

## **Private Lands Access Closures -Intended to Reduce Risk by “Prevention” 2011 Update**

In recent years landowners have sought any and all means to reduce natural resource damage from accidental or careless activities caused in part by the general public as well as reduced suppression resources due to budget reductions. These valuable resources include: growing forests, clean air, clean water, fish populations, wildlife and wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities very important assets to all Oregonians.

Normally the season having the greatest potential for fire damage is, obviously, summer and early fall although climate change effects are showing fire danger periods extending farther each year into early spring and late fall. During fire season, some landowners have experienced unacceptable levels of damage, not only from fire but also from other risks and liabilities listed below. Many landowners have chosen to reduce the damage by controlling public access to their lands (Prevention). Some eliminate public access on a year round basis while others restrict access only during *EXTREME* fire conditions. These closures are individual landowner decisions based on their unique geographic locations and company situations, as well as the levels of risk they are willing to accept as part of their active *Fire Prevention Plan*.

Besides the risks associated with fire, reductions in the following illegal activities are also achieved by access closures / restrictions:

Trespassing	Methamphetamine Labs
Marijuana growing	Poaching
Vandalism/Metal Theft	Illegal Dumping
Stolen Vehicle Dumping	Party Fires
Minor Forest Product theft	Timber theft
Road damage	Stream/Soil damage from off-road vehicles
Target Shooting	

Another consideration for implementing access closures to reduce new fire starts is the evaluation of fire crew availability within the region. This can occur from base budget funding for local readiness or fire responses throughout the region. The numbers of available crews depend on other fire activity in our area, regionally or nationally. The rising cost of suppression resources and wildfires warrant greater attention and commitment to the “*Prevention*” aspects of an effective Fire Program.

Once the fire danger has been reduced by fall rains, many landowners restore public access in time for traditional fall activities. The public’s access and participation in ODF&W general hunting seasons is a critical component of an integrated timber damage program. Reducing seedling damage caused by deer and elk browse in managed forests helps meet long-term sustainability goals for landowners and public expectations.

It is recognized that landowner access closures do affect many diverse public activities but are not intended to single out any one specific interest or activity group. Restricted use or closures of private lands is part of the landowner’s prevention planning process to protect Oregon’s resources. Thank you for your efforts to prevent fires and keeping our forests healthy and habitats safe. We trust that with this better understanding of the considerations associated with the benefits from “public access closures” there will be a greater appreciation, understanding and acceptance of access restrictions as a “*Prevention*” tool.

**“Keep Oregon Green”<sup>©</sup> – Help Prevent Wildfires**