

Wildfire outbreaks across much of West keep crews busy

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Wildfire season is picking up across much of the West, as fire crews employ early attacks to keep blazes from growing, officials say.

“We are in high fire danger,” said Sarah Wheeler, fire information officer at the Eastern Idaho Interagency Fire Center in Idaho Falls.

Lowland fire-fuel samples show low moisture, and fuels on higher-elevation forestland are drying early as high temperatures and drought persist, she said.

Actions that pose risk but don’t always start wildfires, from field burning to campfires, are likelier to start fires, Wheeler said.

“We’ve been preaching that things look and feel different this year,” she said. “Just be very aware.”

To the west, U.S. Bureau of Land Management Boise District Fire Information Officer Jared Jablonski expects the fire risk to rise soon.

“Eastern Idaho is a little ahead and dried out a little earlier,” he said. “I don’t think we are that far off from increased wildland fire activity. Southwest Idaho is really starting to dry out.”

Jablonski said a dry winter and spring limited growth of new vegetation but left more of the 2020 crop viable.

“So there’s still plenty of fuel to burn,” he said, from grasses and other fine fuels to juniper. Wildfire risk also is up on increases in population and public-land use.

Western heat waves and extended drought make more fuel ignition-ready, National Interagency Fire Center Public Affairs Specialist Carrie Bilbao said.

“With it being so extreme in many areas of the West, and expected lightning coming in, we expect the potential for fires to increase,” she said.

NIFC said the number of fires from Jan. 1 to June 21 totaled 28,926, up 28.9% from a year ago. The center tracks new or active wildfires that are at least 100 acres in timber or 300 on rangeland, or have an incident management team assigned.

Burned acres are pegged at slightly more than 1 million, up 8.7% from last year.

The 10-year average for the period is 24,933 fires burning a total 1.6 million acres.

“Our initial attack resources are doing a good job,” a factor in keeping a fire smaller, Bilbao said.

But firefighters and equipment are expected to be at a premium during peak fire season.

Federal fire officials declared National Fire Preparedness Level 4, on a scale of 1 to 5, June 22. They had declared Level 3 earlier than usual in 2020 and this year.

Bilbao said Level 3 means wildfires are active in about a quarter of the U.S. That level prompts the NIFC-tied National Interagency Coordination Center to apply a national perspective in setting priorities and allocating personnel and equipment. Level 4 signals competition for personnel and resources intensifying.

The InciWeb website tracks wildfires and prescribed fires to date, though it often does not report an acreage for a prescribed burn. June 22 totals were 24 fires and 339,291 reported acres combined in Arizona, 12 fires and 8,388 acres in California, 12 fires and 10,071 acres in Colorado, 4 fires and 1 acre reported in Idaho, 4 fires and 39,818 acres in Montana, 4 fires and 1,894 acres in Nevada, 9 fires and 111,723 acres in New Mexico, six fires and 16,546 acres in Oregon, 4 fires and 43,814 acres in Utah, none in Washington and 1 fire of 1,038 acres in Wyoming.



Carrie Bilbao

Oregon drier than last year as fire season begins

OSU forum discusses wildfire, drought

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

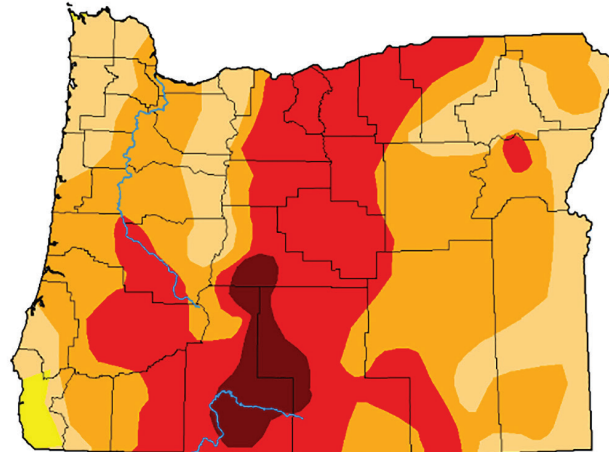
CORVALLIS, Ore. — Historically dry conditions are raising concerns that another long wildfire season may be ahead in Oregon.

Experts at Oregon State University held a virtual forum Monday to discuss this year’s drought and fire conditions. Meanwhile, several large blazes are already burning thousands of acres and temperatures are expected to reach into the triple-digits statewide.

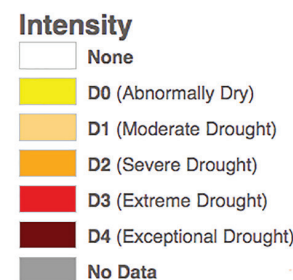
“Right now, we are drier at this point than we were at this point last year,” said Larry O’Neill, state climatologist with the Oregon Climate Service. “I think we’re in the thick of it right now, at least in terms of the drought conditions and how it projects onto wildfire risk.”

As of Monday, The S-503 Fire was the largest, burning 6,201 acres near the Warm Springs Reservation in Central Oregon. The fire started June 18, and was 10% contained. A cause has not been determined.

In Southern Oregon, the Cutoff Fire started June 19 and has burned 1,150 acres on state forestland about 6 miles north of Bonanza. It is 12% contained, and the cause remains under investigation.



Oregon



Earlier this month, a pair of lightning-sparked fires in northeast Oregon — the Joseph Canyon and Dry Creek fires — torched 9,195 acres of timber and rangeland. Those two fires were mostly contained on June 11.

Meg Krawchuk, an associate professor at the College of Forestry, said conditions on the ground are more characteristic of what firefighters might expect in July, rather than June.

“When we have early and longstanding drought, we’re more likely to have fires burning,” Krawchuk said.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, all of Oregon is listed in some stage of drought, including 77% in “severe” drought, 36% in “extreme” drought and a little under 5% in the worst category of “exceptional” drought.

The driest conditions are spread over Central and Eastern Oregon, said

O’Neill, the state climatologist. Klamath, Deschutes, Crook, Jefferson and Wasco counties all experienced their driest or second-driest spring on record, he said.

In addition, the USDA reports that 80% of the state’s cropland and livestock pastures are rated as either “short” or “very short” of soil moisture.

“That’s also very concerning right now for a lot of the agricultural and livestock producers here,” O’Neill said. “Things are looking a little bit bleak.”

Oregon is coming off a record fire season in 2020 during which more than 1 million acres burned, particularly in Western Oregon, where a series of post-Labor Day conflagrations fanned by strong easterly winds consumed entire towns.

Lisa Ellsworth, an assistant professor who studies fire behavior and rangeland ecology at the College of Agricultural Sciences, said

Oregon is not at the point yet where fire season lasts year-round, as in California. But the trend toward higher temperatures and more severe drought across the West is having an impact.

“Twenty years ago, when I fought wildland fire, our seasons looked nothing like this,” she said. Hotter and drier weather does not always necessarily mean more fires. There must be a spark, in combination with the right conditions, for wildfire to spread.

Ellsworth said more than 80% of fires in the West are caused by humans, underscoring the need for people to be careful working and recreating outdoors.

“While we can’t do a whole lot about the drought conditions we are facing right now, we can do a whole lot about the ignition sources ... managing people and managing that potential for wildfire as people are out there recreating,” she said.

\$220 million Oregon wildfire bill progresses despite ‘defensible space’ fears

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A far-reaching bill aimed at reducing Oregon’s wildfire risks has passed a key budget-setting committee despite fears it could impose excessive restrictions on rural areas.

The Joint Ways and Means Committee voted 14-9 to approve Senate Bill 762 with a do-pass recommendation on June 22, clearing the \$220 million proposal for a vote on the Senate floor with just days to go in the 2021 legislative session.

The legislation has several components, such as developing a wildfire risk map, updating building codes and improving forest resiliency, but provisions related to establishing standards for “defensible space” next to houses have proven among the most controversial.

Critics say that SB 762 has an overly broad definition of “wildland-urban interface” that could subject a vast amount of the rural landscape to expensive and unsightly vegetation removal requirements.

The entire reason people move out to the woods is to be surrounded by trees and other vegetation, said Sen. Fred Girod, R-Stayton. “How many of you want to have nothing around your house for 35 feet or more?”

The new requirements could add another \$50,000 to \$100,000 to the cost of a home when people are already struggling to obtain permits to rebuild after last year’s wildfires, he said. “Every obstacle known to God and man is put before these people so they can’t rebuild.”

Opponents claim that SB 762 hasn’t received enough vetting in light of its sweeping nature, particularly since a recent amendment was passed without testimony from the public.

“We are changing land use, we are



Kari Greer/USFS

A bill authorizing \$220 million in spending to reduce Oregon wildfire risks has made progress despite fears about excessive “defensible space” requirements around homes.

impacting building, we are changing codes. We are all over the place with this bill and you’ve had about 20 people who’ve testified on this bill in one hearing in the Senate,” said Rep. Christine Drazan, R-Canby.

While most objections to SB 762 came from Republicans during recent hearings, some Democrats also registered misgivings about the bill.

Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said she was concerned about the paucity of public testimony and the expansive “wildland-urban interface” definition, though she ultimately voted to approve the bill for a vote on the Senate floor.

Johnson noted that her family owns a home in the woods of Central Oregon. “I’ll be damned before I cut down any of the trees around that house,” she said.

The bill’s defenders said the alarm about severe “defensible space” requirements and the “wildland-urban interface” definition were misguided because the specifics would be refined

during agency rule-making. Areas within the wildland-urban interface will be categorized according to risk classifications and won’t face blanket restrictions, said Rep. Tina Kotek, D-Portland.

“You have to be in the wildland-urban interface and in a certain risk level for certain things to apply,” she said. “Let’s not forget that.”

Homeowners whose property was destroyed in last year’s wildfires won’t be subject to the restrictions and have an “expedited path to rebuilding” under other legislation, she said.

Rep. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, said that only the “extreme” and “high risk” classes within the wildland-urban interface would face regulation under SB 762.

It would be “vanishingly rare” for homes in agricultural areas to come under such restrictions, he said. Homes subject to regulation won’t face “cookie-cutter” restrictions but would undergo property-specific consultation.

Mormon church high bidder for Easterday ranch

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Farmland Reserve Inc., the real estate company of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, submitted the high bid of \$209 million for the Easterday ranch properties in Eastern Washington, topping a company linked to Bill Gates.

The winning bid, which must be approved by a judge, was reported Monday to the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for Eastern Washington.

Gates’ company, Delaware-based 100C LLC, bid \$208 million, according to court records.

Farmland Reserve plans to acquire Easterday properties in Benton County, Wash., commonly known as Goose Gap Farm, River Farm, Cox Farm and Farm Manager House.



Cody Easterday

Cody Easterday and his wife and mother declared bankruptcy in February as he faced charges of defrauding Tyson Foods and another company of \$244 million by billing the companies for non-existent cattle.

Easterday, 49, pleaded guilty March 31 to one count of wire fraud. He faces up to 20 years in prison. He is scheduled to be sentenced Aug. 4 in the U.S. District Court for Eastern Washington.

Easterday’s grandfather founded the ranch and farm in 1959.

The auction was conducted June 17 via video conference and was limited to five qualified bidders.

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Notice is hereby given that the following vehicle will be sold, for cash to the highest bidder, on 07/05/2021. The sale will be held at 10:00am by
COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2017 TOYOTA HIGHLANDER UT
VIN = 5TDDZRFH1H5369306
Amount due on lien \$1535.00
Reputed owner(s)
DIRECT MOTORZ LLC

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2017 BMW X3 4DR
VIN = 5UXWZ7C37H0V91372
Amount due on lien \$1535.00
Reputed owner(s)
FINANCIAL SERVICES VEH TRUST

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2014 SUBARU IMPREZA 4W
VIN = JF1GR7E62EG248748
Amount due on lien \$2435.00
Reputed owner(s)
CAMERON OAKES MOSSMAN OREGON COMMUNITY C.U.

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2013 KIA SPORTAGE UT
VIN = KN0PB3A29D7528675
Amount due on lien \$2435.00
Reputed owner(s)
ALONDRA GARCIA CABALLERO WELLS FARGO AUTO

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2010 TOYOTA RAV 4 UT
VIN = 2T3ZF4DV1AW027093
Amount due on lien \$2435.00
Reputed owner(s)
KARI JEAN REGAS

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2019 HYUNDAI IONIQ SW
VIN = KMH651C6K1U179733
Amount due on lien \$1435.00
Reputed owner(s)
FLEXDRIVE SERVICES LLC HYUNDAI MOTOR FINANCE

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2011 INFINITI EX35 SW
VIN = JN1AJ0HR8BM851188
Amount due on lien \$1255.00
Reputed owner(s)
HEATHER S FISHER OREGON COMMUNITY C.U

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2015 AUDI A 4 4DR
VIN = WAUHFAGL6FN007021
Amount due on lien \$1255.00
Reputed owner(s)
NANCY WESSINGER KLINE

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2019 WILD 31FT CT
VIN = 4X4TWCC25KT018208
Amount due on lien \$1455.00
Reputed owner(s)
BRANDI M & JARIT D PITOCHELLI ALASKA USA FEDERAL C.U.

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2016 KEYS COLEMAN TRL
VIN = 4YD2T3528GY933298
Amount due on lien \$1535.00
Reputed owner(s)
ROWANNE & SAM J HALEY OREGON STATE CREDIT UNION

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2013 NISSAN ALTIMA 4DR
VIN = 3N6CM0KN7DK696300
Amount due on lien \$1535.00
Reputed owner(s)
OLGALIDIA REYES RESENDIS SELCO COMMUNITY C.U.

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COPART OF WASHINGTON INC
2885 NATIONAL WAY WOODBURN, OR 2019 NISSAN ALTIMA 4DR
VIN = 1N4BL4BV6K214594
Amount due on lien \$1535.00
Reputed owner(s)
ASA MOHAMED MAHAMUD CARMAX BUSINESS SERVICES LLC