

# Early start to western wildfire season likely

## April precipitation expected to be above normal in Northeastern Oregon

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

BOISE — Drought and low snowpacks in the West likely mean an early start to wildfire season, meteorologists at the National Interagency Fire Center predict. “Due to below-average, and in some cases record-low, snowpack from the Sierra into the Oregon Cascades, we are anticipating an early and active start to fire season,” said Nick Nauslar, a fire meteorologist at the center in Boise. The risk of large wild-land fires will be above normal in parts of Central Oregon from April to June. Nauslar said extreme to exceptional drought, and low snowfall and snowpack, are factors. The Fire Center’s Predictive Services unit said

in an April 1 report that above-normal potential for large fires is expected in Central Oregon through June before expanding into Washington and southwest Oregon in July. Nearly normal potential is expected in the rest of the Northwest into July. March brought near-normal temperatures to the Northwest, and more consistent rain and snow to western Washington, parts of eastern Washington, and northern Oregon. Drought continues in central and southwest Oregon and much of eastern Oregon, where precipitation has stayed below normal for more than a year. April precipitation is expected to be



Nauslar



Bootleg Fire Incident Command/Contributed Photo, File  
**A DC-10 tanker drops retardant over the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon, Thursday, July 15, 2021.**

above normal in western Washington and northeast Oregon, and below average elsewhere in the region, the report said. Near-term risk in the Great Basin is mixed, fire forecasters said. Major long-term drought has improved but remains across much of the area. Above-normal precipitation in late fall and early winter could have increased the likelihood that the crop of grasses and other fine fuels

got bigger from western Nevada into southern Idaho. But recent drier conditions stunted some of the

grass growth, so shorter grass overall will limit the risk at lower elevations. Forecasters said the Great Basin fire potential is expected to remain normal through April and increase in May and June. Weak storms are likely to move through in April and drier, warmer conditions are expected headed into fire season. Early snowmelt likely will lead to a faster start to fire season in higher terrain from May through July. Large-fire risk in the Northern Rockies should remain normal through May. In June, risk could be

above normal if spring rains do not come and temperatures are higher than outlooks suggest, the report said. The La Nina weather pattern has helped snow-water equivalents stay near or above normal for most of northern Idaho and Montana west of the Continental Divide. Risk in Northern California is expected to be normal in April, and above normal in May in San Francisco Bay, mid-coast-Mendocino and Sacramento Valley-foothill areas. Above-normal risk is forecast at most elevations in June and July.

## Report: No spike in recidivism for prisoners

By **CONRAD WILSON**  
Oregon Public Broadcasting

SALEM — A preliminary report released last month by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission found some people released early from prison because of the COVID-19 pandemic were not more likely to commit crimes. Gov. Kate Brown commuted the sentences of 963 people during the COVID-19 pandemic between July 2020 and October 2021. The majority were considered medically vulnerable or near the end of their sentences. The Criminal Justice Commission, a nonpartisan state agency, looked at the first 266 people granted a release between July and November of 2020. The agency found 18% were arrested within one year of their commutation, 8% were convicted of a new crime and 2% were reincarcerated. CJC executive director Ken Sanchagrin said those numbers are similar to figures from 2019 involving people granted release or parole. This chart comes from a March 2022 report by the Oregon Criminal Jus-

tice Commission. It compares recidivism rates from people who got out of prison in 2019 with those who were released in 2020 after their sentence was commuted by Gov. Kate Brown. “It doesn’t appear that being let out early for these folks had any type of negative impact as far as higher rates of recidivism that we would normally expect,” Sanchagrin told OPB. Sanchagrin said his agency will issue another report sometime in the next year. The report found of the commuted people who reoffended, 10 involved a crime against another person. “Of these 10 individuals, the most common person crime was menacing, followed by recklessly endangering another person, assault in the fourth degree, and robbery in the second degree,” the report states. “There was one arrest for assaulting a public safety officer and one arrest for robbery in the first degree.” The report also states one person who received a commutation was later convicted of and incarcerated for second degree manslaughter. Brown has faced criticism, and a lawsuit, over

the pandemic-related commutations. In January, two district attorneys in Oregon filed a complaint, alleging the governor went outside the bounds of her executive powers to issue the commutations.



## Oregon to pay \$1.3M to home care workers who received late or partial payments

By **JAMIE GOLDBERG**  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Oregon will pay a combined \$1.3 million in late fees to more than 4,000 home care workers who received late or incomplete payments over the last seven months due to glitches in a state software system. Rebecca Sandoval, vice president of Service Employees International Union Local 503, which represents home care and personal support workers, said the union is aware of more than 8,600 instances over the last seven months where Oregon failed to provide home care workers employed by the state with their full paycheck on time. The glitches have impacted 4,366 workers, nearly a sixth of the state’s home care workers, who care for seniors with physical disabilities, according to the state. “It’s not acceptable,” Sandoval said. “It’s quite negligent in terms of servicing a workforce.” Elisa Williams, a spokesperson for Oregon’s Department of Human Services, said the state is working on a fix that will allow hours to be entered entirely electronically. Williams said the state hired an outside vendor to implement the new system

in order to meet federal law, which required the state to use an electronic visit verification system to approve hours. In light of the issues with incorrect payments, Williams said the state has hired additional technical staff to help home care workers, reached out directly to workers who are experiencing problems with the system and provided access to computers where workers can enter their hours at agency offices around the state. The union filed a grievance against the state in November. The settlement between the union and Oregon’s Department of Human Services requires the state to pay providers who received partial or late payments since August \$150 for each incident when they were incorrectly paid, in addition to the pay they were owed for their time worked. The money will start going out to workers in May. The state agency also agreed to pay late fees when home care workers receive late paychecks and partial payments going forward, the union said. The Oregon Home Care Commission has also agreed to investigate any late pay complaints within 30 days, the union said.