



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

## Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

775 Summer Street NE, Suite 360

Salem, OR 97301-1290

(503) 986-0178

FAX (503) 986-0199

[www.oregon.gov/OWEB](http://www.oregon.gov/OWEB)



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  
**FROM:** Eric Williams, Grant Program Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item O – Governor’s Priorities, Post-Fire Response  
October 16-17, 2018 Board Meeting

### I. Introduction

Staff request the board support immediate technical assistance needs required for a local response to catastrophic wildfire impacts to watershed health on private lands as a result of wildfires in north-central Oregon. Normal project delivery mechanisms through OWEB’s Open Solicitation Technical Assistance (TA) offering are not suited to the rapid response the situation requires. Based on conversations with Governor Brown’s office, funds would be drawn from the Governor’s Priorities line item in the spending plan.

The north-central Oregon fires require a quick and proactive response to prevent further impacts to the watersheds, including impacts to ESA-listed salmon and steelhead.

### II. Background

North-central Oregon experienced an extreme fire season in 2018. Fires in Wasco, Sherman, and Gilliam counties burned over 307,000 acres. Attachment A provides a description of the larger fires that occurred the across the counties. Soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs) are working closely with local, state, and federal partners to coordinate resources to address the damage caused by these fires. Primary concerns are soil erosion on crop and rangeland, loss of riparian and upland vegetation, damaged fences that protect sensitive areas from livestock damage, potential for invasive species colonization of disturbed sites, and damaged forestland that will impact watershed functions.

The fires impacted both public and private lands. On the federal lands impacted by the fire, Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams move swiftly to assess and implement immediate actions to protect and minimize detrimental impacts from fires and wet season runoff. While BAER coordinates with other federal agencies and private landowners, there is not a similar rapid response designed to assess impacts and verify the burn severity and intensity in order to prioritize and develop actions to meet the restoration needs on private lands.

Although OWEB does not currently have a program designed to quickly respond to natural disasters, it does have a rich history of such responsiveness, including assistance with drought and salmon fishery closures.

### **III. Proposal**

The SWCDs will work with private landowners affected in the fires to inventory damage to natural resources and develop conservation plans. This will include landowner engagement through events and media, coordination with partner agencies, site visits to conduct inventory, GIS mapping and analysis, and project prioritization. The SWCDs will assist landowners in weighing alternatives and choosing the best restoration plans to address critical post-fire recovery needs and direct them to appropriate funding opportunities.

### **IV. Recommendation**

Staff requests that the board delegate authority to the Executive Director to enter into a grant agreement to implement technical assistance activities to identify and develop responses to immediate watershed health needs caused by the north-central Oregon fires on private lands in an amount not to exceed \$60,000, to be taken from the Governor's Priorities line item in the spending plan.

### **Attachments**

- A. Description of 2018 wildfires in north-central Oregon.

## Description of Wildfires in North-Central Oregon

The **Boxcar Fire** was a wildfire that started near the town of Maupin, in Wasco County. The fire started on June 21, 2018 due to a lightning strike and burned 100,207 acres due to dry, windy conditions.

The **Substation Fire** started near The Dalles in the late afternoon on July 17, 2018. Strong winds caused the fire to grow rapidly, with the fire moving over 18 miles in days. Agricultural and recreational areas suffered heavy damage and by July 18 Oregon Governor Kate Brown had declared a state of emergency, which included calling the Oregon National Guard to assist with fighting the fire. As of July 23, the fire had destroyed 78,425 acres across Wasco and Sherman Counties.

The **Long Hollow Fire** was first reported on July 26, 2018, at 4:45 pm in a field southeast of Dufur, in Wasco County. The fire was started by farm equipment. Dry temperatures and strong winds led to the fire's rapid growth into the evening into the canyon of the Deschutes River. A portion of the river and Highway 216 were closed as a result. The Long Hollow Fire burned 34,097 acres in both Wasco and Sherman Counties.

The **South Valley Fire** was a wildfire that started west of the town of Dufur in Wasco County. The fire grew fast, burning almost 3,500 acres by the first evening. Level three evacuations were put in place and Governor Kate Brown call into action the emergency conflagration act as a result of the fire, sending resources. The South Valley Fire burned 20,043 acres and caused the evacuation of 400 people and threatened 100 homes.

The **Stubblefield Fire** was a wildfire that started six miles west of Condon in Gilliam County. The fire was started on August 17th due to a lightning strike and burned 54,221 acres due to dry, windy conditions. The rugged John Day Canyons in the Ferry Canyon and Thirtymile watersheds limited the ability of fire crews to efficiently contain the fire. This led to ~10% of the Thirtymile watershed and ~25% of the Ferry Canyon watershed being burned. Both of these watersheds contain Endangered Species Act (ESA) critical habitat for steelhead. Without fire restoration this habitat may be compromised due to winter weather and invasive species colonization.

The **Lonerock Fire** was a wildfire that started seven miles northwest of Lonerock in Gilliam County. The fire was started on August 17th due to a lightning strike and burned 5,055 acres due to dry, windy conditions. The rugged John Day Canyons in the Rock Creek watershed limited the ability of fire crews to efficiently contain the fire. This led to ~3.5 miles of Lonerock Creek being burned. Lonerock Creek is listed as ESA critical habitat for steelhead.

The **Jackknife Fire** was a wildfire that started east of the town of Grass Valley, in Sherman County near the John Day River. The fire started on June 21, 2018 due to a lightning strike and burned 15,590 acres due to dry, windy conditions.



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

## Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board

775 Summer Street NE, Suite 360

Salem, OR 97301-1290

(503) 986-0178

FAX (503) 986-0199

[www.oregon.gov/OWEB](http://www.oregon.gov/OWEB)



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board  
**FROM:** Eric Williams, Grant Program Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Agenda Item O-2 – Governor’s Priorities, Post-Fire Response  
October 16-17, 2018 Board Meeting

### I. Introduction

This staff report describes a late-breaking opportunity for OWEB to contribute to post-fire conservation treatments on land impacted by wildfires in Wasco County in 2018.

### II. Background

Rangeland impacted by wildfire is at an increased risk for invasive annual grasses such as medusahead and cheatgrass to become established. Wasco County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) has identified 24,650 acres that were burned in the 2018 wildfires, for an aerial herbicide application to control the spread of these invasive annual grasses. Wasco SWCD is coordinating with 12 landowners and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife to treat 45 separate tracts of rangeland impacted by the fires. For treatments to be successful, aerial application must be completed by November 30, 2018.

Emergency funding for post-fire restoration is available through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). However, this funding is reimbursement-only, and Wasco SWCD is seeking bridge funding to implement the restoration project until NRCS reimbursement occurs. Wasco SWCD is working with Craft3, a nonprofit organization that makes loans in Oregon and Washington to strengthen the resilience of businesses, families, and nonprofits, to secure a \$410,000 bridge loan in order to immediately implement the aerial herbicide application on 24,650 acres.

### III. Request

Wasco SWCD has already expended hundreds of hours of staff time in post-fire restoration efforts, and has not budgeted for this unanticipated expense, which nonetheless is critical for restoring landscapes impacted by fire. The Craft3 loan to Wasco SWCD is expected to be for three months, at which time NRCS reimbursement will occur. Wasco SWCD is requesting OWEB funding to cover the loan fee, closing costs, and three months of interest at 2%. These costs will not exceed \$10,000. The funding would come from the Governor’s Priorities line item in the 2017-2019 spending plan. In order to accommodate this request, the Governor’s Priorities line item in the

spending plan would need to be increased by \$10,000. This increase can occur through adding recaptured grant funds to the Governor's Priorities line item in the spending plan. Recaptured grant funds are monies that have been previously allocated to other projects, but were unspent, and now available for reallocation.

**IV. Recommendation**

Staff request the board add \$10,000 of recaptured funds to the Governor's Priority line item of the 2017-2019 spending plan, and delegate authority to the Executive Director to enter into a grant agreement with Wasco SWCD to cover fees, closing costs, and interest on a loan to implement post-fire restoration, in an amount not to exceed \$10,000, to be taken from the Governor's Priorities line item in the spending plan.