



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Forestry

State Forester's Office
2600 State Street
Salem, OR 97310-1336
503-945-7200
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www.oregon.gov/ODF

May 21, 2018



"STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY"

Lance Christensen, President
Clackamas-Marion Forest Protective Association
22965 N Fork Rd. SE
Lyons, OR 97358

Dear Lance,

Thank you for your recent letter acknowledging the challenges of the 2017 fire season. Everyone at Oregon Department of Forestry appreciates the support for our protection program and firefighting personnel expressed in your letter. We heartily agree with your commendation of ODF's North Cascade District. They did a fine job protecting private lands despite significant fire activity on adjacent federal fires and having to prepare for the August 21 solar eclipse.

ODF received invaluable assistance from your Association members, who provided equipment and personnel. Thanks to that combined effort we were largely successful in preventing the many persistent fires on adjacent jurisdictions from spreading to private lands. For example, although the Whitewater Fire burned for several weeks of the summer scorching over 14,000 acres, we were able to limit the number of private acres burned to just 2.

The biggest loss of private land came during the Eagle Creek Fire. Driven through difficult terrain fanned by east winds, that fire burned over 48,000 acres, some 1,281 of which were on private land protected by the North Cascade District. That fire was caused by a single careless act by someone from an urban area visiting the Columbia Gorge. It's one reason we have increased our prevention outreach this spring in the Portland-Vancouver metro area. The keystone is a wildfire awareness exhibit created jointly by Oregon Department of Forestry and Keep Oregon Green. The exhibit is at the World Forestry Center in Portland from May 5 through the end of June. We also continue to work with local communities to encourage fire preparedness. The first two communities in Marion County to be declared Firewise – Idanha and Detroit – achieved that distinction just last year.

As this summer approaches our fire teams are well prepared. In addition to our normal seasonal hiring of firefighters, we again will have exclusive use of 27 aircraft – 1 owned and 26 on contract. We also have numerous call-when-needed agreements with other mostly Oregon-based companies for a variety of equipment, hand crews and firefighting aircraft, including helicopters, single-engine airtankers, and large and very large airtankers. In addition, we have a call-when-needed agreement for remotely piloted vehicles to carry short-wave infrared technology. ODF fire managers at the Horse Prairie and Eagle Creek fires last year piloted using this technology. They were able to use it to see through thick smoke that observers in planes and helicopters could not.

We are continuing to engage with our federal partners on effective approaches to protecting valued resources. We have had frank conversations with them about the transfer-of-risk issue to private forestland. They recognize the importance of ensuring wildfires that start on public lands don't endanger private forestlands.

Negotiations over the contract for fire suppression that we have with the BLM are continuing. We are making the actual costs of protecting BLM lands in western Oregon a key point of discussion in those talks.

We appreciate the Association recognizing the strain a prolonged, persistent fire season puts on the entire fire management system. These were recognized in the Sustainable Fire Organization Work Group's fire program review and in the Secretary of State's audit done in 2016. Both concluded that the agency's militia model of fire protection worked well but is not sustainable given the demands of more complex and intense wildfires. Fire seasons in the past lasted only a few months. Now, deployments to wildfires in Oregon and other states with which we have mutual aid agreements occur almost year-round.

Last summer, Oregon was at the highest fire preparedness level for 40 days – a record length. Statewide, incident management teams spent as much time in 2017 managing wildfires as they would normally do over three years. To cope with multiple active wildfires, local, state and federal resources had to be supplemented with out-of-state and Canadian firefighters, the Oregon National Guard, and the U.S. military. With so many states experiencing devastating wildfires, there were times when additional firefighting resources were simply not available anywhere.

ODF's staffing is less now than it was in the late 1980s. This results in our having to rely on a smaller pool of people to accomplish the protection mission. Meanwhile, the average number of acres burned in Oregon has risen each decade. An average of 300,000 additional acres have burned every year in the last 10 years compared to 1988 to 1998. Not surprisingly, overtime hours at ODF have risen sharply (by 86%) compared to the years before 2013. That translates into 7,000 more hours of overtime a month – equal to 36 full-time equivalent positions.

To put our protection mission and other important work on a sustainable basis, ODF has proposed that the Legislature invest \$25 million from the General Fund to increase ODF's biennial budget. About half that is for additional personnel - a total of 55 positions. Although still below the agency's peak staffing in the 1980s, we feel this will help us meet the demands of peak fire season and reduce overtime. Giving staff a better work-life balance should also ensure retention and recruitment do not become issues.

I'm confident in the competence and resolve of our people to vigorously protect from wildfire the forestlands entrusted to them by your Association's members and landowners throughout Oregon. Again, thank you for your confidence in our agency and our long-standing partnership with you.

Sincerely,



Peter Daugherty
Oregon State Forester



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STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY

Debbi Dalrymple, President
Eastern Lane Forest Protective Association
3150 Main Street
Springfield, OR 97478

Dear Debbi,

Thank you for your April 12 letter in which you shared the appreciation of your members for the hard work of our South Cascade District wildfire protection staff. As you point out, last year saw ODF personnel fully engaged statewide. We provided aggressive initial attack of wildfires starting on lands we protect, keeping 94% of all wildfires to 10 acres or less. South Cascade and other districts also worked diligently to assist federal and local partners to prevent wildfires on their jurisdictions from spreading to lands owned by Association members.

Almost no rain fell in July and August in the South Cascade District, making it the driest two-month period in the past quarter century. Some 53 fires started in the district – about a fourth of them caused by lightning. Thanks to effective fire management, only 80 acres burned in the entire district in 2017, with the average fire size being kept to 1.5 acres.

ODF received invaluable assistance from your Association members, who provided equipment and personnel. Thanks to that combined effort we were largely successful in preventing the many persistent fires on adjacent jurisdictions from spreading to private lands. Although the Jones, Staley and Avenue fires burned almost 16,000 acres in and around the Willamette National Forest, these fires burned just 47 acres of ODF-protected land. This public-private partnership is a hallmark of our system of wildland fire protection.

In the near term, as the summer approaches our fire teams are well prepared. In addition to our normal seasonal hiring of firefighters, we again will have exclusive use of 27 aircraft – 1 owned and 26 on contract. We also have numerous call-when-needed agreements with other mostly Oregon-based companies for a variety of equipment, hand crews and firefighting aircraft, including helicopters, single-engine airtankers, and large and very large airtankers. In addition, we have a call-when needed agreement for remotely piloted vehicles to carry short-wave infrared technology. ODF fire managers at the Horse Prairie and Eagle Creek fires last year piloted using this technology. They were able to use it to see through thick smoke that observers in planes and helicopters could not.

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STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY™

Joe Justice, President
Eastern Oregon Forest Protective Association
1604 27th Street
La Grande, OR 97850

Dear Joe:

It was great to be with you and the other members of the Eastern Oregon Forest Protective Association in John Day as you celebrated your 50th anniversary. This continues to be an important relationship to both our organizations. Collaboration with landowners through Associations such as EOFPA is a hallmark of Oregon's system of complete and coordinated fire protection.

Given the concerns you expressed about declining landowner participation in EOFPA, I was quite heartened to learn of your Board's plans to identify landowners in the region who might be interested in participating more fully. We wish you success as you work to engage these folks.

Thank you for acknowledging the great work that was done by our Northeast and Central Oregon district firefighters last year. The numbers below help show their success:

In Northeast Oregon

There were 20 fewer fires in this district compared to the 10-year average (59 vs. 79), a drop of 25%. However, acres burned were down even more, by 91%, with just 642 acres burning this year. Compared to the 10-year average, 6,615 fewer acres burned in 2017. The average number of acres burned per fire was down dramatically as well. Each fire this year averaged 10.8 acres in size versus about 92 acres over the past decade.

In Central Oregon

The 114 wildfires experienced in this district was down about 21% from the 10-year average of 145. However, total acres burned were down even more – by about 80%. That works out to almost 9,200 fewer acres burned in 2017 compared to the 10-year average. On average, each fire in Central Oregon over the past 10 years has burned about 80 acres. This year, each fire burned an average of only 21 acres. A chief reason is great initial attack that prevented potentially massive fires from growing out of control. This was no mean feat given moisture levels in vegetation being near their driest levels ever.

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Sincerely



Peter Daugherty
Oregon State Forester