



Advancing Fire Protection In Oregon

Wildfire Programs Advisory Council Annual Report

October 2024





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Wildfire Programs Advisory Council - Annual Report
[Advisory Council Roster and Workgroup Participants](#)
October 2024

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Glossary of Acronyms

20YLRs	Oregon's 20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy
AOC	Association of Oregon Counties
BCD	Building Codes Division
COU	Consumer-owned utility
CWPP	Community wildfire protection plan
DCBS	Department of Consumer and Business Services
DEQ	Department of Environmental Quality
DFR	Division of Financial Regulation
DLCD	Department of Land Conservation and Development
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
HB	(Oregon) House Bill
HECC	Higher Education Coordinating Commission
IAG	Invasive Annual Grass
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
IOU	Investor-owned utility
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NGO	Nongovernmental organization
NHMP	Natural hazard mitigation plan
OCC	Oregon Conservation Corps
ODF	Oregon Department of Forestry
ODHS	Oregon Department of Human Services
OEM	Oregon Department of Emergency Management
OHA	Oregon Health Authority
OREM	Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (within ODHS)
ORS	Oregon Revised Statutes
OSFM	Office of the State Fire Marshal
ORSC	Oregon Residential Specialty Code
OSU	Oregon State University
OWEC	Oregon Wildfire & Electric Collaborative
PM2.5	Particulate matter 2.5
PUC	Public Utilities Commission
R327	Oregon Residential Specialty Code: R327.4 Wildfire Hazard Mitigation
RAC	Rules Advisory Committee
SB	(Oregon) Senate Bill
WUI	Wildland-urban interface

Executive Summary

Oregon faces increasing hazards and effects of wildfire. In response to the growing concern over wildfire, Oregon Governor Kate Brown convened the Governor’s Council on Wildfire Response in January 2019 to assess the issue and provide policy and funding recommendations to the Governor and State Legislature. This was followed by the devastating Labor Day fires of 2020. Responding to these recommendations and recognizing the need to make Oregonians and their communities safer and more wildfire prepared and resilient, the Oregon Legislature enacted Senate Bill 762 (SB 762) in the 2021 legislative session. SB 762 set an unprecedented path for 11 state agencies to implement multiple programs intended to transform how Oregon lives with wildfire. These programs work together to modernize fire preparedness and response systems, creating new opportunities to advance fire protection at multiple scales from the individual to the landscape. However, many of these programs have been one-time, defunded, or partially funded. This is a dire challenge given that wildfire suppression costs and the need for increased mitigation are extensive, and there is currently no stable, sustainable source of funding for these activities. This was evident in 2024, as the state experienced a historic and catastrophic wildfire season. The largest number of acres in a single season—over 1.9 million acres burned. Approximately 30,000 structures were threatened and approximately \$350 million was spent on fire response. Much of this impact occurred in eastern Oregon and on rangelands, but several fires in western and southwestern Oregon did occur in close proximity to values at risk including communities and energy infrastructure.

SB 762 also established a Wildfire Programs Director and Wildfire Programs Advisory Council (“Council”) to guide implementation. The Council consists of 19 members representing a diverse range of Oregon’s geographies and sectors related to wildfire. The Council is charged with monitoring progress of wildfire programs, advising, and assisting the Director, and preparing an annual October report to the Governor and appropriate committees or interim committees of the Oregon Legislative Assembly. This report describes implementation progress to date and specifically provides advice and recommendations on:

- Changes necessary to dramatically reduce wildfire risk and ensure defensible space, building codes, and land use applications are appropriate
- How Oregon’s wildfire hazard map may inform building codes and land use laws, rules, and decisions in a regionally appropriate manner
- The application of defensible space requirements to vineyards, crops, and other cultivated vegetation
- How to strengthen intergovernmental and multiparty collaboration including government, stakeholders, and the public

Council Recommendations and Actions Necessary to Implement

The Council has developed several broad, cross-cutting recommendations to advance fire-adapted communities and landscape resiliency in Oregon. These are relevant to multiple wildfire programs, involve multiple agencies and sectors, and will require an all-hands approach.

- Respond to the wildfire funding crisis:** Recent wildfire seasons demonstrate that adequate funding for wildfire mitigation and response is a crisis, with costs escalating at the same time that funding is shrinking. The landmark 2023 report of the Federal Wildfire Commission, which included several representatives from Oregon, provided a strong recommendation for increased funding that is sustained and predictable, keeps pace with the escalating crisis, incentivizes investments by other governments at all levels, and includes a focus on the mitigation of risk and impacts both before and after wildfire. *Oregon must find a collaborative wildfire funding solution by creating a stable and sufficient revenue source with a broad base that is not solely reliant on general fund appropriations.* The state must invest because landowners cannot fund this scale of increasing costs. Wildfire response and mitigation broadly affect Oregonians and involve multiple agencies and sectors; therefore, solutions must incorporate ideas and contributions from all involved. Suppression will continue to be an increasing need. Funding solutions should not solely address suppression. Mitigation, adaptation, recovery, public health, and outreach and education also need investment. This includes funding all programs of SB 762.
- Prioritize investments and treatments based on equity and vulnerability:** Investments should prioritize the most vulnerable communities and landscapes in high hazard areas. This includes prioritizing treatments in the wildland-urban interface (WUI), as well as large landscape treatments that can moderate fire behavior. Funding must be provided to continue to improve community preparedness and resilience, including public health, and incorporating equity considerations to ensure that the most socially vulnerable individuals and populations are served and have access to resources to survive and mitigate impacts from wildfire.
- Increase investment in public health agencies, and their coordination with land management agencies:** Public health agencies and local community organizations need, and have not had, sustainable, sufficient funding to provide education and resources that can address health impacts of wildfire. Local public health agencies and organizations must also receive investment. Public health and land management agencies must be funded and encouraged to increase their coordination, which is necessary to address the intersection of public health challenges from smoke and the need to increase landscape resiliency through treatments that produce smoke (i.e., prescribed and beneficial fire use). This is important both within and outside of the WUI as smoke can have broad impacts. Public health investments can be addressed through an overall stable and sustainable funding solution.
- Invest in multiple forms of workforce development:** The scale of a trained workforce to implement land management activities, prescribed fire, and wood products processing is insufficient for the scope of wildfire risk reduction needed. Dedicated funding is necessary for workforce training and capacity building. This includes a cross-trained prescribed fire workforce and investment in the Oregon Conservation Corps.
- Seek alignment with the Federal Wildfire Commission:** The Oregon legislature, state agencies, and their partners should draw from and align Oregon's future policy direction with the many recommendations of the Commission's 2023 report.
- Allow time for wildfire programs to mature and outcomes to be realized:** The wildfire hazard map and insurance market efforts of SB 762, SB 80, and SB 82 are examples of novel approaches to protect Oregonians from wildfire, and they are also complex. Given this, they will require time to further develop, for agencies to increase their experience with using new tools, and for their efficacy to be evaluated. In addition, time is needed to see the effects and benefits of landscape treatments, home hardening, and defensible space efforts.

In addition to these broad recommendations, the Council makes the following specific recommendations for the continued success of wildfire programs in Oregon (Table 1). Details of these recommendations can be found in the corresponding report sections.

Table 1. Wildfire Programs Advisory Council recommendations and needed actions, October 2024

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
OSFM	<p>Defensible space:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recommend that the 2025 legislature establish a durable and sufficient source of funding for the OSFM community risk reduction program. Funding should be prioritized to those with the most need, taking into account whether they are located in the high wildfire hazard area/WUI. 	<p>Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.</p>
BCD, OSFM	<p>Home hardening:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look to the home hardening grant program recommendations of the OSFM and BCD in their September 2024 report for guidance in future funding. Continue to invest in voluntary compliance with R327 by providing education and funding. Connect property owners to other sources of possible funding for home hardening. Direct BCD to adopt fire hardening codes covering commercial and multi-dwelling structures. Explore methods to encourage or require hardening of manufactured homes. Collect data to better understand the extent and value of home hardening in partnership with fire safety agencies. 	<p>Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.</p> <p>Issue should be directed at the responsible agencies for review to determine needed action.</p>
DLCD	<p>Land use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase investment in wildfire planning efforts for DLCD and other agencies involved in regulating and mitigating wildfire risk for new development. Fund DLCD to offer technical assistance and grants to cities and counties to revise their transportation system plans for safe and efficient wildfire evacuation and response. Fund DLCD Technical Assistance grants that increase local resources for planning for wildfire adapted communities. Increase funding for DLCD GIS capacity to create and analyze geographic data to help counties and cities understand how to reduce the fire risk to housing. 	<p>Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.</p> <p>Issue should be directed at the responsible agency for review to determine needed action.</p>

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce and simplify the current patchwork of funding opportunities for wildfire risk reduction planning, including interagency coordination to identify more collaborative grant and funding tools. • Create an effective cooperation plan between local governments and OSFM for land use application reviews. • Focus state agency efforts on prioritizing federal funding, other resources, and technical assistance to support updates of CWPPs in a more timely manner. • Address current statutory inconsistent provisions regarding where requirements for home hardening and defensible space for rural accessory dwelling units (ADUs) will apply once the statewide wildfire hazard map is approved by revising the current statute to align the requirements for ADUs with those for homes and accessory structures. 	
ODF, OSU	<p>Wildfire hazard mapping:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to message that implementing defensible space and home hardening makes properties more wildfire resilient, can reduce ember intrusion, allows firefighters to operate safely, and puts properties in compliance with the law—but that these activities do not impact the hazard category of individual properties. • Message that federal land managers are actively engaged in reducing fuels that can contribute to wildfires on forest and rangelands. • Allow the wildfire hazard map to stay in its current format and be used until its regular update (approximately every 4-5 years), coinciding with two legislative cycles, to allow the agencies to develop experience with using this tool. 	Issue should be directed at the responsible agencies for review to determine needed action.
DFR	<p>Homeowners' insurance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time for measures to allow insurance market incentives to develop and assess if they can function effectively. 	Issue should be directed at the responsible agency for review to determine needed action.

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to support an insurance structure of extensive consumer education, website hosting of insurance incentives, and transparency. 	
OHA, DEQ, ODHS	<p>Public health programs for wildfire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue and sustain investment in wildfire smoke protections for public health. Provide funding for additional air quality monitors, and capacity to maintain those monitors, for areas of the state not adequately covered, and funding for development and implementation of community smoke response plans across the state. Provide funding for additional air filtration devices and air conditioners; the estimated unmet need for these items is 200,000-300,000 people. Provide these funds to local public health departments, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups to administer indoor air quality programs so they can be tailored to each community. The funding should also cover evaluation and data collection capabilities. 	Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.
HECC	<p>Oregon Conservation Corps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a dedicated source of funding for OCC at a level sufficient to expand and provide certainty to their community wildfire protection program. 	Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.
PUC, ODF	<p>Public utilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow existing utility wildfire mitigation plans to continue to be developed by each utility in coordination with the commission staff to bring alignment in risk evaluation methodologies and mitigation program investments. Create a shared GIS database for identification of risk trees outside of the utility right-of-way. 	Issue should be directed at the responsible agencies for review to determine needed action.

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging, at pace and scale, log purchase agreements that make fuel reduction efforts more economical and align with existing electric utility vegetation management programs that maintain clearance between trees and electrical assets. • Encourage utilities and ODF to collaborate by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sharing electric utility asset locations with ODF to aid in alignment of fuel reduction activities and identification of potential fire break locations that protect critical utility assets. ○ Explore potential for leveraging of existing projects through increased coordination in alignment with the 20-Year Landscape Resiliency strategy. ○ Encouraging coordination between the utilities and ODF on fuel reduction programs for the debris remaining after a utility has conducted vegetation management trimming in a given forest area so that fuel sources are not left on the landscape. 	
ODF	<p>20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fund implementation of the 20-year Landscape Resiliency Strategy with an immediate emphasis on creating regional governance structures and supporting local planning initiatives through technical and science support. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use these regional structures and local initiatives to prioritize defensible space, evacuation routes, wildfire protection planning, and preplanning within the WUI and adjacent lands; and support these activities through local risk mitigation plans. 	<p>Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.</p> <p>Issue should be directed at the responsible agency for review to determine needed action</p>

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Use tools and existing structures to assist with these activities including community resilience hubs, Potential Operational Delineations, MOUs between land management agencies and high hazard communities, and Community Mitigation Assistance Teams. ● Increase and provide consistent state and federal funding for resilience projects. ● Continue to use grants and incentives such as renewable energy credits to utilize wood products and improve economic success of landscape resilience projects, and provide steady funding sources for these. ● Increase efforts to encourage and enhance workforce training to produce a trained, effective landscape management and wood products workforce. ● Promote the creation/continuation of biomass facilities using secondary wood products as a fuel source. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review and reform (if necessary) tax credits and regulatory incentives to encourage appropriately scaled biomass facilities owned by both the public and private sectors, with a prioritization on integrated facilities. ○ Amend the Federal Renewable Fuel Standard to include federal forest residuals as Renewable Identification Number eligible feedstock with appropriate sideboards. ● Develop systems for tracking and assessing outcomes of the 20YLRS to determine progress, especially in and around the WUI. Invest in science and technology that supports planning, monitoring and assessing outcomes. ● Follow the Federal Wildfire Commission’s recommendation that wildland fire data should be managed through a decentralized, integrated data and modeling collaboration environment in coordination with federal agencies, including: 	

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ New technologies that provide integrated decision support, share a common platform and terminology to implement community risk reduction planning in and around the WUI and connecting nearby communities. ○ Wildfire preplanning and use of Potential Operational Delineations to engage communities, neighborhoods, and recovery and emergency response organizations. 	
<p>Federal, state, and local air quality regulators, land management agencies, and public health entities</p>	<p>Increasing use of beneficial fire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continue and increase ongoing discussions regarding how to increase the use of beneficial fire while also safeguarding public health through tabletop and applied fire exercises (e.g., West Bend Prescribed Burn Project). In particular, explore and adopt efficiencies and best practices with respect to exceptional event demonstrations and forthcoming smoke management planning and State Implementation Plan revision. ● Continue to explore methods to reduce prescribed fire smoke, including enhanced emission reduction techniques, reducing fuels on the landscape prior to burning, finding alternative means of removal for piles beyond burning, and options other than burning. ● Increase funding for meteorological and smoke modeling services necessary to determine burn windows and estimate smoke effects to local communities. ● Increase funding for public education and outreach efforts related to increased prescribed fire and smoke. Relatedly, relevant state agencies should work internally to develop a culture of respect and support for beneficial fire, including cultural burning. 	<p>Legislative action needed to appropriate funding.</p> <p>Issue should be directed at the responsible agencies for review to determine needed action</p>

Responsible agency/ies	Council recommendations	Action taken or needed
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and expand existing state smoke mitigation programs that provide resources to communities and sensitive populations experiencing wildland and prescribed fire smoke impacts. Tailor mitigation options to the differences between wildland and prescribed fire smoke effects. • Increase funding to catalyze the creation of a dedicated, cross-organizational prescribed fire workforce in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, Tribes, local, state, and federal land managers, and other burners. This should include dedicated and long-term funding to support prescribed fire training, capacity building, workforce development, and implementation, including through consistent funding sources, accessible grants, cost-share agreement structures, dedicated position authority within ODF for prescribed fire planning and implementation, and prioritizing funding that increases community involvement in prescribed fire. • Evaluate the implementation of SB 80 (establishing the State’s Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program and revising its Certified Burn Manager Program) and enact appropriate changes, if any, to ensure that burners have access to sufficient liability insurance. Consider whether changes to Oregon’s negligence standard to shift to a gross negligence standard would be appropriate. • Apply different strategies to wildfire management in rangelands, including aggressive initial attack, landscape treatments with targeted grazing, and herbicide use to control invasive annual grasses. 	

1. INTRODUCTION

Context

Oregon faces ever-increasing hazards and impacts from wildfire. The Governor's first Council on Wildfire Response, formed in 2019, reviewed Oregon's existing model for wildfire preparation and response. This body provided 37 recommendations and suggested a comprehensive approach aligned with the three goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy:

1. Create fire-adapted communities by modernizing emergency response, health systems, electric utilities, and land use, in order to improve structural resiliency, enhance defensible space, ensure access and egress, and reduce human-caused ignitions; with an emphasis on serving vulnerable populations.
2. Restore and maintain resilient landscapes by investing in active management of forests and rangelands through prioritized treatments in areas of highest risk.
3. Respond safely and effectively to wildfire by modernizing fire response capacity and expanding protection services.

These recommendations preceded the catastrophic 2020 wildfire season in Oregon, which saw over 1.2 million acres and 5,000 structures burned, and nine lives lost. Senate Bill 762 (SB 762) passed in the 2021 legislative session and set an unprecedented path for action on many of these recommendations. It invested \$195 million in 11 state agencies to implement programs intended to transform how Oregon lives with wildfire, also aligning with the three goals of the Cohesive Strategy. This represented a collective, all-hands-on-deck approach to assessing wildfire hazards and prioritizing multiple actions to make communities and landscapes more fire-adapted.

In the 2023 legislative session, new bills further built on the efforts of SB 762 by requiring changes to hazard mapping and directing insurance companies to not use the map in coverage decisions (Senate Bills 80 and 82). Legislation also created a prescribed fire liability pilot program and prescribed fire claims fund (HB 2985, SB 80). In 2024, the legislature included a budget note directing the Department of Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) "to work in partnership to convene a workgroup to identify options for sustainably funding wildfire mitigation, suppression and mobilizations, land classification, and managing the intersection between forest land protection districts and structural fire protection districts."

In 2024, Oregon also experienced another historic and catastrophic wildfire season. The largest number of acres in a single season—over 1.9 million acres—was burned. There were 17 conflagration declarations, which is a record for the state. Approximately 30,000 structures were threatened, and 42 primary residences and 132 additional structures were lost across 19 different significant fire events. Approximately \$350 million was spent on fire response, which has eclipsed the state's record of \$160 million. The pilot of a single engine air tanker was also killed, while responding to a fire. Much of this impact occurred in eastern Oregon, with large fires and complexes including Cow Valley, Durkee, Falls, Telephone, Battle Mountain, Rail Ridge, and Crazy Creek. Numerous other fires occurred in close proximity to communities from Fossil to Tygh Valley to Sunriver. However, strong response efforts kept the state from witnessing urban conflagration to the extent experienced in 2020. Although western and southwestern Oregon did not have as many fire events, several fires such as the Lee Falls, Dixon, and Milepost 98 Fires did occur with direct threats to communities and energy infrastructure. These events necessitated collaboration with utilities and were complex to manage, particularly given the values at risk and how thinly spread suppression resources were at many points in the season.

Wildfire Programs Advisory Council

SB 762 established a state-wide Wildfire Programs Director position and Wildfire Programs Advisory Council to guide implementation. The Wildfire Programs Advisory Council (hereafter “the Council”) features 19 members representing a broad and diverse range of Oregon’s geographies and wildfire-related sectors. The Council is charged to monitor progress, advise, and assist the Director; and prepare an annual October report to the Governor and appropriate committees or interim committees of the Oregon Legislative Assembly. This report describes implementation progress and specifically provides advice and recommendations on:

- Closely monitoring implementation of activities related to wildfire prevention and response, including receiving and evaluating agency reports related to wildfire prevention and response.
- Providing advice on potential changes to the activities in order to fulfill the goal of dramatically reducing wildfire risk in this state and ensuring that regional defensible space, building codes and land use applications are appropriate.
- Strengthening intergovernmental and multiparty collaboration and enhancing collaboration between governments and stakeholders on an ongoing basis.
- Developing strategies to enhance collaboration among governmental bodies and the general public.
- Assessing ways the [statewide map of wildfire risk] statewide wildfire hazard map described in ORS 477.490 may inform development of building codes and land use laws, rules and decisions, in a regionally appropriate manner.
- Assessing the application of defensible space requirements to vineyards, crops and other cultivated vegetation.
- Reviewing Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) findings and recommendations in the report required by section 11, chapter 592, Oregon Laws 2021, and making additional recommendations related to potential updates to the statewide land use planning program, local comprehensive plans and zoning codes to incorporate wildfire [risk] hazard maps and minimize wildfire hazards to people, public and private property, businesses, infrastructure and natural resources.
- Assisting communities in building resiliency and actively engaging with individuals in need, in a timely manner, during wildfire and heat events, including the distribution of devices necessary to mitigate impacts to public health.

Given the nature of evolving wildfire events and impacts, and the challenging 2024 wildfire season, the Council also continues to track lessons learned about the urgent need to build resiliency and better prepare communities to safely respond to the threat of wildfire.

This third annual (2024) report fulfills SB 762’s reporting requirement for the Council.¹ It represents the efforts of Council members and agency support staff. It was developed through a collaborative process centered around three workgroups focused on 1) community risk reduction, 2) landscape resiliency, and 3) adequate funding for mitigation and response. These groups met regularly to obtain information from agencies, discuss members’ perspectives, and develop draft report content. Members were not required to seek consensus. Workgroups sought to clearly document common ground and differing views where they existed. Review and approval of the draft report occurred at the October 11, 2024 meeting of the full Council.

¹ Prior Council reports are available at: <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/policies/pages/wildfire-programs-council.aspx>

Updated Policy Context

Over the last year, some programs and investments initiated by SB 762 have continued, while others were one-time or otherwise not funded after the 2021-2023 biennium. In addition, new wildfire-related laws passed in the Oregon legislature in 2023 went into effect.

Senate Bill 762 (2021)

SB 762 programs pursue the three goals of the Cohesive Strategy (Figure 1). These programs work together to modernize Oregon’s fire preparedness and response systems, creating new opportunities to advance fire protection at multiple scales from the individual to the landscape.

Figure 1. Programs of SB 762 (2021) in support of the three goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy



Some programs initiated in SB 762 continued to be funded in the legislatively adopted budget for 2023-2025, while others were not. Fiscal details and status of SB 762 programs as of October 2024 are as follows:

Readiness and Response:

- \$15 million Landowner Offset (ODF): Not funded in 2023-25 biennium.
- \$12 million Local Fire Service, Up-staffing Grant (OSFM): Reduced by 50% leaving no funding available for the 2025 fire season.

Mitigation:

- \$12 million Smoke Mitigation Programs: DHS and OHA funding adjusted for “like programs” as detailed in Smoke section while \$4 million for Community Smoke Response Plans in DEQ’s budget was not carried forward in the 2023-25 biennium.
- \$32 million Community Risk Reduction (OSFM): Reduced to \$3 million.
- \$25 million Landscape Resiliency: Reduced by 50%.
- \$10 million Home Hardening programs, for those who have lost their homes in wildfires, was distributed across the current and past biennium. The legislature has signaled for consideration during the 2025 session, the development of a proactive Home Hardening program.

Senate Bills 80 and 82 (2023)

SB 80 Enrolled provided several updates to many of the requirements set forth in SB 762, including updating the statewide wildfire risk map to a “hazard” map instead, defining the purposes of the map; and changing hazard zones to three zones: low, moderate, and high, from a former five risk classes (none, low, moderate, high, and extreme). Property owner notice and appeal processes were revised and requirements for a robust community engagement process were added, including eight in-person meetings with county commissioners and staff throughout the state and a follow up meeting for counties with the Association of Oregon Counties (AOC). No date is specified in law for the map’s release; it is to be completed and released expeditiously. Throughout the bill, language changes for consistency with the map title and hazard zones are made, including conforming amendments for SB 644, accessory dwelling units in areas zoned for rural residential use (Section 9). In addition:

- The Landscape Resiliency Fund (Section 4) and the Community Risk Reduction Fund (Section 5) are established.
- Clarifications are made related to cleaner air spaces (Sections 6 and 7), including additional entities identified as grant recipients and state agency support for cleaner air spaces.
- The Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program and the Prescribed Fire Claims Fund are established (Section 14).
- Appropriations for the above funds are made (Sections 19-26).
- The effective date is July 1, 2023.

SB 82 Enrolled prohibits insurers from using the statewide map of wildfire hazards in coverage decisions. It requires insurers to provide information about their rating and underwriting decisions related to wildfire hazards through disclosure requirements to customers. The bill allows consumers to see how wildfire risk reduction efforts, such as establishing defensible space, hardening homes, and participation in wildfire community preparedness programs, may influence their insurance rating and the availability of insurance. It also provides flexibility to extend rebuilding and content replacement deadlines.

Federal Wildfire Commission

Congress created the federal [Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission \(Wildfire Commission\)](#) through the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (Pub. L. No. 117-58; § 40803, 135 Stat. 1097 (2021) (IIJA) to prepare a report with policy recommendations addressing wildfire management, mitigation, postfire rehabilitation and recovery.² This report was released in fall 2023.

The Commission's recommendations emphasized the need for increased funding that is sustained and predictable, keeps pace with the escalating crisis, incentivizes investments by other governments at all levels, and includes a focus on the mitigation of risk and impacts both before and after wildfire.

2024 Legislative Session

In the 2024 short session, the legislature tasked ODF and OSFM with convening a workgroup to identify solutions for sustainable wildfire mitigation and response funding through a budget note. A workgroup comprising 35 members from diverse interests was formed and met in June 2024.

Another development was House Bill 4016 (2024), which extended the Department of Consumer and Business Services (DCBS) Building Codes Division's (BCD) home hardening grant program for wildfire survivors and expanded it to include wildfire losses that may occur in the 2024 fire season. It also requires BCD and OSFM to write a report to the legislature on what a proactive home hardening grant program would look like by September 15, 2024.

Despite these policy innovations and investments over the last few years, Oregon still does not have a dedicated funding mechanism nor funded way to pay for costly fire seasons. With costs to protect Oregonians from wildfire rapidly growing, this issue will only continue to annually challenge response agencies. Significant challenges are ahead of us as much of the funding in SB 762 and during the 2023 session was one time funding, many of the programs established have since been defunded, and questions remain if they will even exist next year due to a lack of sustainable funding. While the scope and scale of the wildfire crisis exponentially grows, funding for response, mitigation and paying for large costly fires exponentially retracts.

² <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/wfmmc-final-report-09-2023.pdf>

2. COMMUNITY RISK REDUCTION

This section of the report addresses the components of SB 762, 80, and 82 focused on community risk reduction. This includes wildfire hazard mapping, defensible space, building codes, land use, public health, community resilience, and insurance. It meets the requirement of the Council in SB 762 to assess the progress and appropriateness of defensible space, building codes, and land use applications, and how the wildfire hazard map informs those. It reviews current policy context and implementation progress to date, and offers advice and recommendations on the following:

- Changes necessary to dramatically reduce wildfire risk and ensure regional defensible space, building codes, and land use applications are appropriate;
- How Oregon's wildfire hazard map may inform building codes and land use laws, rules, and decisions in a regionally appropriate manner;
- The application of defensible space requirements to vineyards, crops, and other cultivated vegetation;
- Public health protections from wildfire smoke;
- Homeowners' insurance coverage related to wildfire; and
- Improve community preparedness and build community resilience;
- How to strengthen intergovernmental and multiparty collaboration including government, stakeholders, and the public on the above topics.

Defensible Space

Status and Progress to Date

Defensible space is a critical element of an effective community risk reduction program. Defensible space refers to the area around a structure where vegetation has been treated, cleared, or modified to slow the rate and intensity of advancing wildfire and allow space for fire suppression operations to occur. Creating defensible space can include removing flammable or dead vegetation, limbing low tree branches, and other similar actions to reduce the flammable material. A comprehensive and effective defensible space program addresses neighborhoods and communities, in addition to individual properties.

SB 762 mandated and appropriated funding for OSFM to direct a community risk reduction program, including establishing minimum defensible space requirements for lands that are in both the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and in a high hazard area, as identified on the state wildfire hazard map. The program also includes public education on wildfire risk reduction, response planning, and community preparedness. In addition to keeping our homes and neighborhoods more wildfire safe, a robust defensible space program is a critical element in Oregon maintaining a healthy homeowner insurance market.

Under SB 762, OSFM established defensible space standards and with the initial funding, provided educational, financial, and technical support to communities across the state for community risk reduction. One service that OSFM offers is a free defensible space assessment to homeowners who request one. As of October 4th, 2024, 2,446 assessments were completed statewide. There are 406 assessors trained statewide representing 73 agencies, including two state agencies (OSFM and ODF). OSFM also provides extensive online guides for steps every property owner can take to create defensible space around their structures and for collective actions neighborhoods and communities can take. OSFM uses information on the location of socially and economically vulnerable communities, including the Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), to prioritize grants and target other assistance programs.

Final adoption of the wildfire hazard map will allow OSFM to further prioritize investments, education, and tools on the ground, especially to vulnerable communities in high hazard WUI areas. With sufficient resources, OSFM plans to achieve this risk reduction through continued education, grants, and other locally focused assistance.

These defensible space programs were not funded in the 2023-25 biennium, and so their continued maintenance, expansion, and effectiveness is at risk, making Oregon less wildfire prepared. However, the 2024 legislature's budget note directing OSFM and ODF to convene a workgroup identifying funding options may help address these funding gaps in the future.

Observations and Recommendations

The legislature took a significant step through SB 762 to make Oregon more wildfire prepared and safe in directing and funding OSFM to create a defensible space program consistent with national standards and best practices. OSFM has developed an effective program, utilizing outreach and education, grants, technical assistance, and regulations. Additional program and policy direction is not needed. However, the gains made will fade quickly and will not reach as far as needed without consistent, ongoing funding.

The Council believes that maintaining and expanding the overall community risk reduction program, including the defensible space program, is one of the most powerful tools that the state has to keep Oregonians and our communities more wildfire prepared and resilient. We recommend that the 2025 legislature establish a durable and sufficient source of funding for the OSFM community risk reduction program.

Home Hardening (Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Building Code)

Status and Progress to Date

No area in Oregon is immune from wildfire. Yet Oregon must continue to build and remodel homes to meet the housing needs of its residents and communities. Therefore, the legislature, in SB 762 (2021) and SB 80 (2023), directed BCD to adopt home hardening building code standards that would apply to new dwellings, retrofits of existing homes, and accessory structures of dwellings on properties in both a high wildfire hazard area and the WUI. Home hardening refers to using building materials and practices that can reduce the likelihood of ignition of a home by embers from wildfires.

These home hardening requirements are found in section R327 of the Oregon Residential Specialty Code (ORSC). By using these specific building construction methods in the high hazard areas of the WUI, home hardening can reduce the likelihood of building ignition, reduce the risk of structural loss, and help keep Oregonians safe.

The legislature recognized that Oregonians, local governments, state agencies, building professionals, and others would need a predictable transition to implement the home hardening codes. The adoption date of the ORSC Section R327 provisions is based on the date that the wildfire hazard map becomes final. There will be a six-month phase-in period between when the standards are adopted and when they become mandatory, during which building inspectors, contractors, other officials, and the public will be educated. These educational tools include the BCD Homeowner Home Hardening Guide and BCD Wildfire Hazard Mitigation Training Video.³ Outreach strategies will include providing supporting materials to impacted

³ <https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/codes-stand/Documents/5785-howfirehardeningworks.pdf>,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JJNzDiywvy8>

building departments to provide to customers, sharing training materials for contractors to comply with the code changes, and highlighting the changes at industry and local government events. BCD will also continue to work together with OSFM on defensible space and home hardening outreach.

SB 762 also required BCD to adopt a tool integrating all the mapped hazards for which there are design criteria, including wildfire, wind load, and snow load. That tool, the Oregon Design Criteria Hub, is now complete and publicly available.⁴

There have been a few policy changes related to home hardening since the Council's last report. As part of implementing SB 1537 (2024), BCD is creating the Housing Accountability and Production Office in partnership with DLCD. BCD has created a new Housing and Building Safety Section, which will perform wildfire policy work, among other tasks. Wildfire issues are housing and building safety issues; maintaining our current housing stock and mitigating risk to future housing need to be part of the overall housing strategy. In addition, House Bill 4016 (2024) extended the BCD home hardening grant program for wildfire survivors to include wildfire losses from the 2024 fire season. It required BCD and OSFM to write a report to the legislature on what a proactive home hardening grant program would look like, which was submitted in September 2024.⁵

Observations and Recommendations

Home hardening standards will apply to new homes and remodels of existing homes in the WUI and high wildfire hazard areas; however, these are not static locations. Home hardening benefits the homeowner, the community, fire fighters, and the state as a whole by helping to reduce ember movement, injury and death of humans, and loss of homes. Given this value of home hardening to the state, we recommend the following:

- The state should continue to invest in helping Oregonians voluntarily comply with R327, including by providing education and funding.
- Funding should be prioritized to those with the most need, taking into account whether they are located in the high wildfire hazard area/WUI.
- The state should help connect property owners to other sources of possible funding for home hardening.
- The legislature should look to the home hardening grant program recommendations of the OSFM and BCD, made in their September 2024 report, for guidance in future funding.
- Because BCD's fire home hardening code provisions apply only to one and two-family dwellings, we recommend that the legislature direct BCD to adopt similar codes covering commercial and multi-dwelling structures.
- While federal pre-emption currently prevents BCD from creating construction requirements for manufactured homes, the relevant agencies should explore other methods to encourage or require hardening of manufactured homes.
- Collect data to better understand the extent and value of home hardening. While we do not recommend creating additional permit requirements to track this, there might be other methods to achieve this monitoring, including partnering with agencies such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology Fire Research Laboratory and the Fire Safety Research Institute.

⁴ <https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/codes-stand/pages/design-criteria.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.oregon.gov/bcd/Documents/5989-proposal-proactive-home-hardening-grant-program.pdf>

Land Use

Status and Progress to Date

Section 11 of SB 762 requires DLCD to identify needed updates to the statewide land use planning program, local comprehensive plans, and zoning codes to incorporate the wildfire hazard map and to help minimize wildfire risk. DLCD submitted its required report to the Legislature by October 1, 2022, providing six recommendations.⁶ The Legislature has not taken action on DLCD's recommendations.

In 2024, the legislature did not pass legislation directing or funding DLCD to initiate rulemaking or develop guidance for statewide land use policies focused on mitigating wildfire hazards. As a result, DLCD's work over the past year allocated existing resources for inter-agency coordination and to support communities voluntarily advancing wildfire protection measures. DLCD is making progress on three of the six recommendations using voluntary programs and federal funding sources. SB 80 (2023) directed changes to the wildfire hazard map, which will have some impacts on the defensible space and home hardening requirements and timelines.

Specific activities that DLCD has undertaken related to its recommendations are:

Recommendation 3: DLCD and OSFM collaborated to address a current inconsistency in how cities and counties provide notice of land use development applications to fire agencies and OSFM for technical review and comment. DLCD and OSFM developed a potential solution to this issue, including issuing a technical advisory for local governments, and educating key parties in the land use application process about best practices for land use application notification and comment.

Recommendation 5: On post-disaster recovery planning, DLCD participated in the first statewide wildfire recovery summit in Eugene and in local planning processes in Clackamas and Washington counties to better understand local need and cross-organizational (e.g., non-government organizations, federal, state, local, etc.) planning efforts. DLCD is also currently involved in the update of the Oregon Disaster Recovery Plan led by the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM).

Recommendation 6: The majority of DLCD's work this year related to Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and Natural Hazard Mitigation Plans (NHMP) focused on Linn County's pilot project to better integrate CWPP and NHMP update processes. Using 2023 Pacific Northwest Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment data, Linn County had a productive and positive experience developing their CWPP with up-to-date county-specific data, which informed the NHMP update. DLCD is seeking federal grant funding to expand the pilot program into other Oregon communities. This highlighted an issue relating to the timing of plan updates. A NHMP is required to be updated every five years, but a CWPP has no mandatory deadline. FEMA requires the use of best available data in a NHMP (no more than five years old) which drives CWPP updates in some communities. These documents have different purposes, planning requirements, update deadlines, and sources of funding to support their development. The Council supports ongoing state agency work to better align these timeframes. Related to equity, DLCD uses data about socially and economically vulnerable communities when conducting natural hazards risk assessments for CWPPs, NHMPs, and the statewide risk assessment.

⁶ https://www.oregon.gov/lcd/Publications/20220930_DLCD-Wildfire-Recommendations-Report.pdf

Observations and Recommendations

- Increase investment in wildfire planning efforts for DLCDC and other agencies involved in regulating and mitigating wildfire risk for new development.
- Create an effective cooperation plan between local governments and OSFM for land use application reviews. OSFM should be able to distribute their deputies around the state to expedite these land use reviews.
- Reduce and simplify the current patchwork of funding opportunities for wildfire risk reduction planning, including interagency coordination to identify more collaborative grant and funding tools.
- Focus state agency efforts on prioritizing federal funding, other resources, and technical assistance to support the update of CWPPs in a more timely manner.
- To address current statutory inconsistent provisions regarding where requirements for home hardening and defensible space for rural accessory dwelling units (ADUs) will apply once the statewide wildfire hazard map is approved, the 2025 legislature should revise the current statute to align the requirements for ADUs with those for homes and accessory structures.
- Fund DLCDC to offer technical assistance and grants to cities and counties to revise their transportation system plans for safe and efficient wildfire evacuation and response. This will enhance resilience efforts by concentrating on life safety through: assessing the vulnerability of a jurisdiction's transportation infrastructure system; identifying feasible evacuation routes; prioritizing needed facility improvements; and identifying regulatory and financial strategies to develop the needed infrastructure. Planning would identify and prioritize routes that can serve as emergency evacuation routes, in conjunction with local, regional, and state emergency management professionals.
- Fund DLCDC Technical Assistance grants that increase local resources for planning for wildfire adapted communities.
- Increase funding for DLCDC GIS capacity to create and analyze geographic data to help counties and cities understand how to reduce the fire risk to housing, beyond the simple in-or-out wildfire hazard map.

Wildfire Hazard Map

Status and Progress to Date

SB 80 (2023) directed changes to the original wildfire risk map mandated by SB 762. These helped clarify its purposes as a tool for preparedness and resilience. The purposes are:

- Educate Oregon residents and property owners about the residents' and property owners' wildfire exposure by providing transparent and science-based information.
- Assist in prioritizing fire adaptation and mitigation resources for the most vulnerable locations.
- Identify where defensible space standards and home hardening codes will apply.

While the modeling that informs the map is still based on climate, topography, weather, and vegetation, these significant changes were made to it:

- The title of the map was changed from "risk map" to "hazard map."

- The map was required to display three hazard classes titled high, medium, and low, as opposed to the previous five risk classes.
- Notices to property owners will only be sent to those both in high hazard and within the wildland-urban interface boundaries, limiting confusion on who is subject to defensible space standards and home hardening codes.

The change to a wildfire *hazard* map helped to clarify the map's purpose in public outreach and education. For example, defensible space work done on one property will not change a property's hazard category classification because the classification reflects the combined hazards posed to that property by climate, weather, topography, and vegetation in the area. However, defensible space and home hardening measures can increase the likelihood that a structure will not burn.

SB 82 (2023) also directed insurance carriers that they could not use the statewide map of wildfire hazard to determine insurance coverage or rates.

In March and April 2024, ODF hosted a rulemaking advisory committee to consider whether irrigated agriculture should be to be directly considered in wildfire hazard calculations and, if so, to recommend rules guiding its inclusion. Irrigated agriculture and its potential hazard mitigating qualities were one of the most common themes of public feedback in 2022.

The committee determined that irrigated agriculture represents a persistent characteristic of vegetation and therefore should be to be directly considered by OSU when they calculate hazard. Specifically, the committee recommended that any agricultural area which has been verifiably irrigated in at least one of the last five years be considered irrigated agriculture for the purposes of hazard calculations. The Board of Forestry voted to adopt the recommended rules in September 2024.

The process for revising and re-releasing the hazard map in 2023-2024 was conducted jointly by OSU, ODF, OSFM, BCD, DFR, and the Council, and included:

- Soliciting feedback from legislators, planners, and elected officials across the entire state in coordination with the Association of Oregon Counties through a series of meetings (fall 2023).
- Creating OSU and ODF websites with all relevant information about the map, answers to frequently asked questions, and how to obtain additional information.⁷
- Outreach to a variety of media throughout the state.
- Holding six open houses in the areas that comprise over 95% of the properties that are in high hazard areas and also in the wildland-urban interface in spring-summer 2024: La Grande, Central Point, Klamath Falls, The Dalles, Grants Pass, and Redmond. Representatives from OSU, ODF, OSFM, BCD, DFR and the Council addressed many questions at these events and engaged with over 500 community members.
- Releasing an updated draft map on the Oregon Explorer website on July 18th, 2024, and accepting public comment for one month.⁸

Based on current draft data, there are about 109,000 tax lots statewide that are within the WUI *and* in a high hazard zone, or about 5.5% of all tax lots in Oregon. Twenty-six counties have tax lots that meet these criteria, but approximately 70% are in just four counties: Jackson, Josephine, Deschutes, and Klamath. These figures are subject to change as the wildfire hazard map is finalized.

⁷ <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/Pages/wildfire-hazard.aspx> and <https://hazardmap.forestry.oregonstate.edu/>

⁸ <https://oregon-explorer.apps.geocortex.com/webviewer/?app=665fe61be984472da6906d7ebc9a190d>

Observations and Recommendations

The map is key to successfully moving forward with protecting people, homes, businesses, and communities from wildfire in the future, through treatments at every scale across the landscape. Focusing on the high hazard WUI is the low hanging fruit that will give Oregon the most return on investment. The hazard map assists in identifying areas at the intersection of high hazard and vulnerable populations, providing insight into allocating funds where they will be the most effective.

This needs to happen sooner rather than later. With all these measures and treatments in place and maintained, Oregon towns should be a refuge from fire, not at risk of fire.

The Council makes the following recommendations:

- Agencies and the Council should continue to message that implementing defensible space and home hardening makes properties more wildfire resilient, can reduce ember intrusion, allows firefighters to operate safely, and puts properties in compliance with the law. It does not impact the hazard category of individual properties. They should also continue to message that federal land managers are actively engaged in reducing fuels that can contribute to wildfires on forest and rangelands.
- Let the map stay in its current format and be used until its regular update (approximately every 4-5 years), coinciding with two legislative cycles. This will allow the agencies to develop experience with using this tool.

Homeowner's Insurance

Status and Progress to Date

Insurance has been one of the most challenging issues as Oregon addresses wildfire preparedness and resilience. Fundamental shifts in wildfire behavior in Oregon have produced record fire losses, costs, and damage to communities, especially over the last decade. The 2020 Labor Day fires burned nearly a million acres, resulting in the loss of over four thousand structures and nine lives. This led to the 2021 legislature passing SB 762, the state's first comprehensive approach to modernize Oregon's wildfire preparedness and resilience systems, advancing multiple methods at multiple scales, from individual properties to communities to landscape.

SB 762 (2021) included developing a statewide wildfire risk map in 2022, which happened to coincide with some insurance companies canceling or not renewing homeowner insurance policies and raising rates. This resulted in some public concern that the map drove this behavior by the insurance companies. However, it is important to note that insurance companies do their own risk modeling and have extensive information on the wildfire loss histories in the regions where they operate. Despite public education on this, it seems that a portion of the public will not be convinced that it is the risk of wildfire itself, which insurance companies track on their own, that influences their decisions.

The legislature passed SB 82 (2023) in response to these real and perceived issues with homeowner's insurance. SB 82 has four main components:

- Prohibits insurance companies from using the state wildfire hazard map for insurance purposes.
- Requires disclosures: If a policy is not renewed, the company must provide a specific explanation to the policy holder. If the decision is wildfire related, the company must document property specific characteristics that led to the decision and actions the insured could undertake to improve the insurability of the property, if any.
- Underwriting and rating: Insurance companies must disclose their underwriting guidelines and rate plans, including how the insurer considers wildfire risk mitigation actions. While not requiring discounts or incentives, any that are offered must be publicized on the insurance company website.

- Requires that insurance policies provide for at least 24 months to rebuild and replace homes in certain circumstances.

The legislature also raised the limits in the state’s safety net insurance program - the FAIR Plan - to \$600,000 for personal dwellings and farms and \$1,000,000 for commercial buildings. Further modification is being discussed, including going to actual replacement value rather than actual cash value of the home.

The Oregon Division of Financial Regulation (DFR) has been working with insurance companies to update consumer notices on wildfire risk. Over time this could evolve into a market driven mechanism that would make insurance more affordable and make homes and neighborhoods safer. For example, some companies provide discounts for homes in communities participating in the Firewise USA® program. The DFR website will post all the incentives offered by companies operating in Oregon. DFR also offers:

- Outreach and education to empower Oregonians on how to shop for insurance.
- Community meetings, wildfire hazard map education, and other informational tools and opportunities for risk reduction.
- Free support by phone and email, including contacting insurance companies and advocating for consumers.

Observations and Recommendations

Oregon has suffered from homeowner insurance policy non-renewals in the most wildfire prone areas, however to a lesser degree than other states in the west. This is primarily because insurers can use actuarially justified rates without artificial caps or barriers as some states use to hold down rates. Those caps in other states have led to insurers deciding to stop offering coverage in entire areas of states, a dynamic that is unlikely to happen in Oregon due to the ability of insurance companies to obtain the rates necessary to continue in the homeowner insurance business.

SB 82 was crafted with much input and negotiation with insurance companies. The Council makes the following recommendations:

- Oregon has put some measures in place to allow insurance market incentives to develop. Although another year of record losses in 2024, so soon after 2020, makes matters more difficult, it doesn’t change the fact that measures will take time to develop. We need to assess whether a market structure that is regulated and overseen, but not imposed, by the government will function effectively.
- The state should continue to support an insurance structure of extensive consumer education, website hosting of insurance incentives, and transparency.

Health Systems for Smoke and Heat

Status and Progress to Date

Because wildfire smoke impacts often co-occur with extreme heat, public health programs addressing both heat and smoke are described in this section. Starting with SB 762, public health protections from wildfire smoke have been provided through multiple programs to the following public health agencies: Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Oregon Health Authority (OHA), and Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) Office of Resilience and Emergency Management (OREM). These include increased air quality monitoring and communications capabilities, community planning to prepare for and respond to wildfire smoke, increased capacity to provide emergency sheltering in public spaces, and resources to help individuals and families safely shelter at home during smoke and heat events. These public health programs funded by SB 762 were completed in 2023, and limited funding was allocated in the 2023 legislative session to support ongoing public health protections. In 2024, SB 1530 provided funds to OREM for warming or

cooling emergency shelters/facilities and to OHA for air conditioners and air filtration devices. Legislative investments are as follows (Table 2).

Table 2. Summary of wildfire programs and investments related to public health

Recipient agency	Bill and purpose
DEQ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB 762(2021): \$3.3 million for increased air quality monitoring, Tribal smoke resilience programs, research related to alternatives to burning, and development and implementation of community wildfire smoke response plans.
ODHS OREM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB 762 (2021): \$5.2 million for cleaner air spaces and grant program • SB 1536 (2022): \$2 million for warming/cooling center grants • SB 80 (2023): for expanded eligibility for the SB 762 ODHS shelter grant program to nonprofits and faith groups (no funding provided) • HB 3049 (2023): \$10 million for Resilience Hubs and Networks grant • SB 1530 (2024): \$2 million for warming or cooling emergency shelters/facilities, no funding for wildfire smoke abatement
OHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SB 762 (2021): \$4.8 million for home air filtering devices to individuals living with increased susceptibility to smoke impacts • SB 1536 (2022): \$5 million to buy portable air conditioners and air filtration devices for medically vulnerable Oregonians most likely to be impacted by heat and wildfire smoke • SB 1529 (2024): guidelines for air conditioner and air filter program (no funding) • SB 1530 (2024): \$3.5 million for air conditioners and air filters to eligible recipients through eligible distribution entities under the residential air conditioner and air filter delivery programs

Program accomplishments by agencies with these investments are as follows:

DEQ:

- DEQ grants and contracts supported projects that created alternatives to outdoor burning, including yard debris, agricultural waste, and slash pile burning.
- Enhanced smoke preparedness for Oregon’s Tribes.
- Developed Community Response Plans in smoke sensitive communities across Oregon.
- Moved existing Community Response Plans to implementation.
- Completed comprehensive emissions testing on air curtain incinerators as an alternative to slash pile burning.
- Identified locations for 20 new DEQ-built low-cost SensOR sensor modules to be placed across the state. Parts for the sensor modules were purchased; however, due to lack of continued funding to support staffing needs for operation, hardware, and data management, they have not been constructed and deployed.

ODHS OREM:

- ODHS OREM issued a grant program to fund improvements to public spaces for governments, public education providers, and Tribal nations needing cleaner air and warming and cooling spaces for emergency purposes.
- Twenty-nine recipients in 16 counties received funding awards to make improvements. ODHS estimates the unmet need based on interest surveys and unfunded applications at \$18 million.
- ODHS OREM issued a Request for Proposals for the Resilience Hubs and Networks Grant (2023-2024).

OHA

- 9,000 air filtration devices were distributed to individuals residing in six counties with highest levels of wildfire smoke (2022-2023).
- 7,500 portable air conditioners were provided to individuals across the state (2022-2023).
- 5,600 climate devices (4,400 air conditioners and 1,200 air filtration devices) were purchased for distribution in 2024. The OHA Air Conditioner and Air Filter program is meant to augment the other two programs that may provide devices to eligible Oregon Health Plan (OHP) members.⁹

A pilot program to build partnerships among federal, state, and local agencies was implemented in central Oregon in Spring 2024, aimed at increasing public health protections and communications in conjunction with larger scale prescribed burning on the Deschutes National Forest, in the WUI west of Bend. A joint agreement for the project partners (including DEQ, OHA, and ODF) builds on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) issued in 2023 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Interior, Center for Disease Control, and Environmental Protection Agency.¹⁰

Lessons learned from the successful West Bend Pilot Project will inform future efforts to increase community readiness for wildfire smoke and prescribed fire smoke. DEQ, OHA, ODF, and other state agency partners continue to seek ways to reduce smoke management barriers to prescribed burning, with the goal of building capacity to provide public health protections during prescribed burns.

Relationship to Wildfire Hazard Map

ODHS OREM has a role in Emergency Support Function 6 Mass Care and provides support to local emergency managers in the event of climate hazards, emergencies, and evacuations. ODHS OREM uses the wildfire hazard map to better understand where people they serve, including in-home and long-term care facilities, may be at greater risk of needing wildfire evacuations, and where landscape treatments are needed.

Equity Considerations

Wildfire smoke and related climate hazards are harmful to all Oregonians, but some are at greater risk. This includes older adults, people with multiple chronic conditions and/or disabilities, those with lower socio-economic status, and unhoused individuals. A central focus of Community Response Plans is how community partners work to notify, educate, and support these priority populations from prescribed fire and wildfire smoke impacts. OHA works with community-based organizations and coordinated care organizations to provide air filtration devices to medically and socially vulnerable community members. ODHS used the Social Vulnerability Index and EPA Environmental Justice tools to develop funding distribution and scoring criteria for the Resilience Hubs and Networks grant. ODHS also worked with Portland State University to provide technical assistance to anyone applying for their grant to make the resources more accessible to smaller communities and entities with limited resources.

⁹ <https://www.oregon.gov/oha/Pages/Air-Conditioner-Program.aspx>

¹⁰ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/r6/fire-aviation/?cid=FSEPRD1170659;>
<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-epa-doi-cdc-mou.pdf>

Observations and Recommendations

A March 2024 DEQ report on wildfire smoke shows that increasing wildfire smoke impacts, especially at hazardous levels, continue across the state.¹¹ Recently the U.S. Environmental Protection Association updated the National Ambient Air Quality Standards for particulate matter 2.5 (PM2.5) to reflect that fine particulate, including PM2.5 from smoke is more harmful to health than previously understood.¹² There are more air monitors across the state, thanks in part to the existence of home unit sensors such as Purple Air. However, there are areas of the state not adequately covered by existing monitors. Additional funds are needed for DEQ capacity to operate and maintain those monitors. The wildfire smoke response protocol includes a convening call of DEQ, OHA, and other stakeholders across the state to create air quality advisories and messaging to protect communities that are likely to see smoke impacts during wildfire season. Without additional funding support, DEQ has limited ability to support this work to assess air quality risks and develop tailored communications throughout the wildfire season or to continue developing and implementing community smoke response plans across the state.

Recommendations to support public health wildfire programs are:

- Continued and sustainable investment in wildfire smoke protections for public health. The public health investments funded by SB 762 established Oregon as a leader in developing groundbreaking programs to respond and adapt to wildfire smoke. The West Bend Prescribed Burn Pilot Project is an example of how Oregon continues to innovate in this space. However, programs that have demonstrated value and impact have not received continued funding.
- Funding for additional air quality monitors, and capacity to maintain those monitors, for areas of the state not adequately covered, and funding for development and implementation of community smoke response plans across the state.
- Funding for additional air filtration devices and air conditioners. OHA estimates the unmet need for these items to be 200,000-300,000 people. This estimate is based on OHP members that qualify for the health-related social needs benefit. These funds should be provided to local public health departments, community-based organizations, and faith-based groups to administer indoor air quality programs so they can be tailored to each community. The funding should cover evaluation and data collection capabilities to improve our understanding of how well such programs protect public health.

Oregon Conservation Corps Status and Progress to Date

SB 762 funded the Oregon Conservation Corps (OCC), through the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), to train and employ youth for community wildfire protection projects located in the wildland-urban interface. SB 762 has resulted in productive partnerships among the state's youth-focused programs to collaborate and align their efforts, resulting in more on-the-ground results for Oregonians. The grant administrators in the various agencies meet monthly to ensure they are not duplicating efforts and are funding in complementary ways to achieve shared outcomes. As recommended by the Council in our 2023 annual report, this has included combining advisory boards into a new Oregon Youth Works Advisory Board to oversee youth workforce programs.

¹¹ <https://www.oregon.gov/deq/wildfires/Documents/wf2024wfTrendsRep.pdf>

¹² <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-02/pm-naaqs-air-quality-index-fact-sheet.pdf>

From January 2022-June 2023, the OCC program funded nine different programs across the state and trained over 500 participants. These corps members conducted on-the-ground vegetation management and defensible space work, identifying areas of social vulnerability and high hazard to prioritize the funds. This amounted to approximately 100,000 hours spent directly on over 500 sites in the WUI. The wildfire hazard map benefits this work, since communities and property owners in high hazard areas welcome work crews to help with vegetation management.

The OCC program is over-subscribed, both from youth who would like to participate and from the sites that would like the OCC to undertake community wildfire risk reduction work. In addition, those who have participated in the OCC have often moved into seasonal wildfire work, filling a significant need.

The potential for growing this OCC program is quite large and would benefit not just from additional funding to do the on-the-ground work, but also from funding to establish a unified cross-agency database and to produce outreach and education materials. The OCC was not funded as part of HECC's current service level budget in 2023-25, but was appropriated \$10 million in the end-of-session budget bill.

Observations and Recommendations

The OCC program provides multiple benefits to Oregon: it conducts much-needed, community-scale wildfire protection efforts in the WUI; it provides skills training and employment to youth; and it feeds new workers into firefighting fields. The Council recommends that the Legislature establish a dedicated source of funding for this program at a level sufficient to expand and provide certainty to the OCC's community wildfire protection program.

3. ELECTRIC UTILITIES, LANDSCAPE RESILIENCY, AND BENEFICIAL USE OF FIRE

This section of the report addresses the components of SB 762 and 80 related to electrical utilities and landscape resiliency. Although wildfire programs to date have not explicitly focused on beneficial use of wildland fire, the Council identified this as a priority topic and has provided observations and recommendations to increase its application.

Electric Utilities

Status and Progress to Date

SB 762 requires the Public Utility Commission (PUC) to periodically convene workshops for electric utilities and system operators to share information related to wildfire best practices, to adopt risk reduction standards by rule, and to evaluate and approve Public Utility plans that meet specified requirements within 180 days.

Public utilities (investor-owned utilities/IOUs: PacifiCorp, Portland General Electric, and Idaho Power) are required to create, and operate in compliance with, a PUC-approved wildfire protection plan; with the first plan submitted by December 31, 2021, with annual updates thereafter. The wildfire protection plans must, at a minimum contain:

- Identified heightened wildfire risk areas within the service territory
- Mitigation strategies that reflect a reasonable balance with costs
- Protocol for de-energization of power system as a mitigation strategy
- Inspection procedures in the identified high fire risk areas
- Vegetation management procedures in the identified high fire risk areas
- Costs for the development, implementation, and administration of the plan
- Community outreach and public awareness efforts

Consumer-owned utilities (COUs; rural electric cooperatives, Peoples Utility districts, and Municipal electric Utilities) are required to create, and operate in compliance with, a governing body-approved wildfire mitigation plan with the first plan submitted by June 30, 2022, and if any updates occur are required to file with the PUC within 30 days. A copy of the risk-based wildfire mitigation plan is required to be submitted to the PUC to facilitate commission functions regarding statewide wildfire mitigation planning and wildfire preparedness. The wildfire protection plans must contain both mitigation strategies that protect public safety, reduce risk to utility customers and promote electrical system resilience to wildfire damage; and a wildfire risk assessment of utility facilities.¹³

To fulfill the requirement of periodically convening workshops for electric utilities and system operators to share information related to wildfire best practices, the PUC facilitates the Oregon Wildfire & Electric Collaborative (OWEC). Since July 2020 ongoing OWEC workshops have been held to discuss a range of

¹³ <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/safety/Documents/Wildfire-Mitigation-Plans-2023.pdf>

topics where stakeholders are encouraged to participate to enhance collaboration in Oregon regarding wildfire-related operational and policy issues. The PUC most recently convened an OWEC workshop in April 2024, addressing Forest Practices and Wildfire Mitigation. The information is provided as a resource on the PUC's Safety webpage.¹⁴

The PUC has also developed administrative rules that detail specific requirements for public utilities to include in submitted wildfire protection plans. The administrative rules are in alignment with SB 762 and provide a framework the public utilities can be measured against. The rulemaking also includes substantial amendments to safety standards in OAR Division 24 to address wildfires that apply to all electric utilities, including requirements for high fire hazard zones, vegetation clearance, and equipment inspections. The PUC conducts on-site audits of all electric utilities for compliance with these safety standards.

By August 2022, all Oregon consumer-owned utilities submitted their first wildfire mitigation plans to the PUC as approved by their governing body. Updates are not required, but when plans are updated a copy has been provided to the PUC.

The public utilities (PacifiCorp, Portland General Electric, and Idaho Power) all submitted their latest annual wildfire protection plans in 2023. On July 9, 2024, the PUC approved all three IOUs' 2023 wildfire mitigation plans. The PUC recognized in its approval the importance of moving forward a structured framework for evaluating the plans that was grounded in data, similar to the approach taken in California, which will be initially undertaken in the 2024 filings. Thereafter, additional efforts are targeted toward valuing the risk reduction associated with utility mitigation efforts which will inform future plans.

Observations and Recommendations

In 2024, due to the maturity of the overall electric utility wildfire mitigation plans, the Council narrowed their review focus on where the electric utility's wildfire mitigation efforts might overlap landscape resiliency efforts by other state agencies. This was done to identify opportunities for efficiencies in delivering existing wildfire mitigation programs or potentially creating new programs through joint efforts between agencies and electric utilities.

The Council recommends that the existing utility wildfire mitigation plans continue to be developed by each utility in coordination with the commission staff to bring alignment in risk evaluation methodologies and mitigation program investments.

The Council also recommends that the following opportunities be addressed through the evolution of each utility's wildfire mitigation plan and state agency programs:

- Sharing of electric utility asset locations (substations, transmission and distribution lines) with ODF to aid in alignment of fuel reduction activities and identification of potential fire break locations that protect critical utility assets.
- Creation of a shared GIS database for identification of risk trees outside of the utility right-of-way. This will increase awareness of issues and aid in the priority of resolution.
- Potential for leveraging of existing projects through increased coordination between ODF and the utilities, in alignment with the 20-year landscape resiliency strategy. Existing fuel reduction projects should be evaluated for scope modification to generate co-benefits between agencies and the utilities. This could be accomplished through an annual review of planned projects between ODF and utilities.

¹⁴ <https://www.oregon.gov/puc/Pages/EO-20-04-Wildfire-Mitigation-Workshops.aspx>

- Coordination between the utilities and ODF on fuel reduction programs for the debris remaining after a utility has conducted vegetation management trimming in a given forest area so that fuel sources are not left on the landscape.
- Leveraging, at pace and scale, log purchase agreements that make fuel reduction efforts more economical and align with existing electric utility vegetation management programs that maintain clearance between trees and electrical assets.

20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy

Status and Progress to Date

SB 762 directed ODF to develop a 20-year strategic plan, as described in the Shared Stewardship Agreement signed on August 13, 2019, that prioritizes restoration actions and geographies for wildfire risk reduction. The plan must be able to be used to direct federal, state, and private investments in a tangible way. Working with various state and federal agencies along with representatives from tribal governments, affected industries, environmental groups, and private forestland owners, ODF and its state and federal partners developed Oregon’s 20-Year Landscape Resiliency Strategy (20YLRS) and kickstarted implementation of the strategy at the Inaugural Landscape Resiliency Summit in November 2023 in Hood River. The 20YLRS includes a framework comprised of several strategic elements to guide agency direction and funding efforts.¹⁵

In order to implement the 20YLRS, an increased emphasis on proactive efforts on federal, state, and private forestland to promote resiliency are needed. Among those efforts is an emphasis on increasing regional, multi-agency planning efforts, thinning projects, and prescribed burning. These increased resiliency efforts will be targeted in areas of highest priority, with the high hazard areas on the state’s wildfire hazard map a critical component of the prioritization process.

The Council recognizes that there will not be adequate funding to identify and treat all areas throughout Oregon that are at risk – or even high risk – of wildfire, and that a strategy of utilizing available resources within areas that are most susceptible to wildfire and with the most potential for damage to people and property is wise. Similarly, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy noted the following:

Western stakeholders identified protecting the “middle ground,” areas between communities and the more distant wildlands, as an important regional value. While the western stakeholders express concern over community protection, the additional desire is to protect the middle ground areas from extreme wildfire events. The West needs large landscape-scale changes in vegetative structure and fuel loadings to significantly alter wildfire behavior, reduce wildfire losses, ensure firefighter and public safety, and improve landscape resiliency. Active management of public and private land holdings is needed, including harvesting and thinning operations to reduce hazardous fuels in and around communities and in the middle ground.

¹⁵ <https://www.oregon.gov/odf/pages/20-year-strategy.aspx>

A key principle of Oregon's 20YLRs (Principle 1) is to *"fund and support the development of locally led and collaboratively developed landscape assessments and plans that identify priority geographies and actions for landscape resiliency and wildfire risk reduction."* This principle emphasizes the importance of work at the regional and local level for planning and prioritization and is the strategy's proposed next step: ensuring that we are putting limited resources in the appropriate locations. If this planning is done at the regional level, metrics are set and there is alignment with the state strategy. We can then ensure that we are allocating resources (financial, human, and others) to the places of the greatest need while eliminating process waste and opening up bottle necks (utilization opportunities, workforce development, and others) and removing policy and administrative barriers.

The Council focused its efforts this year on two key aspects of landscape resiliency: utilization of byproducts and the need to strategically focus 20YLRs implementation efforts on the WUI.

Utilization of Byproducts

A direct result of an increased emphasis on risk reduction efforts on federal, state, and private forestland to promote resiliency is an increase in the amount of primary and secondary wood materials generated. If these restoration byproducts are not properly disposed of during active resiliency efforts or otherwise manufactured into commercial products, they themselves can become fuel sources that can exacerbate wildfire risk and severity, rather than lessening it. Consequently, efforts must be made to ensure that wood products generated from resiliency projects on all Oregon forestlands are utilized and/or disposed of in a manner that does not create a new and additional wildfire risk.

Fortunately, there are potential productive uses for many of the wood products generated from a resiliency project on forestland. The Council has met with various representatives of public and private associations with a diverse range of experience and interest in the utilization of wood resources from landscape resiliency efforts. Many promising technologies have been developed to utilize both primary and secondary wood products.

While these uses have been studied, tested, and identified, the economic reality of ensuring that an increase in woody biomass will be put to productive economic use has proven challenging for the following reasons:

1. **Location:** The 20YLRs identifies southern and eastern Oregon as the areas most in need of landscape resilience funding and efforts. Unfortunately, the majority of forest products processing facilities in Oregon are in western Oregon, and particularly the Willamette Valley. That means that processing capacities in areas where landscape resiliency projects are likely to be concentrated is low.
2. **Cost:** As a result of the mismatch between areas that need increased resiliency projects and the location of timber mills and processing facilities, the cost to transport primary and secondary wood products from a project site are significant, and in most cases exceed the economic value of the wood products.
3. **Market factors:** The wood products market fluctuates with the national economy and international markets, and in many instances the wood products produced from a project site, especially secondary materials like wood residuals, have limited value in a down economy.
4. **Consistency and reliability:** To make capital investments in areas of the state where resiliency projects are going to be located, private industry will need a consistent and predictable source of wood products into the mills. Without assurance of funding for increased resiliency projects, private industry is less likely to invest in mill infrastructure outside of the Willamette Valley.

5. **Commercial timber as part of resiliency project:** In order to increase the economic viability of a resiliency project, the presence and harvestability of commercial timber within the project site will increase the likelihood that secondary wood produced will be utilized. Where the biomass to be removed is low or no value, investment in resilience treatments will be required.
6. **Workforce/housing issues:** The few remaining mills in areas of Oregon that are likely to be located close to new resiliency projects are struggling to stay in business, in part due to a lack of a qualified and available workforce. There is also a significant lack of affordable housing available in these areas to house a workforce, which also affects wildfire response efforts. An increase in automation is a possible solution to this issue, but automation is expensive and unlikely without assurance of a consistent and reliable source of wood products.

Observations and Recommendations

Based on the Commission Report, the National Wildfire Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, and Oregon's 20YLRS, along with recent discussions and presentations with federal, regional, and state fire officials, we recommend that the legislature fund implementation of the 20YLRS with an immediate emphasis on creating governance structures at the regional level, prioritizing activities in the WUI and supporting local planning initiatives through technical and science support. We also make the following specific recommendations:

- Increase and provide consistent funding for resilience projects: To increase the amount of acreage treated and maintained, a steady, stable, broad based, and reliable source of federal and state funding for landscape resiliency projects is needed.
- Continued use of grants and incentives such as renewable energy credits to improve economic feasibility of landscape resilience projects. The utilization of wood products, particularly lower value secondary materials, can be greatly enhanced through use of federal and state grants available to both the public and private sector. Grants should be provided for a variety of purposes, including innovation grants to fund research on the development of new technologies for utilization of secondary materials, grants to enable existing mills to retool for a different labor market and manufactured products, and grants to offset transportation costs for both primary and secondary wood products created by increased resiliency projects. A steady source of funding for these grants is encouraged.
- Workforce training: The Council recommends increased efforts by the state to encourage and enhance training efforts to produce a trained and effective workforce capable of completing a resiliency project along with a workforce capable of operating a successful mill or biomass facility. Involvement of Oregon's youth and the development of career pathways in the forest sector is particularly important to create a viable workforce for the future.
- Investment in and encouragement of biomass facilities: The Council recommends action by Congress and the Oregon legislature to promote the creation/continuation of biomass facilities using secondary wood products as a fuel source. Congress and the Oregon Legislature should review and reform (if necessary) tax credits and regulatory incentives to encourage appropriately scaled biomass facilities owned by both the public and private sectors, with a prioritization on integrated facilities. This should include Congress amending the Federal Renewable Fuel Standard to include federal forest residuals as Renewable Identification Number eligible feedstock with appropriate sideboards.
- Implement the 20YLRS through development of regional collaboration governance structures with an emphasis in and around communities in high-hazard WUI areas. Invest in these shared stewardship governance structures at the regional level. Use them to work with communities, collaborative groups, and land management agencies to prioritize defensible space, evacuation routes, wildfire protection planning, and preplanning within the WUI and adjacent lands. This specifically includes:

- Emphasize defensible space and institutionalize evacuation route maintenance through support of local plans, promote reduction in cost and increased efficiency and efficacy by strategic prioritization.
- Support preplanning and use of Potential Operational Delineations involving neighborhoods in the WUI.
- Support and prioritize community resiliency hubs in the WUI.
- Participate in MOUs with land management agencies and high hazard communities to improve communication about risk reduction in the WUI.
- Support USFS Community Mitigation Assistance Teams pre-mitigation planning.¹⁶
- Support planning and strategic prioritization within the WUI through local risk mitigation plans. through the regional shared stewardship structure described above.
- Develop systems for tracking and assessing outcomes of the 20-year strategy to determine progress, especially in and around the WUI. This should focus on tracking outcomes, not just treatments. With the understanding that strategic prioritization of risk mitigation in and around the WUI will provide the best return on investment, the only way to determine this is to analyze treatment locations and measure through modeling the reduction of risk and increase in landscape resiliency.
- Invest in science and technology that supports planning, monitoring, and assessing outcomes.
- We second the Federal Wildfire Commission’s recommendation that wildland fire data should be managed through a decentralized, integrated data and modeling collaboration environment, including:
 - Invest in new technologies that provide integrated decision support, share a common platform and terminology to implement community risk reduction planning in and around the WUI and connecting nearby communities.
 - Support wildfire preplanning and use of Potential Operational Delineations that involve communities, neighborhoods and recovery and emergency response organizations. This is a spatial fire planning tool that can help inform mitigation and response decision-making.
 - Coordinate with federal agencies to support and integrate these tools.

Increasing Beneficial Fire Use in Oregon

Status and Progress to Date

An essential element of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy is the use of “beneficial fire” – including prescribed burning, cultural burning, and wildfire managed for resource objectives – to create resilient landscapes and fire-adapted communities. This is in recognition of the crucial roles that wildland fire plays in supporting ecological function and fuels reduction. In addition, the federal Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission recently observed in its report that:

“Dramatically increasing the amount of beneficial fire on our landscapes is essential. Wildfire is a natural process, and the use of fire is vital to both fire-adapted ecosystems and fire-adapted communities. Fires serve to reduce flammable materials that fuel undesirable high-severity wildfires, thus mitigating risk to communities and fire-adapted landscapes. Knowing these benefits, Indigenous people have used fire for thousands of years to steward natural resources and as a core element of many cultural practices. Today, however, widespread beneficial use of fire has largely been lost. As a result, wildfires across the country are burning

¹⁶ <https://co-co.org/affiliates/cmat/>

far less area than they historically would have but are more frequently burning at higher severity and in landscapes no longer adapted to fire (Haugo et al., 2019). Entire ecosystems have missed many cycles of fire (Safford & Van de Water, 2014), compromising overall ecological health and heightening risk to communities in which we live, work, and play.

Expanding beneficial fire, which includes prescribed burning, cultural burning, and wildfire managed for resource benefit, faces a number of legislative and policy headwinds. Proactively utilizing more low-severity fire to lessen the extent and impacts of high-severity fire runs counter to the dominant paradigm over the last century in wildfire response, which typically favors aggressive suppression and other strategies intended to reduce short-term risk (Tedim et al., 2020). However, this approach perpetuates the further buildup of fuel loads near communities (exacerbating risk of severe wildfire in the long-term) and deprives fire-dependent ecosystems of a process that is essential to their function.

Another complicating factor is that all forms of fire, including beneficial fire, produce smoke that, when inhaled, harms human health, particularly for those who are most vulnerable. The need for more fire to prevent worse fire, and the smoke that is produced from all fire creates real and perceived tensions between the mutually important objectives of protecting public health from the impacts of smoke and enabling and supporting beneficial fire. Additional challenges to increasing the beneficial use of fire as a management tool are created by existing regulations, the potential for legal liability, limitations in available personnel, and changes in climate that, in some areas, have reduced opportunities for prescribed fire and the management of wildfire for resource objectives (Clark et al., 2022; Shultz, McCaffrey, & Huber-Stearns, 2019; Wonkka, Rogers, & Kreuter, 2015).

In most fire-adapted ecosystems, we need significantly more fire on the land and around our communities, not less, which will require adaptation, mitigation, and policy change. Plans and incentives must be reoriented to enable and promote beneficial use of fire and systems must be changed to address barriers such as liability, training, and limited personnel. Communities must be prepared for smoke, both in terms of when to expect it and the actions necessary to reduce its impacts. Public health agencies need to have the capacity to engage with land management agencies, state agencies, local and Tribal governments, and communities to better integrate public health and wildfire needs.

The widespread ability to utilize fire in beneficial ways is also dependent upon our collective relationship with fire. Fostering social support for beneficial fire requires building trust amongst all parties through activities such as in collaborative response planning that enables consideration of local needs and values before a fire ever occurs. Finally, Tribes, as the original stewards of our nation's landscapes, must be further empowered to utilize beneficial fire and federal agencies must create conditions that enable such use.

The Commission recommends policy solutions that address the logistical, policy, and resource-related barriers to the beneficial use of fire and also provide means for better protecting public health. The Commission highlights the need for inclusive, collaborative pre-fire planning to help share decision-making, enable mutual understanding, and facilitate the consideration of tradeoffs associated with various wildfire response and management decisions."

In November 2023, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Centers for Disease Control signed a federal MOU committing to work together to increase the footprint of beneficial fire while also protecting human health.¹⁷ In February 2024, these entities and state officials from Oregon and Washington signed a Joint Statement of Intent to Cooperate on Prescribed Fire and Smoke Management (state-federal Joint Statement of Intent) to carry out the commitments in the federal MOU.¹⁸

Observations and Recommendations

Based on the Commission Report, federal MOU, state-federal Joint Statement of Intent, and complimentary state-level reviews and practitioner surveys regarding barriers to increasing beneficial fire use,¹⁹ conversations with Oregon state officials, and our own experiences, we make the following recommendations:

- Federal, state, and local air quality regulators, land management agencies, and public health entities should continue and increase ongoing discussions regarding how to increase the use of beneficial fire while also safeguarding public health through tabletop and applied fire exercises (e.g., West Bend Prescribed Burn Project).²⁰ In particular, these entities should explore and adopt efficiencies and best practices with respect to exceptional event demonstrations and forthcoming smoke management planning and State Implementation Plan revision.
- Continue to explore methods to reduce prescribed fire smoke, including enhanced emission reduction techniques, reducing fuels on the landscape prior to burning, finding alternative means of removal for piles beyond burning, and other options that include alternatives to burning.
- The legislature should increase funding for meteorological and smoke modeling services necessary to determine burn windows and estimate smoke effects to local communities.
- The legislature should increase funding for public education and outreach efforts related to increased prescribed fire and smoke. Relatedly, relevant state agencies should work internally to develop a culture of respect and support for beneficial fire, including cultural burning.
- Maintain and expand existing state smoke mitigation programs that provide resources to communities and sensitive populations experiencing wildland and prescribed fire smoke impacts. Tailor mitigation options to the differences between wildland and prescribed fire smoke effects.²¹
- The legislature should increase funding to catalyze the creation of a dedicated, cross-organizational prescribed fire workforce in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, Tribes, local, state, and federal land managers, and other burners. This should include dedicated and long-term funding to support prescribed fire training, capacity building, workforce development, and implementation, including through consistent funding sources, accessible grants, cost-share agreement structures, dedicated position authority within ODF for prescribed fire planning and implementation, and prioritizing funding that increases community involvement in prescribed fire.

¹⁷ <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/usda-epa-doi-cdc-mou.pdf>

¹⁸ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd1170668.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/rp_prescribed_fire_barriers_strategic_plan_2023.pdf, https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/courneyschultz/wp-content/uploads/sites/23/2024/07/Western-US-RxFire-report_Final.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.oregon.gov/odhs/licensing/adult-foster-homes/Alerts/2024-04-02-bend-prescribed-burn-project.pdf>

²¹ For example, clean air shelters are often not available during prescribed burn windows but are available for wildfires. Similarly, effects from prescribed fire smoke are often felt sporadically and in the evenings, as opposed to consistent effects from wildland smoke.

- Evaluate the implementation of SB 80 (establishing the State’s Prescribed Fire Liability Pilot Program and revising its Certified Burn Manager Program) and enact appropriate changes, if any, to ensure that burners have access to sufficient liability insurance. As part of evaluation of SB 80²², consider whether changes to Oregon’s negligence standard to shift to a gross negligence standard would be appropriate.

An important caveat about these recommendations is that while the forested landscape is almost universally in need of more beneficial fire, Oregon’s rangelands are different from forested ecosystems. We must improve our ability to rehabilitate Invasive Annual Grass (IAG) monocultures back to native plant systems. This is critically important given the 2024 wildfire season, in which nearly 1.2 million acres or 65% of the 1.9 million burned were rangelands. Minimizing the impact of wildfire, especially in the low elevation Wyoming Sage habitats is essential. Aggressive initial attack will be important. Rangeland fires are driven by fine fuels (herbaceous vegetation). Landscape treatments with targeted grazing make a large difference in fire behavior. It will be important to diligently restore our sagebrush rangelands after fire, and continue to study and improve ways to address IAGs. Both late season grazing and new herbicides (i.e., Rejuvra) show promise in this area.

²² SB 80 requires ODF to report on implementation of the prescribed fire liability fund by April 1st, 2028.

4. ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR WILDFIRE MITIGATION AND RESPONSE

Status and Progress to Date

Current funding approaches for wildfire response and mitigation are not adequate to address the growing complexity and cost of wildfires in Oregon. This was amply demonstrated in the 2024 wildfire season, wherein costs were extensive and resources were stretched critically thin. A sustainable, equitable, and durable solution is needed to address this issue across Oregon. Prior attempts to seek general funds for response and mitigation have not succeeded, suggesting the need for a new strategy to increase statewide services specific to wildfire. In the 2024 short session, the legislature tasked ODF and OSFM with convening a workgroup to identify solutions for sustainable wildfire mitigation and response funding through a budget note. A workgroup comprising 35 members from diverse interests, including members of the Council, was formed and met in June 2024. This group agreed on the following shared principles:

- Long term and durable funding for wildfire response and mitigation should be a priority investment for the state.
- Funding solutions should ensure financial solvency of agencies and be directed through existing state programs.
- Mitigation and response are interdependent functions of the Cohesive Wildfire Strategy and both need to be adequately funded.
- Funding solutions will consider the benefits of mitigation and response to all Oregonians.
- Funding should match the need both annually and long-term, and not overly burden any group.
- Wildfire response and mitigation strategies need to be affordable and cost-effective.
- Funding solutions will prioritize human safety.

Through summer 2024, two subgroups on response/readiness and mitigation met regularly to develop concepts for how to fund wildfire programs at levels originally provided in SB 762. These concepts will be discussed by the full group in October 2024, and the agencies (ODF and OSFM) are required to report on the group's work by December 2024. Within the Council, a workgroup was also formed to discuss funding strategies and track the effort of the budget note workgroup.

Observations and Recommendations

The Council concurs with the principles of the budget note workgroup. The Council also concurs with the Federal Wildfire Commission's recommendation that there is a need for increased funding that is sustained and predictable, keeps pace with the escalating crisis, incentivizes investments by other governments at all levels, and includes a focus on the mitigation of risk and impacts both before and after wildfire. In Oregon, wildfire funding needs a stable and sufficient revenue source with a broad base that is not solely reliant on general fund appropriations. As wildfire response and mitigation broadly affect Oregonians and involve multiple agencies and sectors, solutions must therefore incorporate ideas and contributions from all involved. The Council will continue to track the progress of dialogue on this topic, and offer observations on needs, challenges, and opportunities related to funding wildfire response and mitigation.

APPENDIX: WILDFIRE PROGRAMS ADVISORY COMMITTEE ROSTER FOR 2024

Chairperson, Dave Hunnicutt (Hillsboro)

Member who represents rural residential property owners whose property is wholly or partially within the wildland-urban interface

Vice Chairperson, Mary Kyle McCurdy (Portland)

Member who represents state or regional land use planning organizations

Mark Bennett (Unity)

Member representing County Government

Chase Browning (Medford)

Member who represents fire marshals with wildland-urban interface firefighting experience

Joshua Shaklee (Douglas County)

Member who is a land use planning director for a wildland-urban interface county

Jim McCauley (League of Oregon Cities)

Member representing City Government

Bradley Clark (Grants Pass)

Member who is a land use planning director for a wildland-urban interface city

Nick Browne (Clackamas/Canby)

Member who represents fire chiefs with wildland-urban interface firefighting experience

Ian Yocum (Dayton): Member who represents firefighters with wildland-urban interface firefighting experience

Samantha Bayer (Eagle Point)

Member who represents farmers whose land is wholly or partially within the wildland-urban interface

John O’Keeffe (Adel)

Member who represents ranchers whose land is wholly or partially within the wildland-urban interface

Debi Lorence (Halfway)

Member who represents forestland owners whose property is wholly or partially within the wildland-urban interface

Steve Rondeau (Klamath Tribe)

Member who represents federally recognized Indian tribes with land wholly or partially within the wildland-urban interface

Allen Berreth (Portland)

Member who represents a utility company

Susan Jane Brown (John Day)

Member who represents environmental interests

Terry Fairbanks (Jacksonville)

Member who represents forest resiliency interests

Karna Gustafson (Bend)

Member who represents land and housing development interests or real estate industry interests

Sarah Worthington (Bend)

Member who represents public health professionals

Rene Braga (Medford)

Member who represents the environmental justice community



Wildfire Programs Advisory Council

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