



Advisory Report: ODOT Worked Quickly to Oversee the Largest Wildfire Debris Removal Operation in State History



Joint Committee on Legislative Audits – Briefing on [Report #2021-30](#)

January 12, 2022

A photograph of a logging site. In the foreground, a large pile of cut logs is stacked on a dirt road. A yellow tracked loader is positioned next to the logs. The background shows a forest of tall, thin trees on a hillside.

Project origins and approach

- ODOT-requested
- Non-yellowbook, advisory report
- Q&A format



Introduction

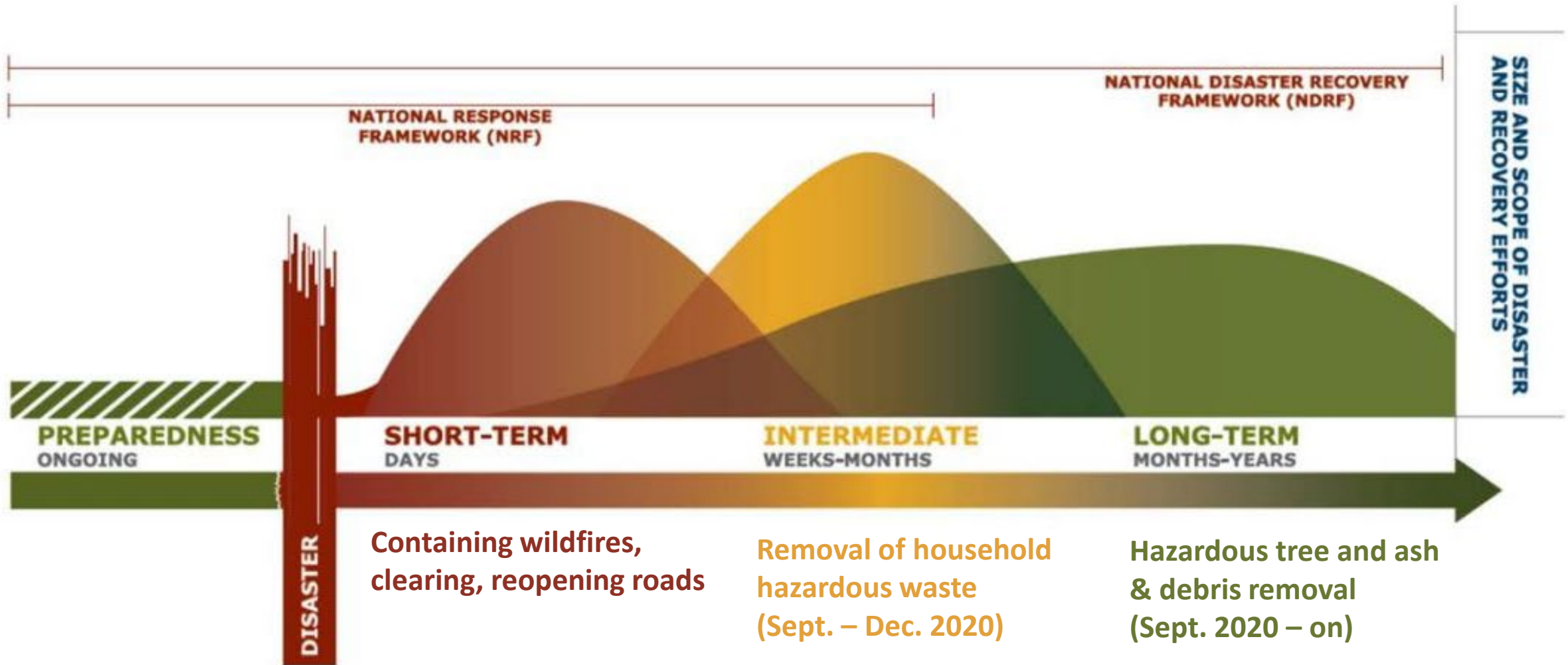
The Labor Day fires were the largest and most expensive disaster recovery in the state's history.

The state had never before undertaken such a widespread and complex recovery effort.

A key part of the wildfire recovery is addressing the debris left behind.



The recovery process is a continuum of activities





Five Questions

Question 1: **Who cut** down trees due to the 2020 wildfires on or near highway corridors?

Question 2: How was **ODOT's criteria** for assessing hazardous trees determined, what were the criteria factors, and were any changes made to it during recovery efforts?

Question 3: What **efforts has ODOT made to preserve** and consider ecologically sensitive areas and cultural **resources** when removing hazardous trees?

Question 4: **What happens to the trees** that ODOT had cut on or near highway corridors?

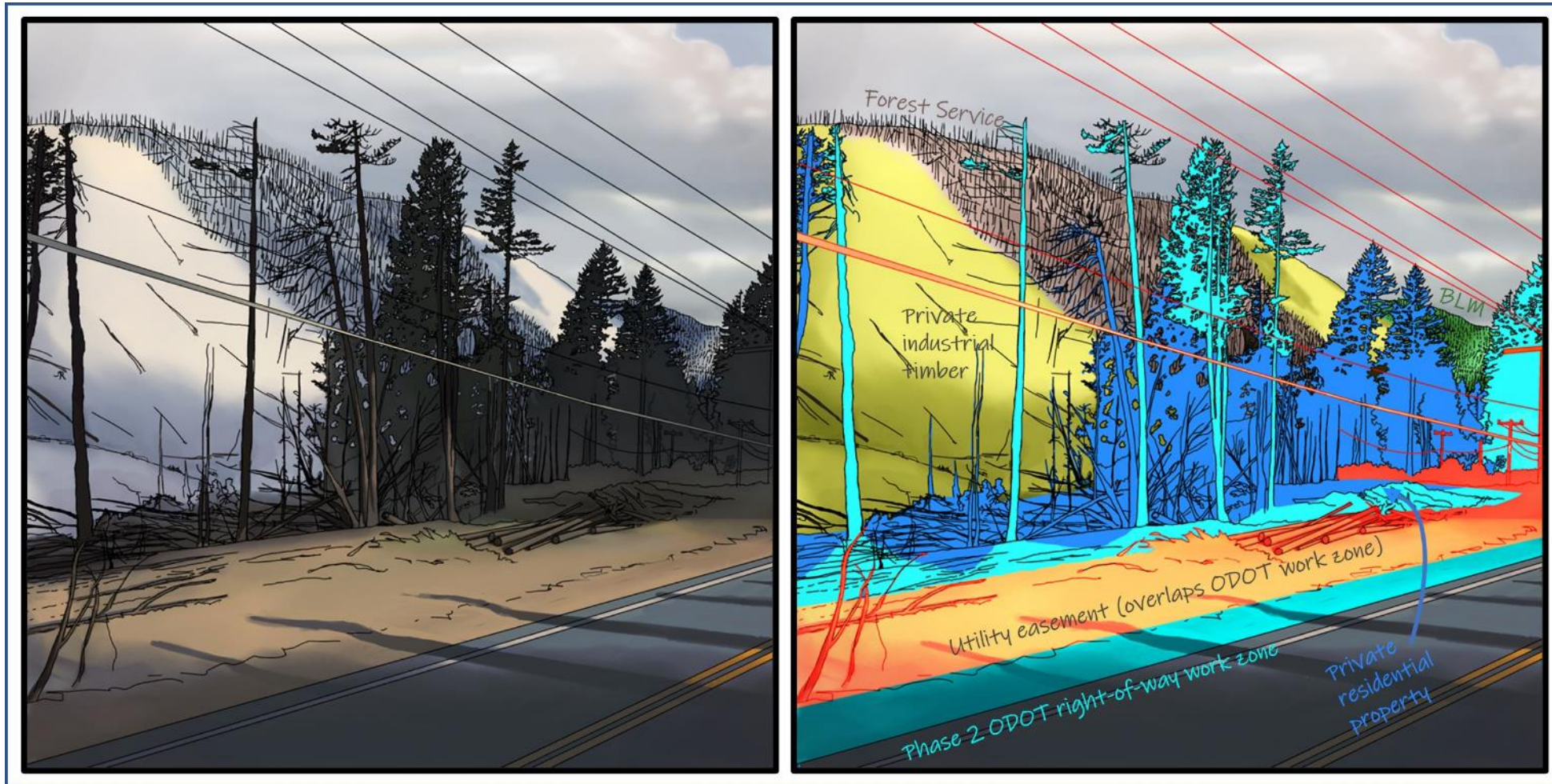
Question 5: What mechanisms are in place for evaluating the recovery efforts? (e.g., **after action reports for continuous improvement** mechanisms and capturing lessons learned)



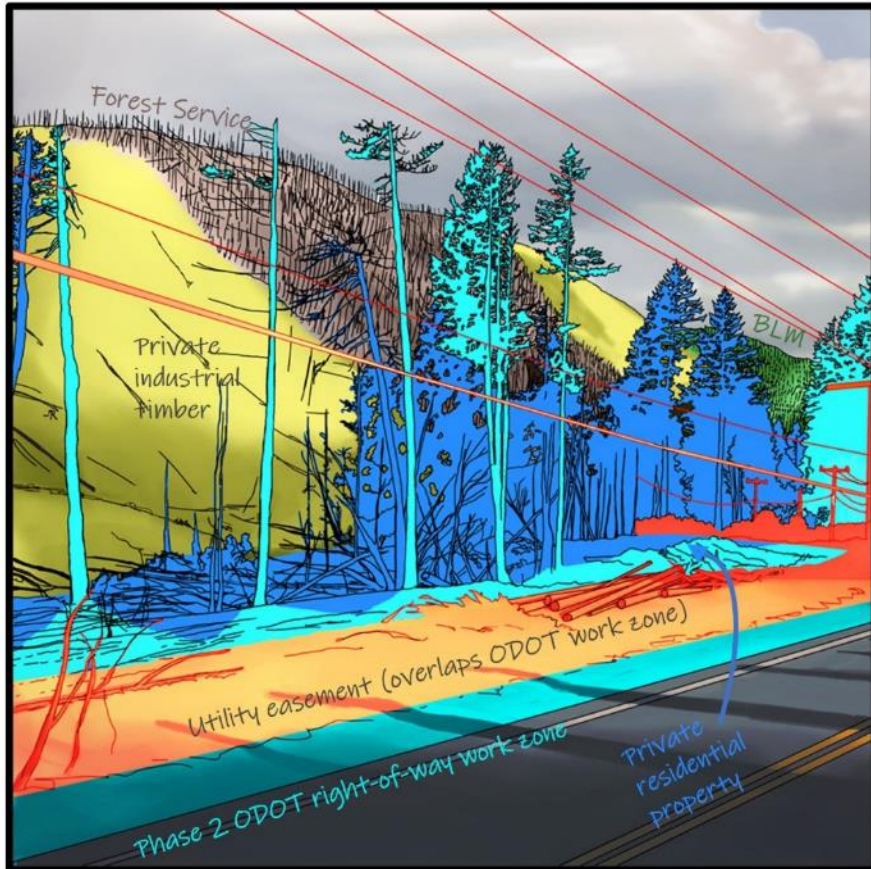
Despite the obvious obstacles, ODOT appears to be doing well managing the hazardous tree removal – again, one part of the state’s recovery efforts.

Question 1: Who cut down trees due to the 2020 wildfires on or near highway corridors?

A: ODOT and many other entities were involved in cutting down trees in the fire areas.



Driving the corridor













ODOT right of way work zone



As of August 19, 2021:

- Damaged trees inspected: **93,259**
- Trees cut: **62,042**

Numerous staff were involved in the right-of-way hazardous tree work within the fire corridors

Those Involved in Hazardous Tree Removal Operations Within the Fire Corridors		Roles and Responsibilities	Total Staff in the Fire Corridors May 2021	Total Staff in the Fire Corridors Aug. 2021
	ODOT	Performing oversight and management of operations	13	10
	Project Monitoring Consultant - CDR	Tagging damaged trees deemed hazardous and monitoring that work	114	67
	Project Monitoring Consultant Subcontractor -MB&G	Conducting tree tagging, tree removal quality control review, and environmental monitoring	40	35
	Project Monitoring Consultant Subcontractor - HRA	Mapping, monitoring, and notifying of cultural resources in work zones	15	10
	Owner's Representative Consultant - AC Disaster Consulting	Monitoring to help ensure work meets FEMA requirements	4	2
	Prime Contractors - <u>Suulutaaq</u> , Ceres, and ECC	Cutting the trees tagged as hazardous for removal	126	105
	Prime Contractors - <u>Suulutaaq</u> , Ceres, and ECC	Hauling cut trees, debris, and processing and decking cut logs as well as grinding slash into wood chips	14	27
	Prime Contractors - <u>Suulutaaq</u> , Ceres, and ECC	Providing traffic control for safe travel through the fire corridors during the removal operations	84	71
	Prime Contractors - <u>Suulutaaq</u> , Ceres, and ECC	Implementing erosion control measures	14	3
	US Army Corps of Engineers	Providing overall supervision for FEMA	8	3
Totals			432	333



Brief pause
for
questions



Question 2: How was **ODOT's** criteria for assessing hazardous trees determined, what were the criteria factors, and were any changes made to it during recovery efforts?

A: ODOT's contractors developed hazardous tree removal criteria that built off FEMA's criteria and used industry and forest service publications.



Hazardous Tree Criteria Development

September 7, 2020

Historic wildfire event begins.

September 27, 2020

ODOT begins to develop the Oregon Wildfire DROP.

November 17, 2020

FEMA directs ODOT/DMTF to proceed with hazard tree work for reimbursement.

November 19, 2020

CDR hired as debris monitoring firm; CDR hires MB&G as sub-contractor.

January 1, 2021

CDR completes the first version of the hazardous tree removal criteria. Hazardous tree removal criteria being used in the field.

January 1, 2021 – May 27 2021

Hazardous tree removal criteria revised 10 times.



Brief pause
for
questions



Question 3: What **efforts** has **ODOT** made to **preserve** and consider ecologically sensitive areas and cultural **resources** when removing hazardous trees?

A: ODOT worked with many stakeholders and included multiple complex federal and state regulations to create its Environmental Protection Plan.

Within the fire corridors, almost as many archeological resources were inadvertently discovered as were previously recorded

Fire Corridor	Previously Recorded Archeological Resources	Inadvertent Discoveries of Archeological Resources
Riverside	33	11
Beachie Creek/Lionshead	38	33
Holiday Farm	11	31
Archie Creek	36	26
<u>Thielsen</u>	5	3
2-4-2	43	37
<u>South Obenchain</u>	14	2
Totals	166	141

Note: Figures are as of August 15, 2021, and are subject to change as work continues.

Source: Historical Research Associates, Inc.



Brief pause
for
questions

Question 4: **What happens to the trees** that ODOT had cut on or near highway corridors?

A: Cut trees belong to the property owner. Under a new process, ODOT will sell trees removed from some federal land. Those proceeds will reimburse FEMA.





Brief pause
for
questions



Question 5: What mechanisms are in place for evaluating the recovery efforts? (e.g., **after action reports for continuous improvement** mechanisms and capturing lessons learned)

A: There is no solidified plan for a state-level review. ODOT will conduct an after action review of its debris removal operations.



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Photos courtesy of ODOT,
Pexels, and Audits Division