Wildfire Adapted Communities


Purpose: DLCD’s Wildfire Adapted Communities project is in response to Senate Bill 762, passed by the Oregon Legislature in 2021. The legislation represents Oregon’s comprehensive response to readying the state for increased wildfires, intensified by the impacts of climate change. This proactive approach provides more than $220 million to help improve wildfire preparedness and resiliency, with particular focus on investing in under-served communities. The three key strategies, consistent with the National Cohesive Wildfire Strategy, include:

- Creating fire-adapted communities,
- Increasing wildfire response safety and effectiveness, and
- Strengthening the health and resiliency of Oregon's landscapes.

Advancing wildfire protection in Oregon requires action from multiple state agencies, overseen by the State Wildfire Programs Director and Wildfire Programs Advisory Council, to:

- Minimize loss of life and property,
- Protect the lives of firefighters,
- Protect and manage Oregon’s forest assets, and
- Reduce wildfire risk for communities and development.

Wildfire Risk Map: The Oregon Department of Forestry is responsible for the statewide map of wildfire risk to inform decision-making and investments, in consultation with Oregon State University. The map will:

- Include wildland-urban interface (WUI) boundaries and fire risk classes, as well as social and economically vulnerable communities,
- Be updated to reflect current wildfire risk, typically every five years.
- Be available by June 30, 2022, via the Oregon Wildfire Explorer website.

Wildfire Impacts

Record-breaking wildfires have threatened communities, businesses, landscapes, and wildlife across Oregon.

By the numbers...

- **1M+** Acres burned in Oregon 2020
- **4,000** Homes destroyed in Oregon 2020
- **662,000** Acres burned annually over three decades
- **$1.4B** Spent fighting fires since 2017

Smoke from wildfires and the associated health and economic impacts are some ways that many Oregonians have been impacted by wildfires.

In addition to the devastating loss of life, homes, and businesses, other significant social, economic, and environmental implications include loss of infrastructure, cultural resources, and tourism; transportation and power interruptions; and negative impacts to watersheds, wildlife habitat, timber, agriculture, and recreation.

Sources: Office of Senator Jeff Golden and Doug Grafe, Wildfire Programs Director
Outcomes: DLCD is preparing a report for the Wildfire Programs Advisory Council and the Oregon Legislature, due October 1, 2022, with recommendations on:

- State and local land use planning changes that will reduce wildfire risk to people, property, and communities.
- Development considerations, safe evacuation routes, sufficient defensible space, and building codes, allowing for regional differences.
- Appropriate levels of state and local resources necessary for effective implementation of recommendations.

The legislature will consider DLCD’s recommendations in 2023 and may direct the agency to work on rules or other implementation strategies. DLCD is developing a corresponding budget and legislative proposal for the 2023 legislative session to advance and fund ongoing agency efforts to create wildfire adapted communities.

How to Provide Input: Community engagement is a cornerstone of Oregon’s statewide planning program. DLCD seeks to gain input from a broad spectrum of Oregonians using a variety of engagement strategies, including community listening sessions, a virtual open house, a survey, a stakeholder group, and additional targeted outreach to voices that have traditionally been excluded. In a parallel process, DLCD is consulting with Tribal nations. Stakeholder group meetings will be available to view online with written comments accepted, and the Land Conservation and Development Commission will accept both written and verbal testimony at their July and September meetings. Visit DLCD’s Wildfire Adapted Communities webpage to learn more about engagement opportunities, upcoming meetings, and to sign up for the project email list.
Recommendations: DLCD’s recommendations will focus on the following themes:

- **Protecting what we have.** What land use recommendations can DLCD make that will help protect existing homes, development, infrastructure, farm and forest lands, and natural resources? How can a community reduce its vulnerability to the effects of wildfire and post-fire impacts such as landslides and flooding?

This infographic provides examples of land use planning strategies and techniques that can address wildfire risk in a community. Source: [https://cpaw.headwaterseconomics.org/](https://cpaw.headwaterseconomics.org/)
• *Planning for growth.* How can DLCD guide or help local governments plan for growth in the face of wildfire threat? Planning for growth, or new development, is relevant for both cities and counties. It can be a rural home, an industrial area, an expanding urban growth boundary, or new development within an existing urban growth boundary. How can cities and counties reduce wildfire risk as they plan for growth, including factors such as infrastructure needs and placement of important facilities?

• *Integrating the Statewide Wildfire Risk Map.* DLCD will make recommendations about how local governments can use the information in the Statewide Wildfire Risk Map in local planning.

• *Reducing barriers to wildfire recovery and mitigation.* After the Labor Day fires of 2020, DLCD assisted local government planning offices that were overwhelmed with permit applications. Reducing this barrier helped impacted communities recover more quickly. DLCD is looking at tools like this and other ways we can help communities recover after a wildfire.

• *Considering equity.* Adaptation to and recovery from natural disasters is more difficult for socially and economically vulnerable households and communities. Variables such as income, age, mobility, housing type, health, race and ethnicity, and other socioeconomic factors can influence vulnerability to wildfire impacts. For example, limited access to resources increases susceptibility to catastrophic loss by decreasing opportunities to prepare for, mitigate, adapt to, and recover from disaster events. A [national study](#) revealed that communities that are mostly Black, Hispanic, or Native American experience 50 percent greater vulnerability to wildfires compared with other communities. Knowing about potential unequal impacts of wildfire can help direct resources, inform education and outreach efforts, and guide plans and strategies. DLCD’s report will highlight opportunities to reduce barriers and increase benefits for vulnerable communities.

• *Identifying appropriate levels of funding.* Both local governments and DLCD will need additional funding and other resources to implement the recommendations advanced in DLCD’s report.

**Other Agencies:** DLCD’s wildfire adapted communities work is closely aligned with the work of several other state agencies:

• [Oregon Department of Forestry](#) – Responsible for the Statewide Wildfire Risk Map.


• [Department of Consumer and Business Services, Building Codes Division](#) – Responsible for fire hardening building codes and grants.

• [Wildfire Programs Director and Wildfire Programs Advisory Council](#) – Responsible for implementation oversight, coordination, and reporting to the Legislature.

• There are 11 implementing agencies for SB 762. Beyond the agencies listed above, there is work focused on community risk reduction, workforce training, emergency response, public health, air quality, and utilities.

Questions? Contact Susan Millhauser, Natural Hazards Planner - Wildfire, susan.millhauser@dlcd.oregon.gov, 971-718-1584