

Sample: Opinion- Editorial on Disaster Planning

Our Homes, Our Lives, Our History...Kept Safe from Disaster

Oregonians have become much more informed about the impacts of climate-related disasters on our communities. Whether from fire, floods or earthquakes, the damage caused by disasters is not just emotionally and economically devastating, but it also causes us to lose our sense of place; our physical connection to the places that we value and the cultural heritage they represent.

As heritage advocates in *[name of city/ region/ tribal lands]* we are working to translate that knowledge of climate-driven disaster threats to our community. We are beginning the work of identifying those places most at risk, assessing their contribution to our community's cultural heritage, and learning from the community what values they hold and what places matter most to them.

In 2020 disastrous wildfires stretched across Oregon, from Santiam Canyon to the Southern part of the state and from the Oregon coast to the Clackamas River. It was the worst Oregon fire season in recorded history with 1.2 million acres lost. The most destructive of the fires burned not only the wildland urban interface, but also driven by strong winds, decimated city centers. Thousands of homes, commercial buildings, and public structures, some historic, were lost.

On July 6, 2021, the Bootleg fire started, spreading across the Fremont-Winema National Forest, destroying the sacred ancestral homelands of the Klamath Tribes.

We can be better prepared, more disaster resilient. There are resources available to be more proactive in *[name of city / region / tribal lands]* in protecting and recovering our places of history, our community heritage and identity. We must work closely with building code officials, emergency management personnel, and local leaders to secure the necessary technical resources (i.e., updated wildfire risk maps) and funding to better prepare our historic properties for disaster.

When making improvements to your historic property, consider your disaster risk before you begin.

A starting point is guidance offered by the National Park Service (NPS), the nation's leading steward of heritage resources. In their *Disaster Planning Checklist*, the NPS advises property owners to consider the question, "Why do I care about saving this?" The idea is that no one can be a better advocate for saving historic places and heritage resources that matter to you than you.

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Start by crafting an emergency plan for your property. Create an inventory, retrieval, and protection plan for your most cherished belongings or collections. Ensure that you know the specific hazards that might impact your property – extreme rain events, wildfire, earthquake – all have different methods for disaster preparedness. Consider what building materials are more disaster resilient and seek advice from the *[city / region / tribal]* historic preservation office or the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office to determine if those materials are appropriate for your historic property. Have handy the contact information for your plumber, electrician, contractor, or insurance agent. Most importantly make sure you understand what your insurance covers and what post-disaster assistance you can expect from the Oregon Emergency Management Agency or FEMA.

Our State's natural hazards mitigation plan recognizes Oregon's cultural resources as worthy of protecting from disaster, stating their importance for their historical significance, their cultural and heritage value and their "economic impact on local, regional, and statewide tourism." Even more significant is the recognition that "Oregon heritage is everywhere."

As advocates for *[name of city / region / tribal lands]* heritage, we must inspire property owners, cultural institutions, and business owners at risk to prepare for disasters. Our heritage can't wait for the government to act, particularly when it comes to being prepared. Assess what history is at risk and invest in building greater resilience for your own property and your community's heritage.

Take personal responsibility. Understand your disaster risk. Buy insurance. Prepare an emergency kit. Develop a business continuity plan. Maintain your building. Create an inventory.

Owning a piece of Oregon's history is an investment in the future. Protect it from peril.