

Increasing wildland fire protection in Oregon

By Rod Nichols, Oregon Department of Forestry

When a fire occurs, dial 911, right? But on 6 million acres of Oregon rangelands, there's no fire department to respond to a call. Located outside of existing rural fire districts, forest protection districts and rangeland fire protection associations, these unprotected lands are jurisdictional blank areas on the map.

To help close the gap, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) recently created a Rangeland Fire Coordinator position for the eastern portion of the state, where most of these under-protected lands occur. Gordon Foster brings to the position, decades of forestry and wildfire experience with the U.S. Forest Service and ODF. Officially on the job December 12, he needed no advance publicity to make landowners aware of the efforts to address unprotected areas.

"I've already been contacted by people in unprotected areas of the state," Foster said. "Information about this new initiative is being spread by word of mouth."

The Rangeland Fire Coordinator's primary aim is to assist rangeland owners in extending fire protection to their property. This will be accomplished by:

- providing technical assistance;
- offering access to federal grants administered by ODF; and
- helping landowners find appropriate resources to reduce wildfire risks.

The new initiative is strictly voluntary. While increased rangeland protection will improve fire protection capabilities, it will not provide for structural fire protection.

The Rangeland Fire Coordinator position was created based on recommendations from a task force charged with identifying solutions of under- and unprotected lands. It was co-chaired by the Department of Forestry and the Office of State Fire Marshal.

For more information, contact Gordon Foster at Oregon Department of Forestry, Box 670, Prineville, Oregon 97754, 541-447-5658 or gfooster@odf.state.or.us. For information on wildfire mitigation projects and community wildfire prevention planning resources, contact Donna Disch, 503-373-1540 ext. 275 or email donna.disch@state.or.us



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