaining net costs after insurance are anticipated to be allocated: \$40.15 million General Fund (80%) and \$10.0 million Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund (20%). It is expected that ODF will request funding for these amounts, as refined, and the residual costs of severity resource contracts not allocated to emergency fires, prior to the 2022 legislative session.

Report on losses on private lands of timber, buildings, fencing, livestock, and of grazing land capacity where the land is expected to be unavailable for two or more growing seasons

This report is required by HB 2501 (Chapter 517, Oregon Laws 2015). There were ten fires in 2021 that require reporting under the law. The total number of acres burned in these fires were 218,064 and 478 individual structures were lost, with the value of timber and structures lost totaling \$180.27 million.

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means acknowledge receipt of the report.

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Oregon Department of Forestry
Klein

Request: Report on the 2021 fire season and preliminary report of losses on private lands, of timber, building, fencing, livestock, and unavailability of grazing land capacity.

Recommendation: Acknowledge receipt of the report.

Discussion:

2021 Fire Season Recap

The 2021 fire season started with extended attack wildfires in March and the season continued through much of October in certain districts. The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) prepared for a severe fire season due to below average snow fall and drought conditions across much of the state. As of the date of the report, there were 1,117 fires on ODF protected lands, exceeding the 10-year average of 912 fires per season. A total of 224,332 acres were burned, also exceeding the 10-year average of 94,968 acres. Several investments were made by the Emergency Board in January 2021 to provide funding to ODF to advance fire protection efforts early in the season. This included additional positions, funding for fuel reduction efforts, and an increase to the severity program funding allowing for additional ground and air support.

During the 2021 fire season, ODF maintained a focus on safety including COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Health and wellness liaisons were integrated into the Incident Management Teams for both ODF and Office of the State Fire Marshall. This added capacity provided a focused effort on keeping firefighters safe and healthy. The initiative appears to have been successful as the number of known cases was kept low at ODF wildfire incidents.

Loss Reporting Summary (House Bill 2501)

House Bill 2501 (2015) requires ODF to report on fires impacting more than 1,000 acres of land and include losses of private timber lands, buildings, fencing and livestock, and grazing land expected to be unavailable for two or more grazing seasons. At this time, the Department is still making assessments of losses but has provided the following preliminary estimated information for the 10 fires meeting the criteria.

Fire	Private Forestland Acreage	Grazing Acreage	Number of Structures	Number of Livestock	Estimated Loss Amount (millions)
Bootleg	154,124		408		\$40.7
Log 329	5,682				Unknown
Elbow Creek	14,551		6		\$30.6
Grandview	1,552		14		\$5.6
Patton Meadow	1,245		4		\$1.0
Joseph Canyon	3,602				\$0.5
Ponina 132	1,191		7		\$1.1
Cutoff 215	1,000		22		\$0.6
Poole Creek	5,291		7		\$99.3
Cougar Peak	29,829		10		\$1.0

Fire Season Expenditures

The Department is still finalizing accounting for the 2021 fire season. Current estimates are nearly \$130 million of gross costs, with net costs of \$68.9 million after recoveries from federal agencies and FEMA. Due to gross costs exceeding \$50 million, ODF plans to initiate a claim against the catastrophic firefighting expense insurance policy through Lloyds of London for approximately \$18.9 million. Additionally, ODF estimates total Severity Program spending of \$9.3 million, this includes funding from the Special Purpose Appropriation for Severity Program, as well as funding available from the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund. Funding requests associated with the 2021 fire season will be requested through a future interim committee.



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Forestry

State Forester's Office

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October 18, 2021

Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, Co-Chair
Senator Betsy Johnson, Co-Chair
Representative Dan Rayfield, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE
H-178 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97301

RE: 2021 Fire Season Report

Dear Co-Chairpersons:

Nature of the Emergency/Request

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) respectfully requests permission to appear before the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means at its November 2021 meeting for the purpose of providing:

1. The final report on the 2021 fire season in Oregon.
2. The preliminary report of losses on private lands of timber, buildings, fencing, livestock, and grazing land capacity if the land is expected to be unavailable for two or more grazing seasons as required by HB2501.

Agency Action

2021 fire season report

The 2021 fire season was characterized by early season predictive services outlooks indicated an increased probability of potential significant wildfire potential and an above average fire season in the state of Oregon. Below average snowpack in many areas coupled with early snow melt and significant drought intensifying in the state required early preparation and preparedness for the 2021 fire season. Seasonal firefighters were hired earlier, and additional resources were utilized to be at the ready for the increased initial attack and large fire potential.

The statistics as of October 6 highlight the complexity, severity, and length of the fire season. For 2021, the year-to-date (YTD) number of fires on ODF-protected lands is 1,117, which exceeds the 10-year average of 912 fires. Acres burned for 2021 are at 224,332, which also exceeds the 10-year average of 94,968 acres. Human-caused fires accounted for 907 of this year's fires on ODF-protected lands, also exceeding the 10-year average of 661, burning 56,655 acres (10-year average: 62,597 acres burned).

Across all jurisdictions in the state, approximately 1,891 fires occurred that consumed 816,880 acres. This fire season the Oregon/Washington geographic area was at the highest level of preparedness (PL5) for 65 consecutive days.

Fall weather patterns have brought much needed rain to most parts of the state significantly moderating any new fire starts and fire behavior on the remaining fires burning in the state. At the time of this letter, all west side ODF districts, except for the Southwest Oregon District, had terminated fire season. Southwest and the remaining east side districts anticipate terminating the fire season prior to the end of October.

The 2021 fire season started early, with extended attack fires occurring as early as March 2021. Fire occurrence continued at a pace well above the 10-year average throughout April, May and June. By the end of May, five districts had declared fire season. By mid-June, another five districts declared fire season. ODF Incident Management Teams (IMTs) first deployed to the Cutoff Fire in the ODF Klamath-Lake District on June 19, 2021. That fire was contained at 1,288 acres. The next ODF IMT deployment was to the Lewis Rock Fire in ODF's Central Oregon District and was contained at 368 acres. These early fires exhibited fire behavior consistent with fires typically later in the year. By June 25, all the remaining districts had declared fire season.

On June 29 ODF assisted Redmond Fire and Deschutes County Fire with a series of fires just outside of Redmond that imminently threatened over 100 homes and prompted evacuations as well as the closure of the airport and community college. The fires qualified as Oregon's first FEMA FMAG fire of the year authorizing suppression cost reimbursement to the state and cooperating agencies.

On June 30, Governor Kate Brown declared a state of emergency due to the imminent threat of wildfire across Oregon. On the heels of record-breaking high temperatures, much of the state was in high or extreme fire danger with red flag warnings in effect for hot, dry, windy conditions and dry thunderstorms. With the extended forecast in Oregon calling for unseasonably high temperatures with no rain in the forecast—and with 19 counties already in declared drought emergencies—the threat of wildfire in Oregon was imminent.

In July, ODF IMT 2 mobilized to the Grandview Fire near Sisters, and on the same day, ODF IMT 1 mobilized to the Bootleg Fire in Klamath County, this fire was eligible for reimbursement under the FEMA FMAG program and eventually burned a total of 413,717 acres in Klamath and Lake Counties. On July 18, ODF IMT 3 mobilized to the Elbow Creek Fire near Troy, which resulted in all 3 ODF IMTs being mobilized at the same time.

In early August, several "complexes," or multiple fires being managed as a single incident due to their geographic proximity, ignited in Southwest Oregon. To highlight the incredible value of initial attack, especially when resources are so limited regionally and nationally, two complexes did not become large fires on the landscape because successful initial attack kept them small. In ODF's Southwest Oregon District, the Applegate Complex included 43 lightning fires in the Medford Unit, and the Apple Foot Complex was 23 fires on the Grants Pass Unit. These fires all occurred within a five-day period, but early detection and aggressive initial attack kept all those 66 fires from becoming large

incidents and further drawing down local, state, and national resources. The largest fires within those complexes were the Round Top Fire at 23 acres and the Buck Rock Fire at 17 acres. The resulting five large fire complexes were comprised of 104 fires that started during extensive predominantly dry thunderstorms that produced significant lightning.

The 18 Skyline Ridge Complex fires started on or around August 1 on ODF-protected lands 5 miles east of Canyonville, ODF IMT 1 was deployed on August 3. The 38 Devil's Knob Complex fires started on or around August 3 on federal lands 30 miles southeast of Roseburg. The 32 Rough Patch Complex fires started on or around July 27 on federal lands 26 miles southeast of Cottage Grove. The 11 Middle Fork Complex fires started on or around July 29 on federal lands 9 miles north of Oakridge. The 5 Bull Run Complex fires started on or around August 3 on federal lands 9 miles south of Detroit in the Bull of the Woods Wilderness Area on Mt. Hood National Forest.

Oregon National Guard (ONG) aviation resources were once again deployed on multiple fires for direct fire suppression missions as well as aerial medical extrication. ONG firefighting hand crews were deployed to the Bootleg and Rough Patch fires. Traffic Control Point (TCP) resources were also deployed to multiple incidents.

In Eastern Oregon, a swiftly moving lightning storm produced two positive lightning strikes, one in Klamath County and one in Lake County. The fires became the Willow Valley Fire, predominantly burning on BLM jurisdiction in Klamath County and the Patton Meadow Fire burning in Lake County and were managed as a complex known as the Fox Complex, ODF IMT 3 was assigned on August 13. The Patton Meadow Fire qualified as the state's third FEMA FMAG incident. In total, ODF IMTs deployed seven times, for a total of 92 days. Drought continued to intensify and as of September 9, 2021, all of Oregon was in drought: 27% of Oregon was in "exceptional" status, 50% in "extreme," 22% in "severe," and 1% in "moderate."

Fire season estimated costs

Fire season 2021 costs to date as of October 7th are once again significant. This year gross costs are estimated currently at \$129,174,634, while after fire cost recoveries from federal agencies and FEMA reimbursements, net costs are \$68,939,782. This results in an estimated claim against the catastrophic firefighting expense insurance policy through Lloyds of London of approximately \$18.9 million.

Fire prevention

Fire prevention remained a primary focus throughout fire season, with coordinated public outreach campaigns with our key fire prevention partner "Keep Oregon Green." ODF actively engaged with our local, state, and federal partners, including private landowners. The Oregon Department of Transportation supported the prevention effort through highway reader boards highlighting the extreme fire danger.

General Fund investments

There were a number of General Fund investments that were invaluable to ODF's operations during the 2021 fire season.

In January, the Emergency Board invested \$13 million in advancing fire protection in Oregon. These funds were valid through June 30, 2021. Investments included 33 limited duration positions for key fire line leadership and support capacity and additional months of funding for seasonal firefighters for the 2021 fire season. There was also an investment of \$5 million in funding for all-ownership strategic fuel reduction projects around communities was appropriated. Thirty-seven projects were awarded targeting 7,199 acres of fuel reduction, including prescribed fire. This included 1,400 hours of volunteer work, 500 hours of young adult training, 30 miles of right-of-way and hiking trails fuel mitigation treatments, and the hiring of 8 ODF limited duration FTE.

The General Fund and the Oregon Forestland Protection Fund partnership in ODF's severity program can be accredited for much of our initial attack success. The Emergency Board allocated \$5 million in State of Oregon General Funds to bolster the severity program through June 30. This provided a significant ability to add resources to our local districts and associations to respond quickly, safely, and effectively. Type 2 and 3 helicopters and additional ground resources were utilized and ODF added a next generation large airtanker and additional SEATs. Having the ability to mobilize necessary resources, when needed throughout the state continued to be a proactive approach to successful suppression. Additionally, ODF's infrared camera mounted on our state's aircraft funded through OFLPF's strategic investment program played critical role in successful early detection of fires when they were small. Estimated expenses for these resources is \$3.2 million.

A one-time General Fund increase of \$2 million was made to the Fire Protection Division's 2021-23 budget in recognition of the increased length and complexity of modern fire seasons. This increase was to provide additional capacity to staff all aspects of fire management and intended to off-set costs to all landowners.

Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA) Severity Program

The department manages a severity program, as introduced earlier in the report, by contracting for one large air tanker, eight medium helicopters, one small helicopter, five single-engine air tankers, two fire-detection planes and several ground-based resources. Additional aviation and ground resources were added during periods of very high fire danger and increased fire activity. Additional resources were procured through call-when-needed (CWN) contracts and local incident resource agreements. Over the past decade, the SPA has provided for the availability of statewide severity resources for use where and when fire conditions were most severe.

With the passage of HB 2050 during the 2013 Legislative Session, the annual SPA funding of \$2 million for the severity program was matched with up to \$3 million annually from the OFLPF, for a total severity program of \$5 million. In the 21-23 biennial budget, an additional \$5 million of general fund has been added to the SPA for total landowner and general fund investment of \$10 million. The severity program has been highly effective at keeping fires small by supporting ODF's ability in 2020 to keep 97 percent of fire starts on ODF-protected lands at 10 acres or less. The statewide severity program resources are in addition to district aviation resources already positioned throughout the state. The estimated SPA request for the 2021 fire season is currently \$9.3 million.

COVID-19

As a result of the COVID -19 pandemic, ODF spent significant time and effort implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies with local, state, and federal partners for wildland firefighting. ODF partnered with Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM) to incorporate “health and wellness liaisons” into the IMT structures at both agencies. The modules added specialized capacity to the IMTs that allowed the teams to focus on their firefighting objectives while additional responders focused on COVID-19 mitigation, personnel health, and relationships with county public health departments. ODF, OSFM and OHA worked together to address needs and concerns specific to COVID-19 and fire camps, with the goal of keeping firefighters and communities safe and healthy. By all indications, these efforts proved very successful in limiting the spread of COVID-19 among firefighting personnel. This fire season there were only eleven known positive cases of COVID-19 on ODF wildfire incidents in the state.

HB2501 Preliminary Report on Losses on Private Lands

The department is required to report on wildfires more than 1,000 acres regarding the losses on private lands of timber, buildings, fencing and livestock, and of grazing land capacity if the land is expected to be unavailable for two or more grazing seasons (HB 2501). During the 2021 fire season, 10 fires met the reporting criteria. This preliminary loss assessment report is consistent with the expectation of law, but limited by the time, capacity, and expertise required to offer a fair and comprehensive assessment of loss relative to what the state has experienced. As a result, these numbers are likely to change in the coming months.

The Bootleg Fire impacted 154,124 acres of private forestland and destroyed 408 structures; 161 were homes at a value of more than \$40.7 million.

The Log 329 Fire impacted 5,682 acres of private forestland.

The Elbow Creek Fire resulted in an estimated timber stumpage loss of \$29,829,550 across 14,551 acres of privately owned timberlands. Six structures were destroyed at an estimated value of \$698,000.

The Grandview Fire burned 1,552 acres of private forestland resulting in more than \$3.6 million in estimated timber stumpage loss. 14 structures were destroyed at an estimated value of more than \$2 million.

The Patton Meadow Fire burned 1,245 acres of private forestland resulting in about \$868,000 in estimated timber stumpage loss. Four structures were destroyed at an estimated value of \$122,000.

The Joseph Canyon Fire burned 3,602 acres of private forestland resulting in more than \$494,000 in estimated timber stumpage loss.

The Ponina 132 Fire burned 1,191 acres of private forestland resulting in \$893,460 in estimated timber stumpage loss. Seven structures were destroyed at an estimated value of \$253,000.

The Cutoff 215 Fire burned an estimated 1,000 acres of private forestland. 22 structures were destroyed at an estimated value of \$560,000.

The Poole Creek Fire burned 5,291 acres of private forestland resulting in more than \$99 million in estimated timber stumpage loss. Seven structures were destroyed at an estimated value of \$253,000.

The Cougar Peak Fire burned 29,826 acres of private. Ten structures were destroyed at an estimated value of over \$1 million.

Action Requested

Acknowledge and accept the following:

1. The final report on the 2021 fire season in Oregon.
2. The preliminary report of losses on private lands of timber, buildings, fencing, livestock, and grazing land capacity if the land is expected to be unavailable for two or more grazing seasons as required by HB2501.

Legislation Affected

None.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Nancy Hirsch
Oregon State Forester
(503) 945-7211

c: Jason Miner, Governor's Office
Oregon Board of Forestry
Matt Stayner, Legislative Fiscal Office
Renee Klein, Chief Financial Office