

# Forecast calls for elevated risk of wildfires

By **GEORGE PAVEN**  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Continued hot and dry weather is expected to elevate the risk for large wildfires this summer across parts of the Northwest already dealing with severe drought.

Fire officials in Oregon and Washington gathered May 24 for an open house at the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center in Portland, which serves as the main hub for deploying resources to battle wildfires throughout the region.

John Saltenberger, fire weather program manager for the center, provided an outlook for the 2022 fire season based on current conditions and a three-month forecast from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

As of May 19, nearly 87% of Oregon is in some stage of drought, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. That includes about 13% in “exceptional” drought in central and southern Oregon, reflecting below-average precipitation, warmer weather and inadequate snowpack over the last three years.

In Washington, a little more than



Oregon Department of Forestry  
**A firefighting tanker making a retardant drop over the Grandview Fire near Sisters on July 11, 2021. Forecasters say drought will elevate the risk of severe wildfires in parts of the Northwest this summer.**

half of the state is listed in drought east of the Cascades. According to NOAA, the entire region will likely see below-average precipitation in June, July and August, while most of Oregon and Eastern Washington are likely to be warmer than usual.

“That’s about as grim a report as I’ve seen NOAA put out,” Saltenberger said.

Taking all factors into consideration, Saltenberger said there will be

an above normal potential for significant wildfires beginning in central and south-central Oregon in June, and will gradually spread north and east into Washington by August.

The wildfire potential in Western Washington and Oregon’s Willamette Valley is normal this summer after the region benefitted from a cool and wet spring.

Already this year, more than 200 fires have burned approximately

1,100 acres in the Northwest. While the fires are mostly small now, Saltenberger said the heat and drought means they could grow into larger blazes later in the year.

A “large” fire is defined as being 100 or more acres in timber, and 300 or more acres in grass or rangeland. More than 2,700 Northwest firefighters have been assigned to contain large fires now burning in the Southwest.

Angie Lane, wildfire division manager for the Washington Department of Natural Resources, said cooperation between state, federal and tribal agencies are key to a successful wildfire season, particularly as fires are growing bigger, hotter and more destructive.

“We know we can’t go it alone,” Lane said. “If we’re not doing it together, I don’t think we would be as successful, for sure.”

Fire managers from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Parks Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon Department of Forestry and Oregon State Fire Marshal’s Office also attended the open house at the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center.

Last year, there were 4,075 wildfires reported in Oregon and Washington that burned more than 1.5 million acres. Those totals were 111% and 155% of the region’s 10-year average, respectively.

The Bootleg Fire in Southern Oregon accounted for most of the burned acres in 2021, at 413,717. The largest fire in Washington was the Schneider Springs blaze northwest of Naches, which burned 107,322 acres.



Sarah Bassing/University of Washington

**Officials say northeast Washington wolf pack with a history of predation has renewed its attacks on livestock.**

## Washington wolf pack renews attacks on calves

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

A northeast Washington wolf pack with a history of attacking cattle has killed one calf and wounded another in the past week, the Department of Fish and Wildlife said Friday.

The Togo pack has been designated for lethal control by Fish and Wildlife five times in the past four years because of chronic attacks on cattle.

The department has shot one wolf in the five tries. Meanwhile, the pack has grown and expanded its territory in Ferry County.

In the latest predations, wolves bit and clawed calves in two private pastures. The ranch checks the cattle several times a day, according to the department. Flashing colored lights were in the pasture where the calf was injured.

The rancher and Fish and Wildlife are working with range-riders from two organizations, the Cattle Producers of Washington and the Northeast Washington Wolf Cattle Collaborative, to patrol the area.

Fish and Wildlife has now

documented five attacks on calves in the pack’s territory in the past 10 months. Department policy calls for considering lethal control after four predations in 10 months. The previous three were in August.

Fish and Wildlife staff members were meeting to make a recommendation to department Director Kelly Susewind, according to the department.

According to the department, a rancher found a dead calf the evening of May 16 in a pasture about a half mile from the ranch’s headquarters.

The next day, Fish and Wildlife investigators saw bites, cuts and holes on the dead animal’s hamstrings and hindquarters. They estimated wolves killed the calf one or two days earlier.

On May 18, the same rancher found an injured calf in a different pasture. The calf had been bitten, cut and clawed. Fish and Wildlife investigators estimated the wounds were three or four days old.

Even before the most recent predations, the Togo pack territory was the only one that meets the depart-

ment’s definition of a “chronic-conflict” area because of its multi-year history of predations. The area receives special attention from department in trying to prevent wolf attacks.

Susewind has authorized removing one or two wolves in the Togo pack five times, beginning in 2018. The department killed a Togo wolf in 2018, but didn’t remove a wolf the other four times.

In response to a series of predations by the pack last summer, Susewind authorized removing one or two wolves.

He issued the order nine days after the last attack. The department stopped looking for the pack four days later. The department said that killing a wolf to change a pack’s behavior is most effective within 14 days of a predation.

The Togo pack had seven wolves at the end of 2021, up from three wolves at the end of 2020, according to Fish and Wildlife counts.

The pack last year expanded its territory to include most of an area previously occupied by another pack in the Kettle River Range.

## Oregon rail-to-barge facility wins \$2 million to expand capacity

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**  
Capital Press

A unique rail-to-barge grain facility at Oregon’s Port of Morrow is expanding with help from a \$2 million grant recently approved by state transportation officials.

The Morrow County Grain Growers cooperative has won approval from the Oregon Transportation Commission for funding that will cover about two-thirds of the \$3 million project’s cost.

“It’s worked great so far and we hope it will give us that much more capability,” said Kevin Gray, the cooperative’s CEO, of the grain handling operation.

Originally completed

in 2019, the facility is the only one of its kind along the Columbia River that can unload grain from rail cars and then load it into barges headed for downstream export elevators.

“It’s a time saver just because of the congestion on the railroads,” Gray said.

The expansion project will install a new 600,000-bushel grain bin and associated conveyors that will connect it to the existing facility.

Six grain bins already stood at the location when the cooperative built the \$7.5 million rail-to-barge system, whose cost included installation of a seventh bin.

The project recently approved for Connect Ore-

gon grant funding will bring the number of bins to eight, with room for five more and a grain bunker left at the site.

Gray said the additional bin is meant to improve the facility’s flexibility, since until now it’s occasionally been forced to reject proposed grain loads because the existing bins were in use.

Even if the bins have storage capacity left, they’re still limited to storing the type of grain each one already contains, he said. “You can’t put corn in the same bin you put wheat in.”

Grain shippers benefit from using the facility because their loads can bypass backed-up rail traffic in Portland, Gray said.

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