

ANALYSIS

Item 41: Department of Forestry 2025 Fire Season

Analyst: April McDonald

Request: Acknowledge receipt of reports on the 2025 fire season and private losses; appropriate \$57,295,787 General Fund to the Department of Forestry for 2025 fire season net large fire costs; allocate \$12,167,370 General Fund from the special purpose appropriation made to the Emergency Board for fire protection expenses; and increase Other Funds expenditure limitation for the Department of Forestry by \$73,600,000 for processing payments related to the 2025 fire season.

Analysis:

2025 Fire Season Summary

Oregon's 2025 fire season started with mild conditions, above-normal snowpack, and improved drought levels statewide. However, in mid-June the season escalated with the first of five fires eligible for Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Fire Management Assistance Grants. These are fires designated as presenting a "threat of major disaster" with potential impact to lives, property, public infrastructure or critical facilities. The 2025 fire season was described by the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) as challenging and incredibly active. The season lasted 138 days from June 1, 2025, until all ODF districts officially ended fire season on October 17, 2025. Throughout those 138 days, there were 3,011 fires statewide, with the first Incident Management Team deployed on June 11, 2025.

This was the second most costly fire season in the past ten years; however, 94% of fires were held to 10 acres or less, and the total acres burned statewide (339,461) was held to less than half of the ten-year average (715,581). The season's expense was driven by the cost of personnel and equipment necessary to keep fires small. Through an approach of rapid response and aggressive initial attack, Oregon had a season with significantly fewer acres burned as compared to last year (1.9 million), even with more fire starts.

The location of fires on the Oregon landscape also drove up cost during the 2025 fire season. Fewer acres burned, but fires such as the Rowena, Grizzly Complex, Highland, and Flat fires, were much closer to communities and burned just over 200 homes and structures. When fires start near the wildland-urban interface, all available resources are employed to keep communities safe. Lastly, inflationary factors play a part in the significant cost of the recent fire season. In a federal Bureau of Land Management analysis of vendor costs from 2017 to 2025,

assessing the expense over time for aviation, crews, and varied equipment, the overall cost increase is 44%, with fire crews realizing a 73% inflationary increase.

The total large fire cost for the 2025 fire season is \$129.9 million, as compared to a ten-year average of \$95.9 million. After subtracting \$10.2 million for anticipated FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grants and \$63.7 million for reimbursements and cost recoveries from federal agencies, the net large fire cost is approximately \$57.3 million. This net cost includes approximately \$1 million in overtime pay for Incident Management Team or Emergency Fire Control personnel during the 2025 fire season; and \$287,987 for fire suppression support in Umatilla County, on lands outside of the agency's protection district boundaries. The agency provided fire support after receiving a task order from the Oregon Department of Emergency Management.

The ten-year average for net large fire costs is roughly \$46.3 million. Consequently, the recent season's gross and net costs are 35.4% and 21.2% greater than the ten-year averages, respectively. The acres burned across the state in 2025 total 339,461, which is 52.6% lower than the ten-year average of 715,581.

Fire Severity Program

The Department's Severity Resources program is designed to provide rapid fire detection and response across the state. Each season, ODF contracts with local and national resources to provide air and ground support to prevent small fires from growing into large, costly fires. These resources allow for rapid response and are deployed during periods of multiple fire starts and heightened fire danger. Severity resources are meant cover both base protection and large fire protection. When utilized on a large fire, the cost of the resource is billed to and accounted for in the large fire cost.

During the 2025 fire season, ODF contracted exclusively for three large helicopters; six medium helicopters; one small helicopter; four single-engine airtankers; two water-scoopers; two air attack platforms (aerial command centers); two detection planes; and several ground-based resources. Each contract included a mandatory availability period of 75 days. These statewide assets are in addition to district aviation resources already positioned throughout the state. HB 5006 (2025) included a \$24 million General Fund special purpose appropriation to the Emergency Board for ODF fire protection to provide severity resources. The total severity expenditures for the 2025 fire season amount to approximately \$12.2 million, which would leave \$11.8 available for the 2026 fire season.

Estimated Private Losses

The Department is required to report on wildfires of 1,000 acres or more, which have led to private losses of buildings, forestland and grazing land capacity if the land is expected to be

unavailable for two or more grazing seasons (ORS 477.777). During the 2025 fire season, five fires met the reporting criteria and have led to estimated losses including 11,648 acres of grazing lands worth approximately \$2.1 million; and 4,059 acres of forestland worth approximately \$1.2 million. There were 63 residences, and 141 other structures lost this season.

Net Large Fire Costs

2025 Fire Season Costs	Total Funds
FY 2025	\$ 11,856,433
FY 2026	\$ 118,043,591
Total 2025 Fire Season Large Fire Costs	\$ 129,900,024
Fire Management Assistance Grants	
FY 2025	\$ (3,683,928)
FY 2026	\$ (6,497,398)
Total Anticipated FEMA Grants	\$ (10,181,326)
Reimbursements and Cost Recoveries	
FY 2025	\$ (2,924,406)
FY 2026	\$ (60,733,545)
Total Anticipated Cost Recoveries	\$ (63,657,951)
Incident Overtime and Suppression on Unprotected Lands	
FY 2025	\$ 674,378
FY 2026	\$ 560,662
Total Overtime and Suppression on Unprotected Lands	\$ 1,235,040
Net Fire Costs	
FY 2025	\$ 5,922,477
FY 2026	\$ 51,373,310
Total 2025 Fire Season Net Costs	\$ 57,295,787

Recommendation: The Legislative Fiscal Office recommends that the Joint Interim Committee on Ways and Means acknowledge receipt of the reports and recommend appropriating \$57,295,787 General Fund for 2025 fire season net large fire costs, with a corresponding decrease in the special purpose appropriation made to the Emergency Board for natural disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery; appropriating \$12,167,370 General Fund for fire severity costs, with a corresponding decrease in the special purpose appropriation made to the Emergency Board for fire protection expenses; and increasing Other Funds expenditure limitation by \$73,600,000 for processing payments associated with the 2025 fire season, for the Department of Forestry, in a budget reconciliation bill during the 2026 legislative session.

Request: Appropriate \$57.3 million General Fund for net costs of the 2025 wildfire season. Allocate \$12.2 million from the Special Purpose Appropriation for Fire Severity Costs of the 2025 wildfire season. Increase Other Funds expenditure limitation by \$73.6 million to enable processing of payments related to the 2025 wildfire season. Report on the 2025 wildfire season. Provide a preliminary report on the losses on private lands of buildings, forestland, and grazing land from the 2025 wildfire season.

Recommendation: Approve the request during the 2026 Legislative Session and acknowledge receipt of the report.

Discussion: The Department of Forestry (ODF) is appearing before the committee to report on the 2025 wildfire season. As of November 2025, the ODF gross costs for the 2025 wildfire season totaled \$129,900,024 with net costs totaling \$57,295,787 on 1,160 fires, which burned a total of 24,447 acres on ODF protected land with a total of 339,461 acres burned in all jurisdictions. In the 10-year period between 2014-2023, the average fire season costs were \$75.5 million gross and \$33.7 million net. In a similar 10-year period of 2015-2024 there was an average of 715,581 acres burned.

The 2025 wildfire season was not punctuated with severe drought or wind events that have been characteristic of larger wildfire seasons in recent years. That said, the 2025 wildfire season did have significant extreme heat and lightning events throughout. Notably, the Flat Fire threatened the town of Sisters and burned 23,346 acres. The Statewide Severity Program, which provides air support for firefighting, flew 1,378 hours during the 2025 wildfire season.

During the 2025 wildfire season, five fires met the reporting criteria for losses on private lands:

1. The Rowena Fire impacted 606 acres classified as forestland, 77 acres classified as grazing land, and destroyed 56 residential structures and 109 other structures.
2. The Alder Springs Fire impacted 3,279 acres of land, none of which was classified as forest or grazing land and no reported residential or other structures lost.
3. The Elk Fire impacted 2,640 acres of land, which included 692 acres classified as forestland, three acres classified as grazing land, and no residential structures were reported as being destroyed but five other structures were.
4. The Cram Fire impacted 896 acres classified as forestland, 6,475 acres of land classified as grazing land, and two residential structures and 16 other structures destroyed.
5. The Flat Fire impacted 1,865 acres classified as forestland, 5,093 acres classified as grazing land, and five residential structures and 11 other structures destroyed.

Legal Reference: Increase the General Fund Appropriation made by chapter 609, section 1(2), Oregon Laws 2025, for the Department of Forestry, Fire protection, by \$57,295,787 for the 2025-27 biennium.

Increase the General Fund appropriation made by chapter 690, section 1(2), Oregon Laws 2025, for the Department of Forestry, Fire protection, by \$12,167,370 for the 2025-27 biennium.

Decrease General Fund special purpose appropriation made to the Emergency Board by chapter 628, section 6(1), Oregon Laws 2025 for fire protection expenses, by \$12,167,370 for the 2025-27 biennium.

Increase the Other Funds expenditure limitation established by chapter 609, section 2(2), Oregon Laws 2025, for the Department of Forestry, Fire protection, by \$73,600,000 for the 2025-27 biennium.



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

Department of Forestry
State Forester's Office
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Salem, OR 97310-1336
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www.oregon.gov/ODF

December 8, 2025

The Honorable Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means
900 Court Street NE, H-178
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Senator Lieber and Representative Sanchez:

Nature of the Request

The Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) respectfully requests permission to appear before the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means at its January 2026 meeting for the purposes of:

1. Providing the final report on the 2025 fire season in Oregon.
2. Providing the preliminary report for losses on private lands of buildings, forestland, and grazing land as required in ORS 477.777 (Oregon HB 3940 from 2025).
3. Requesting \$57,295,787 of General Fund for the net large fire costs for the 2025 fire season.
4. Requesting an additional \$73,600,000 in Other Funds Limitation in the Protection Division to enable the processing of payments from the 2025 fire season.
5. Requesting the release of \$12,167,370 of General Fund from the Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA) fund allocated to the Emergency Board for the state's portion of 2025 fire season severity costs.

Agency Action

Fire Season 2025 Summary

As of November 13, there were 1,160 fires on ODF-protected lands that total 24,447 acres burned. On ODF protected lands the 10-year average is 938 fires for the date and 136,612 acres burned. ODF has responded to 368 non-statistical fires and 2,228 Non-Fire Crew Actions (smoke checks, reports of fires and violations). To date, ODF has been successful keeping 94% of fires 10 acres or less; the Legislative Key Performance Measure is 98%. Five fires qualified for FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG): three in the month of June in a one-week time frame, one on July 12, and one on Aug 22. Statewide across all jurisdictions in 2025, 339,461 acres burned. The 10-year statewide average is 715,581 acres.

The 2025 fire season started out with milder fire conditions than Oregon has seen in recent years, with drought levels improving resulting in complete recovery from drought statewide as well as above-normal snowpack in much of the state. In early June, ODF's fire statistics were below the 10-year average; however, conditions changed quickly by the second week of June. On June 11, the Rowena Fire ignited and quickly resulted in level three evacuations. ODF Complex Incident Management Team (CIMT) 2 and the Oregon State Fire Marshal Green Incident Management Team responded. This was the first FEMA Fire FMAG of the year, burning 3,636 acres.

On June 16, the Alder Springs Fire near the Crooked River Ranch became the second FEMA FMAG incident and burned 3,279 acres. On June 18, the Upper Applegate Road Fire ignited and became the third FEMA FMAG incident of the year and was held to 453 acres.

By July 1, all ODF districts had declared fire season. During the week before the Fourth of July weekend, Southern and Eastern Oregon Area responded to over 100 new fire starts, both lightning (approximately 1,300 strikes statewide) and human caused. Aggressive initial attack kept all new fire starts contained to an average of about half an acre.

During a July 7-8 lightning event with widespread Red Flag Warnings, there were approximately 600 lightning strikes in Southwest Oregon & Northern California resulting in over 72 new confirmed fires. Aggressive initial attack kept all but a handful at between 1/10th of an acre to 6 acres. This event resulted in the Grizzly Complex. The Grizzly Complex included 22 fires that burned 887 acres and was managed by ODF CIMT 3. Additionally, ODF's Southwest Oregon District managed three lightning fires apart from the complex totaling 129 acres. ODF CIMT 3 also managed the 474-acre Board Shanty Fire that started on July 17. In the Klamath-Lake District, the Elk Fire 2,640 acres, Shmore Fire 56 acres and Hagelstein Fire 672 acres were managed by ODF CIMT1 and the Oregon State Fire Marshal Red Incident Management Team.

On July 12, a fast-moving fire just outside of Prineville became the fourth FEMA FMAG fire for the year. Named the Highland Fire, it was held to just 719 acres. Next, the Cram Fire, approximately 13 miles from Antelope in Jefferson County, started on July 13 and was managed by the Northwest Interagency CIMT 10 and the Oregon State Fire Marshal Green Incident Management Team. The Cram fire was the largest fire of Oregon's 2025 fire season, burning 95,769 acres.

During mid-late July extending into August, fire activity moderated, and safe and aggressive initial attack prevented additional large fires on ODF-protected acres. Several thunderstorms with abundant lightning occurred during this same timeframe and multiple fires started across the state. Thanks to quick, effective initial attack and much needed moisture associated with the storms, all fires were caught with minimal acreage burned.

On August 21, the Flat Fire started in central Oregon approximately 3 miles west of Lake Billy Chinook, as the result of human activity. Hot and dry conditions persisted across Central Oregon, sustaining active and extreme fire behavior on the Flat Fire. Numerous homes were threatened and under evacuation orders. This qualified as the fifth FEMA FMAG incident of the year. ODF CIMT 3 and the OSFM Red Team were deployed to manage the incident. The fire threatened the town of Sisters and ultimately burned 23,346 acres.

Late August and early September brought short-lived but intense red flag warnings and extreme heat events in western and central Oregon, as well as thunderstorms that moved up into the state influenced by the southwest American monsoon. Precipitation accompanied the storms in many areas along the Cascades and in southeastern, central, and northeastern parts of the state. These storms helped alleviate the drought in some of these areas. However, western and southwest coastal Oregon had also fallen into severe drought and fuels continued to be receptive to fire starts from any dry lightning thunderstorm cells passing over.

In early September, 3,600 lightning strikes from mostly dry thunderstorms extending from southwest Oregon into central and northeast Oregon led to an increase in initial attack response and, once again, resulted in large fire activity in various parts of the state. The Marks Creek Fire between Prineville and Mitchell started on USFS jurisdiction and, due to rapid initial fire growth, immediately threatened private lands under ODF protection. Due to the federal inter-agency CIMTs for our geographic region all being deployed at this time, ODF CIMT was requested to manage the fire. ODF CIMT 2's work limited the fire to 1,718 acres and kept it entirely on USFS lands.

The lightning-caused Kelsey Peak Fire started on September 3 on BLM jurisdiction protected by ODF. ODF CIMT 1 was ordered to manage the incident, and the fire was held to 1,039 acres, all on BLM. This was a huge success given the location of the fire on some of the most challenging grounds in the state to fight fire on. The nearby Moon Complex consisted of several lightning-caused fires. Resources from ODF's Southwest Oregon District, Coos Forest Protective Association, as well as the Oregon State Fire Marshal assisted the USFS. The fire was ultimately contained at 19,520 acres.

After mid-September, although temperatures remained relatively elevated, overall weather and fire danger conditions calmed, with onshore flow and sporadic short-lived but wetter thunderstorm events. September east winds in western Oregon were mild this year, but northwestern Oregon was particularly dry this year. The Knob Point Fire in the Astoria District started on October 6 near the Clatsop State Forest and was kept to approximately 100 acres.

As of October 17, all ODF districts officially ended fire season after receiving adequate rainfall to improve fuel moisture conditions enough to reduce threat of large fires.

Special Purpose Appropriation Severity Program.

The Statewide Severity Program had 19 aircraft on exclusive use contract with a mandatory availability period of 75 days. The suite of resources included:

- 3 - Type 1 helicopters
- 6 - Type 2 helicopters
- 1 - Type 3 helicopter with a 10-person helitack crew
- 4 – Single-engine airtankers
- 2 – Single-engine scoopers (“Fire Bosses”)
- 2 - Air Attack Platforms
- 2 - Light fixed-wing detection
- 3 - 10-person hand crews

Severity aircraft flew approximately 1,378 hours during the 2025 fire season. During aerial suppression efforts, an estimated 2,794 buckets of water (or fire chemical), over 2 million gallons of water, 231,096 gallons of retardant, and 57,300 gallons of water enhancing gel were delivered to incidents across the state. With the additional severity funds received from HB3940, the addition of the two air attack platforms and two additional ten-person hand crews proved invaluable this summer. The Statewide Severity Program is fiscally funded with \$12 million. Fire season 2025 costs totaled \$12,167,370.

ORS 477.777 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 buildings, forestland, and grazing land (this was changed from previous HB2501 reporting with passage of HB 3940). During the 2025 fire season 5 fires met this reporting criteria. This preliminary loss assessment report is consistent with the expectation of law but limited by the time, capacity, and expertise required to conduct a fair and comprehensive assessment of loss relative to what the state has experienced.

The Rowena Fire impacted 3,636 acres of land, which included 606 acres classified as forestland, with an estimated loss of \$185,587, and 77 acres classified as grazing land, with an estimated loss of \$13,860. This fire destroyed 56 residential structures and 109 other structures. The Alder Springs Fire impacted 3,279 acres of land, none of which was classified as forest or grazing land and no reported residential or other structures lost. The Elk Fire impacted 2,640 acres of land, which included 692 acres classified as forestland, with an estimated loss of \$211,925, and 3 acres classified as grazing land, with an estimated loss of \$540. No residential structures were reported as being destroyed but 5 other structures were. The Cram Fire impacted 95,769 acres of land, which included 896 acres classified as forestland with an estimated loss of \$274,400, and 6,475 acres of lands classified as grazing land with an estimated loss of \$1,165,500. There were 2 residential structures and 16 other structures destroyed. The Flat Fire impacted 23,346 acres of land, which included 1,865 acres classified as forestland, with an estimated loss of \$571,156.25, and 5,093 acres classified as grazing land with an estimated loss of \$916,740. There were 5 residential structures and 11 other structures destroyed.

Fire Season Costs

The department dedicates a significant portion of its biennial budget to wildfire suppression to protect natural resources, communities, and Oregonians. Experience has demonstrated the value of a diverse and resilient fire-funding system—one capable of supporting effective response during challenging seasons like this one.

Fire season runs from January 1 through December 31, spanning two partial fiscal years. Incident cost estimates are prepared for every incident, regardless of size, using data provided by the ODF district where the incident occurred. Larger incidents generate daily cost updates, while smaller incidents report costs within thirty days of containment. Gross incident costs are then refined to incorporate federal cost-share arrangements and FEMA reimbursements, resulting in the final net incident cost, which represents the General Fund obligation.

As of November 25, 2025, the department's gross fire costs for the 2025 fire season total \$129,900,024 while net fire costs—representing the amount remaining after federal cost-share and FEMA reimbursements—are currently \$57,295,787.

Increase in Other Funds Limitation Request

To cover the gross costs of the 2025 fire season, the department will exceed its Other Funds limitation. To ensure continued funding for all department operations, the department is requesting an additional \$73,600,000 in OF limitation in the Protection Division.

Action Requested

ODF respectfully requests that the Interim Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

1. Acknowledge and accept the final report on the 2025 fire season in Oregon.
2. Acknowledge and accept the preliminary report for losses on private lands of buildings, forestland, and grazing land as required in ORS 477.777 (Oregon HB 3940 from 2025).
3. Appropriate \$57,295,787 General Fund for the net large fire costs for the 2025 fire season.
4. Allocate an additional \$73,600,000 in Other Funds limitation in the Protection Division to enable the processing of payments from the 2025 fire season.
5. Appropriate \$12,167,370 of General Fund from the Special Purpose Appropriation (SPA) fund allocated to the Emergency Board for the state's portion of the 2025 fire season severity costs.

Legislation Affected

SB 5521, Chapter 609, Section 1(2), Oregon Laws 2025
SB 5521, Chapter 609, Section 2(2), Oregon Laws 2025
HB 5006, Chapter 628, Section 6(1), Oregon Laws 2025

The Honorable Senator Kate Lieber, Co-Chair
The Honorable Representative Tawna Sanchez, Co-Chair
December 8, 2025
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Skinner', written over a light gray rectangular background.

Kate Skinner
Interim State Forester

c: Legislative Fiscal Office
Chief Financial Office
Board of Forestry
Governor's Office