



February 20, 2022

**Santiam Canyon
Long Term Recovery Group and Santiam Disaster Services
11758 Sublimity Rd
Sublimity, Oregon 97385**

House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery
900 Court Street SE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: Written Testimony and Recommendations from the Santiam Canyon

Dear Representative Evans and Members of the Committee,

Wildfires affecting the wildland-urban interface have unfortunately become a part of the reality Oregonians must negotiate. How communities prepare for this eventuality are key to successfully negotiating this delicate balance. In this testimony we will lay out a few key issues that have been crucial to the successes we have had in the Santiam Canyon and some points for improvement that we believe can be made to better prepare for future disasters that may occur.

- 1) Santiam Service Integration, a program of Santiam Hospital and Clinics
 - a. Prior to the September 2020 Beachie Creek/Lionshead fires, Santiam Hospital had started a program Santiam Service Integration in 2017. The purpose of the service integration program is to facilitate collaboration among community partners to provide coordinated resources and information for individuals and families. These are agency and community partners expediting solutions by matching resources to clearly defined needs, while avoiding duplication of services.
 - b. Because this existed prior to the fires, the Santiam Service Integrations Partners were ready to respond to the immediate disaster needs of the canyon. Integrating services with non-profit, government programs, businesses, faith based and community members was what they were skilled in.

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February 20, 2022

- c. Transition to the fire effort took place just a couple days after evacuations, but still required personnel increases and funding additions that were made out of the Santiam Hospital budget, with a future promise that they would be made whole. The program went nearly a year before receiving state funding to provide case management services.
 - d. **Key Take Away:** If the state had an Emergency Wildfire Fund that could be held in reserve for disasters and key memorandums of understanding in place with identified community partners like Santiam Service Integration they could be prepared financially to deploy their team quickly to respond. Another key take away is to use the Service Integration Model in preparation and resiliency for future disaster. There should be an effort to share the model with rural areas of Oregon.
- 2) Little North Fork Evacuation Plan
- a. There was no pre-existing evacuation plan and because of the geography, vegetation and road network, this area became a death trap.
 - b. Emergency Broadcast Systems are mandatory for isolated and remote communities. When a land-based resource are not available, then broadcast and radio systems must be available.
 - c. This part of Santiam Canyon had the highest incidence of death because of the limited access roads, which became blocked quickly. Then the quick moving fire ignited vegetation close to the road, there was no warning system and limited notice given to a small portion of the residents.
 - d. **Key Take Away:**
 - i. There were no designated helicopter landing sites. Crooked roads with trees and brush against the road quickly became impassable. No broadcast system, no early warning or siren system, no permanent fire crew, no distributed evacuation plan and limited radio coverage in this narrow canyon area made warnings almost non-existent.
 - ii. Some existing systems that were successful during the disaster: KYAC (even with a limited broadcast range), Rural Fire Departments did respond

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February 20, 2022

as able, volunteer groups went door to door and neighborhood associations helped each other.

3) Little North Fork EMS

- a. The closest medical and fire services for residents of the Little North Fork are located in Lyons, Oregon. Response times are dependent on volunteers arriving for a call out and then drive times will vary between 8-35 minutes if you go all the way to the Elkhorn area.
- b. This length of time for emergency medical response for anyone with a life-threatening condition can be fatal, even in a non-disaster situation.
- c. Fire suppression rolled out at this distance is severely hampered in gaining quick control of fire situations.
- d. **Key Take Away**
 - i. Build a station and then place vehicles and equipment in the canyon for quicker response time by full-time or volunteer personnel.
 - ii. Maintain neighborhood groups and connections to personnel in the area with EMS training.

4) Resiliency and Disaster Preparedness Resources.

- a. City of Detroit community resiliency building. This is an ongoing project, in conjunction with city administration offices and it will be a key hub for future disasters. This building is being funded through available government monies, donations, fundraising and volunteer efforts. Future emergency storage of emergency resources will be vital to Detroit in the event of a disaster event.
- b. City of Gates tool library. As a resource for current survivors to rebuild, this library has the potential to be a long-term resource for all canyon residents to improve their existing homes and communities with minimal fund outlays. Additions to this effort could include additional storage facilities and improved security for these resources.
- c. Regional hubs for storage and distribution of resources to communities and individuals. Currently the Knights of Columbus in Sublimity, Oregon host the Santiam Disaster Services Team while ODHS pays them rent. A proposal is

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February 20, 2022

being staffed to build an additional 40X60 structure to house building materials, survivor resources and in the future function as a distribution hub for these same items during an event.

- d. Santiam Disaster Services is beginning to explore how they could maintain a percentage of their current team, maintain the co-location model that they have built and continue as a resiliency hub collaborating to prepare the communities of the canyon for a possible future disaster and continue meeting needs as they arise in the communities.
 - e. **Key Take Away:**
 - i. If there is no planning, resourcing or practice of disaster response prior to an actual event, then the local leaders are unable to work with the adjacent communities, county, state or national agencies or organizations. Without some limited pre-positioning of fire or emergency equipment, response time to impacted areas is too long and the disaster can spiral out of control.
 - ii. Having resources close to an event, trained personnel in place and a plan of action is foundational to keeping damage or disaster minimized in most situations. The speed of the 2020 Santiam Canyon fires were unprecedented and even with all the planning in place it would have been difficult to respond. Continue to invest in building strategic buildings located throughout the Santiam Canyon, Little North Fork, Detroit/Idanha and Breitenbush areas.
 - iii. Support the Santiam Disaster Services Team in continuing with a team of employees to continue collaborating at a local, county, state, and federal level to improve how we roll services out to those affected by disasters or crises.
- 5) Existing Community Networks. With the formation of the Long Term Recovery Group and institution of the working committees, it has been shown there is significant benefit to having these teams working in a community. It is recommended that every community across the state establish these key committees as part of their resiliency plan.

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February 20, 2022

- a. Spiritual and Emotional Health Committee: If a region has most of its faith leaders and mental health councilors working together to maintain emotional health, in their congregations and the community at large, there will be additional connection and support in the event of a larger disaster.
 - b. Donations Committee: Regions may already have this kind of linkage to many of the nonprofit organizations and government resources. An established team that is already working with local and regional government agencies will be ready to activate and push support out because they already have a framework of support.
 - c. Volunteer Committee: Some communities and local organizations already do this on an informal basis. Citizens helping each other builds community. In many instances, someone just needs a little additional help, but may not qualify for assistance, so this type of committee would be making huge strides in security, safety and stable communities.
 - d. There are other groups that did exist in government or community structures before the fire but have been augmented for the duration of the disaster response: Housing & Forestry/Agriculture.
 - e. Some committees are primarily for disaster situations: Unmet Needs.
 - f. **Key Take Away:**
 - i. Not having these groups in place prior to an emergency means there is a slow down or disconnect in the community capacity building to mobilize following a disaster.
 - ii. Building resilient community groups and committees is a now job, not just something to be assembled after there is a disaster. Getting these key groups in place and functioning on a daily basis at all times helps ever community grown stronger, every day.
- 6) Disaster Funding. In many instances survivors may be under-insured, by a little or a lot, and unable to fully fund their rebuild. There has been funding to the area but many households are left not able to finish their rebuild with the resources currently available.
- a. Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Funds- were available right away to meet immediate needs. The hospital was able to release the dollars quickly. The

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February 20, 2022

Disaster Case Manager team vets the request, submits check requests and checks are approved within 1 week.

- b. Other funds have been rolled out via the State, County, and Federal. The process is slow and difficult to access. An advocate is needed for most households to navigate the red tape.
- c. Fema- Santiam Disaster Case Managers sometimes had to appeal FEMA multiple times, up to eight for one household who was approved in December of 2021. NEPSC the call center for Fema often told Disaster Case Managers they didn't know how to help, call again and try to get someone different who may know. Case Managers were on hold with NEPSC for hours, often not getting the issue resolved.
- d. SBA- Multiple households report to Santiam Disaster Services that SBA had them sign loan documents, then end up reducing their loan amount. Example; one household went from being approved at 205k, then to 90k, 50k and a year later now received 25k. They will need to try to take out a personal loan.
- e. **Key Take Away:**
 - i. There should be a measured level of support to the community of survivors. At some point, there may be a cut off for support, but a single tiered line in the sand does not give equitable support to the middle section of survivors that may have had some support, but not enough to fully rebuild and recover. Then when support is terminated at 12 months, even though multiple studies show the recovery process can take 7-10 years to be completed. Insurance companies also have arbitrary timelines that cannot always be met because there are numerous mitigating circumstances where survivors cannot begin the rebuild process (COVID, supply chain shut down, limited contractors in area, permit process restrictions...).
 - ii. Government funding needs to partner with local groups like Santiam Canyon Wildfire Relief Fund and Santiam Disaster Services to get the funds out quickly and in an equitable way. Households needing help are registered with Santiam Disaster Services, they have a Recovery budget,

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February 20, 2022

- they turn in receipts, the team understands who needs support and at what level.
- iii. The federal, state and county responses have been key to bringing wildfire recovery dollars to survivors. Government agencies have brought on additional personnel, shifting resources and allocating additional funding to meet needs. Groups, individuals and agencies have advocated for survivors to insurance companies to get extensions and review of denied or limited payout claims. There must be more communication between those working on the ground with survivors and SBA, Fema. We need to work on making federal programs not so difficult to apply for and receive.
- 7) Information Management. Because this is not the first disaster for FEMA or many of the state agencies, it seems that in many cases the same piece of the puzzle is missing from disasters across the state. For the 2020 fires across Oregon there was no agreement or plan put into place during the initial FEMA and Red Cross data collection to allow sharing of survivor information with any government agencies below the state level. This has caused a break in continuity at the county or local government level.
- a. **Key Take Away:**
 - i. Confidential Identifiable Information and security are key components and keeping this information safe is critical so that disaster survivors are not preyed upon by the worst elements in our society. However, because there was not forethought on information release, agencies just below the state level have had to go out and recollect information and traumatizing survivors to secure information that resides at the state and FEMA level.
 - ii. Upfront, have survivors sign a full release of information to allow sharing of their information to other state and county organizations. This is a single piece of paper and this was a known issue prior to it occurring.
- 8) Good News and Success
- a. The state, county and many municipalities have gone above and beyond the call of duty to ensure survivors have potential to rebuild. Yes, there are increased environmental and regulatory requirements that have come into being since their

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February 20, 2022

ancestors first purchased the land, but whenever possible, actions are taken to benefit the survivor.

- b. Resources have been focused on getting survivors back in their homes. The efforts have been monumental from private industry, individual donors, community organizations and government.
- c. Santiam Canyon had a program in place, Santiam Service Integration via Santiam Hospital allowing our survivors the opportunity to immediately begin receiving case management provided by hospital, later funded by the State. This has proved to be influential in survivor's recovery. Households from the Canyon are believed to be further along in recovery than the rest of the State.

Thank you for taking the time to read and address many of these concerns. We are all making a difference as we "Recover, Rebuild & Rise".

Very Respectfully,

Melissa Baurer

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