

Oregon Department of Forestry
Fire Protection Strategic Initiatives – 2020-2021

Division/Program: Fire Protection

Strategic Initiative Summary Matrix

Initiative	Status
Fire Protection Organizational Sustainability	Initiating / Continuing
Next Generation Severity-Special Purpose Appropriation	Initiating / Continuing
Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Law Modernization	Initiating
Governor’s Council for Wildfire Response Recommendations	Initiating

The Fire Protection Division/program has four initiatives:

- (1) Fire Protection Organizational Sustainability
- (2) Next Generation Severity-Special Purpose Appropriation
- (3) Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Law Modernization
- (4) Governor’s Council for Wildfire Response Recommendations

Strategic Initiative 1: Policy Option Package

Fire Protection Organizational Sustainability

Background/Context - Oregon is experiencing increased severity, complexity and duration of its fire seasons, which has challenged ODF’s ability to respond to the wildfire workload and sustain its other core businesses while proactively protecting Oregonians, forests and communities from wildfire. Fire protection demands have taxed all ODF programs in preparing for and responding to wildfires, creating significant challenges and impacting the ability to accomplish core business functions in Fire, State Forest, Private Forest, Federal Forests and Agency Administration. Wildfire impacts to all Oregonians, forests and communities, continues to rise affecting all parts of the state.

Oregon’s complete and coordinated protection system relies on a broad range of landowner, contractor and cooperator engagement making this a highly functional model. Strategic workforce planning and development of a comprehensive training program are key elements for success. Additional capacity is necessary to maintain this complete and coordinated system, ensure that ODF’s core business across all divisions are met and advance ODF’s initial and extended attack strategy to remain effective in the context of growing fire complexity.

It will take a combination of these components to be successful and address the initiative holistically.

- Added capacity with twenty-two positions in the Protection Division, including specialists in fire finance, prevention/investigation, training, aviation and multi-agency coordination. Advances staffing capacity commensurate with the Increase fire workloads.
- Added capacity with nine positions in administrative services, including: finance, procurement, human resources-safety, information technology, public affairs, and strategic workforce planning. These investments would help to address the increased administrative workload that comes with longer, more complex fire seasons.
- Added capacity with twelve wildland-urban interface foresters to work with communities, landowners and homeowners on proactive fuel reduction treatments in interface, advancing WUI protections and community engagement to mitigate the catastrophic risk of fire.
- Strategic workforce planning and training program to achieve fire protection division organizational and supervisory needs and to ensure preparedness, training and availability of qualified, professional firefighters.

Strategic Initiative 2: Policy Option Package

Next Generation Severity-Special Purpose Appropriation

Background/Context - This policy option package proposes wildfire protection system investments including additional “severity” resources that can be staged around the state where fire danger is highest, such as contract hand crews, equipment and overhead resources; rapid transport of firefighters by helicopter; two contracted next-generation air tanker; and additional call when needed detection aircraft. These investments are focused on slowing the increasing size and frequency of large fires across Oregon’s landscape.

It will take a combination of these components to be successful and address the initiative holistically.

I. Component A: Advancing Severity Resources

- Provides additional severity resources such as contract crew and equipment, helicopters, single engine airtankers, overhead and a helitack program for the 2020 fire season. These resources would augment the existing 17 contract aircraft and ground-based fire equipment available through the current severity program.

II. Component B: Advancing the Large Airtanker Program

- This policy option package adds two federally approved, versatile next-generation large air tanker (LAT), by contract, for the 2021 fire season. This would replace ODF’s current LAT contract that expires at the end of the 2020 fire season.

Strategic Initiative 3: Legislative Concept

Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Law Modernization

Background/Context – As directed by the Fire Protection Program through the 2015 Annual Operating Plan, a committee established to review the viability of the Oregon Forestland Urban Interface Fire Protection Act found that the law was in need of updating. Areas of concern included funding and capacity to carry out the requirements of the program by ODF, public confusion on the definition of the wildland urban-interface (WUI), fire risk classification and mitigation standards tied to that risk, and the penalty for non-compliance. Growing concern around the wildland urban-interface from the public, our partners in fire protection, and our elected officials has refocused our attention on existing Oregon laws pertaining to the protection of homes and communities during wildfire incidents.

It will take a combination of these components to be successful and address the initiative holistically.

1. Utilizing new technologies and seek other efficiencies in implementation
 - a. Utilize the Oregon Wildfire Risk Explorer (OWRE), along with fire risk data sets, as a statewide vehicle to inform the implementation of defensible space standards under the Act. The OWRE program should be used as the foundation for defensible space standards across all WUI programs. Integrate existing online certification tool into OWRE, connecting the Act more closely with the OWRE.
 - b. Remove costly mail notification requirement and replace with web-based online certification (in current practice – this tool is already in place but is inconsistent with the law).
2. Funding, capacity, and efficiencies in implementation
 - a. Eliminate the fire risk classifications within the law, allow OWRE to guide determination of fire risk as detailed above and focus on outreach and education aspects of the Act through minimum, or default, defensible space standards.
 - b. Position authority has never been added to the Department to implement the Act, this has proven to be a limiting factor in successful implementation.
 - c. The program administration funding authority in the Act has not been executed given the lack of support to implement locally. Alternate sources of program funding should be considered.
3. Modernizing risk factors and defensible space standards
 - a. Keep default defensible space standards in place as minimum standards and remove the tie to fire risk classification. This brings consistency with Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and Firewise programs so all WUI programs are aligned in mitigating fire risk in the WUI. Consider additional risk mitigation practices for areas of high and extreme risk classifications.
 - b. Apply defensible space standards to all homes on classified forestland within a forest protection district, thus reducing confusion and ensuring equity in the program.
 - c. Assure that standards align and augment statutes and rules of all agencies that have jurisdiction within the WUI, including Oregon State Fire Marshall (OSFM) and the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD).
4. Incentives for compliance
 - a. Replace the penalty portion of the Act with a positive incentive approach. Consider leveraging existing county processes and encouraging innovation at the local level.

Strategic Initiative 4: Legislative Concept/Policy Option Package/Other

Governor's Council for Wildfire Response Recommendations

Fire Finance Sustainability

Background/Context - The current wildfire funding structure does not meet or address the reality of wildfire risk, costs, and impacts in Oregon. Wildfires are a significant and complex problem affecting the safety, health, water, security, economic security, environment and well-being of all Oregonians. Addressing this problem requires all Oregonians, not only individual sectors and stakeholders, be responsible for contributing to and funding the solution.

For Oregon to be successful in protecting Oregonians, our communities, and natural resources from wildfire, the state must look to a new funding model to fully fund the programs and agencies responsible for this work.

Oregon must prepare for increasingly complex and severe fire seasons by planning, budgeting, and allocating additional financial resources. Aside from landowner contributions via the Oregon Forestland Protection Fund (OFLPF), no large-scale dedicated funding currently exists to cover these projected costs. With no dedicated fund, agency budgets are forced to cover the entire gross costs of wildfire response on an emergency and annual basis.

Before accessing the General Fund, fire response agencies must take out lines of credit and loans to cover large fire costs above their operating budgets. These loans accrue interest and are often required to be paid before reimbursements are received. Additionally, reimbursement of large fire costs from FEMA and other federal agencies takes years, requiring state agencies to carry fire-cost debts until reimbursed.

Currently, between Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and Oregon State Fire Marshall (OSFM), only \$10.25 million is dedicated and budgeted annually for large fire costs (\$10 million from OFLPF and \$0.25 million from the Fire Insurance Premium Tax). In recent years, this dedicated budget has only covered about 10 percent of large fire costs. This model is not sustainable.

I. Component A: Development of the Oregon Wildfire Response Fund and identify and dedicate funding sources

Description

This is a placeholder initiative for recommendations coming from The Governor's Council on Wildfire Response regarding fire finances.

II. Component B: Other Governor's Council for Wildfire Response Recommendations

Description

This is a placeholder initiative to position the department to respond to forthcoming recommendations of the Governor's Council for Wildfire Response and subsequent direction from Governor Brown. This work could emerge in multiple pathways including, but not limited to legislative concepts, budgetary policy option packages or other avenues. Some of these recommendations may be covered by Strategic Initiatives 1 and 2.