
Legislature invests over \$600 million for wildfire recovery, prevention

July 1, 2021



The Oregon Legislature has approved more than \$600 million to support communities impacted by the September 2020 wildfires, mitigate the effects of future wildfires, and increase community resiliency.

The Labor Day wildfires of 2020 were the most destructive recorded in state history. They burned over one million acres and destroyed more than 4,000 homes in the Cascades, central coast, and southern regions of the state. Recognizing that climate change will only increase the length and severity of Oregon's fire seasons moving forward, Governor Brown and legislative leaders made wildfire recovery and prevention one of the top priorities for the 2021 legislative session.

"Oregon will see hotter, drier summers and more intense wildfire seasons because of climate change," House Speaker Tina Kotek said. "This session we set a new standard for how the state must respond when wildfires devastate any of our communities, and we also started to charter a new course for smarter prevention and mitigation strategies."

“Last year’s fires were devastating. Oregon and her people are still recovering,” Senate President Peter Courtney said. “We made real progress this session to help our communities rebuild. We changed the way we respond to wildfires. The Legislature will help wildfire survivors get back on their feet.”

Highlights of the recovery funding package include:

\$150 million – Wildfire recovery housing supply and land acquisition

\$110 million – Water and sewer infrastructure projects in wildfire impacted communities, including:

Marion County Sewer & Septic repair/replacement (\$50 million)

DEQ onsite septic repair/replacement loan program booster for wildfire impacted communities (\$15 million)

Lane County Septic repair/replacement & wastewater improvements (\$15.5 million)

Lincoln County Panther Creek Septic/Stormwater (\$15 million)

City of Detroit Permanent Drinking Water System (\$3 million)

Cities of Talent, Ashland, Phoenix fire flow water line upgrade (\$3 million)

Panther Creek Water Tank Replacement (\$1.8 million)

Lincoln County Well repair (\$500,000)

City of Gates Replacement of water meters (\$25,000)

Charlotte Ann Water District Disbanding Transition costs (\$5 million)

\$75 million – Food and Shelter for Wildfire Survivors

\$23.2 million – Reimbursement to counties for lost tax revenues

Over \$20 million for infrastructure projects to support recovery efforts in impacted communities including:

City of Phoenix Public Safety Building (\$13.6 million in Lottery Bonds)

Upper McKenzie Station Rebuild/Property, Fire Engine, Command Rig (\$2.1 million)

Lane County - McKenzie Valley Health Clinic (\$1.8 million)

Blue River Community Library Rebuild (\$1.4 million)

McKenzie Fire & Rescue - Disaster Relief Logistics Center (\$904,000)

High Desert Rangeland Fire Protection Association - Lake County Wildland Fire Needs (\$500,000)

Molalla Rural Fire Protection District - Wildland Fire Protection (\$385,000)

Temporary power poles immediately following fires in Marion County (\$80,000)

\$20 million – FEMA Hazard Mitigation Grant match

\$19.75 million – Grants for riparian and upland restoration and floodplain restoration and reconnection

\$10 million – Grant programs to incentivize fire hardening and energy efficiency for rebuilds

\$5 million for financial assistance for building and planning department staff in fire impacted jurisdictions.

\$5 million to develop tree seedling capacity and increase the supply for replanting in wildfire affected areas

\$4 million for operational needs of impacted municipal governments

\$1.25 million for cultural resource assessment in advance of wildfire debris removal

“I think every day about the emotional testimony we heard this session from wildfire-impacted communities across the state. The stories were beyond devastating,” said Rep. Brian Clem (D-Salem), the chair of the House Special Committee on Wildfire Recovery. “These communities are hurting badly. We have made great strides this session. But recovery will be a long-term effort. To everyone who spoke to the committee, we’re here with you for the long haul.”

The legislature also passed a comprehensive plan to improve wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts in Senate Bill 762. Among the policies included in Senate Bill 762:

Develops statewide, publicly available map of wildfire risk;

Creates policies for community-driven restoration of forests and rangelands and requirements for ignition-resistant materials for new construction within high-risk zones;

Directs new defensible space standards;

Establishes electric utility planning requirements to be maintained and updated regularly in preparation for and during wildfire events;

Designates a process for emergency shelter and voluntary evacuation services and funds a grant program for smoke filtration systems and local government clean air shelters;

Increases firefighter capacity, including air defense resources;

Invests in youth and workforce training programs to help manage our forest lands;

Appoints a Wildfire Programs Advisory Council composed of stakeholders and members of the public to advise a new State Wildfire Programs Director, provide recommendations on implementation and community engagement;

Invests nearly \$200 million to implement these policies and support essential workforce and local communities on the frontlines, managing and mitigating wildfires.

Additionally, the legislature took a step to increase diversity and bolster an effective all-hazards, wildland and structural firefighting force by investing \$6 million in firefighter apprenticeship programs – \$2 million each for the Jackson County Fire District, Clackamas Fire District, and Eugene Springfield Fire Department.

“The devastation of the Labor Day fires stunned us all, and made it hard to see how we’d ever come back,” said Sen. Jeff Golden (D-Ashland), the chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery. “Leaders statewide told us ‘We’re all in this together,’ and made that real with this package. We’ll get through wildfire seasons ahead only by staying together. This could be the beginning of a new kind of Oregon patriotism, and I’m grateful to be part of it.”

Below is a list of additional bills the Legislature passed this session to aid wildfire recovery and prevention.

Property Tax Interest Waiver (HB 2247)

Allows counties to waive interest on late property tax payments for Oregonians impacted by the 2020 wildfires for the 2020-21 property tax year.

Lane County RV Siting (HB 2272)

Requires Lane County approve a planning application to develop a permanent recreational vehicle park or campground.

Streamlined Rebuilding for Wildfire-Impacted Communities (HB 2289)

Authorizes a property owner to alter, restore, or replace certain nonresidential structures destroyed by the 2020 wildfires without additional applications to local government and requires local government to approve applications for dwellings.

Prorated Property Taxes (HB 2341)

Authorizes the proration of property taxes on land that has been destroyed or damaged by wildfires

Construction Tax Exemption (HB 2607)

Provides construction tax exemptions on residential housing built to replace homes destroyed or damaged by the wildfires.

Temporary RV Siting (HB 2809)

Allows temporary siting of RVs on properties with homes that natural disasters have made uninhabitable.

Water District Annexation (HB 3126)

Streamlines the ability for counties to annex land into a surrounding special water district if the water supply has become inadequate or contaminated. The measure will support the Whispering Pines Mobile Home Park in Jackson County, which lost 46 homes and two drinking water wells in the Almeda Fire.

Manufactured Dwelling Park Rebuilding (HB 3219)

Requires local governments to approve the rebuilding of manufactured dwelling parks destroyed or impacted by wildfires.

Property Tax Relief for Wildfire-Impacted Counties (SB 464)

Authorizes counties impacted by the September 2020 wildfires to prorate and cancel property taxes imposed on taxable properties that suffered losses in real market value as result of the wildfires.

Rangeland Protection (SB 590)

Expands the definition of "rangeland" to include land used primarily for cultivating crops for purposes of organizing rangeland protection associations and providing fire protection for rangeland.

Federal Reimbursement (SJM 3)

Urges the federal government to reimburse state and local governments and private property owners for damage from wildfires originating on federal lands.