

Multiple wildfires in Pacific Northwest likely to burn until fall rains arrive

August 8, 2024



Fire Managers in the Pacific Northwest predict that many wildfires currently burning in Washington and Oregon, and potentially new ones, will persist until the region experiences significant rain or snow this fall.

Firefighters are actively battling these fires.

With widespread lightning expected this month, fire managers will be adopting a strategic approach to integrate risk management, ecosystem resilience, and community involvement on long-duration fires before typical east wind events potentially arrive around the beginning of fall.

“Our planners are taking a realistic look at current wildfires, expected new fires, and the resources we have to help us safeguard human lives and property while enhancing our ability to respond to wildfires in high-risk areas,” USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jacque Buchanan said.

Among other tactics, firefighters working long-duration wildfires will focus on identifying and preparing a network of primary and contingency containment lines to help stop fires as they approach critical areas like communities, powerlines, water supply systems, and natural and cultural resources.

“Firefighting is inherently risky. Our role as fire managers is to develop strategies that maximize success while minimizing the risk of injury or death to emergency responders,” USDA Forest Service Acting Fire, Fuels and Aviation Director for the Pacific Northwest and Alaska Regions Kelly Kane said. “There is no structure that is worth the life of the sons, daughters, parents, siblings and friends that make up our wildland firefighting workforce.”

Long-duration fires are typical in timber-dominated forests, such as those found in Oregon and Washington, particularly along and west of the Cascades. These areas provide ample fuel that can sustain fires for extended periods and hold heat deep within the interior of a wildfire until conditions either escalate or moderate fire activity.

The steep, remote locations also make it difficult for firefighters to access wildfires on National Forest lands and present significant hazards, including rolling rocks and logs that can cause injuries. Extracting injured firefighters from these areas is also challenging and increases the risk of complications. Despite these challenges, suppression efforts to protect communities and critical areas will continue.

"Communities will likely face prolonged smoke and other impacts from these fires," Kane said. "Large and long-duration fires vary in intensity and will continue to produce smoke as they move with wind and terrain until extinguished by significant rain or snow."

The Pioneer Fire was reported on June 8 on private land northwest of Chelan and quickly spread onto the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, including wilderness. The fire remains active in steep, rocky and hard to access terrain. Additional information is available at [Wases Pioneer Information | InciWeb \(wildfire.gov\)](#).
Source: Inciweb

What you can do to prepare:

Create Defensible Space: Clear vegetation and debris around your home to create a buffer zone that can help slow the spread of fire.

Prepare an Emergency Kit: Include essentials such as water, food, medications, important documents, and personal items.

Stay Informed: Keep up with the latest fire information and evacuation orders from local authorities.

Install Smoke Alarms: Ensure your home has working smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors.

Have an Evacuation Plan: Plan and practice multiple evacuation routes with your family.

Protect Your Air Quality: Use air purifiers and keep windows closed to reduce smoke exposure indoors.

Information about preparing for and staying safe from wildfire smoke are available at Smoke-Ready Toolbox for Wildfires | US EPA <<https://www.epa.gov/air-research/smoke-ready-toolbox-wildfires>>.

Support firefighters engaged in this challenging fire season by respecting emergency closures and adhering to fire restrictions. Do your part to prevent human-caused wildfires. Learn more at: <https://smokeybear.com/en/prevention-how-tos>.

Smoke rises above a forested ridgeline

The Miners Complex Fires are burning deep in the Glacier Peak Wilderness of the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest in hard to access, thickly forested terrain. Additional information is available at Wamsf Miners Complex Fires Information | InciWeb (wildfire.gov). Source: Inciweb

There are currently 26 large wildfires burning on national forests spanning from Southern Oregon to the Canadian Border. While some fires received rains from the recent weather shift, most wildfires east of the Cascades received little to no moisture and are primed to ramp back up as fire conditions worsen into the weekend.

“We’ve already got hundreds of thousands of acres of active fire out there right now,” added Hiatt. “With the forecasted winds, triple digit heat, and more dry lightning, it’s going to be yet another challenging week for firefighters.”

In addition to these conditions, the incoming weather system may also support the growth of large smoke columns from any new and existing wildfires. Lightning potential is greatest Saturday in far Southern Oregon and expands Sunday into almost all of Eastern Oregon from Bend into the Blues and into far northern areas of Central Washington.

Be smoke ready this summer by preparing yourself, your loved ones, and your workplace for wildfire related air quality impacts with low and no-cost resources at www.airnow.gov/wildfires/be-smoke-ready/.

For more news and information about National Forests in the Pacific Northwest, visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/news/r6/news-events> or the home page, at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r6>.

For more information about the USDA Forest Service visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov>.