

# US vows to work with states to fight wildfires

By **MATTHEW DALY**  
*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — As wildfires choke California and other Western states, the Trump administration pledged Thursday to work more closely with state and local officials to prevent wildfires from ever starting.



**Sonny Perdue**

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said the Forest Service and other agencies will step up efforts to cut down small trees and underbrush and set controlled fires to remove trees that serve as fuel for catastrophic blazes, including a series of deadly fires that have spread through drought-

parched forests and rural communities in California.

Six firefighters have died in those wildfires.

Perdue, who toured the California fires this week, said they were “stark reminders of the immense forest-fire health crisis in this country, and the urgent need to dramatically increase our preventative forest treatments.”

While officials have boosted forest management efforts in recent years, more needs to be done, Perdue said.

“To truly protect our forests, we must increase the number and the size of our (prevention) projects across the local landscape and across boundaries, and frankly we can’t do this by ourselves,” Perdue said at a news conference at the Capitol.

Perdue pledged a “shared stewardship” approach in which the Forest Service,



**Elias Funez/The Union**

**Cal Fire bulldozer 2341 pushes through a mound of burning vegetation Wednesday in Grass Valley, Calif.**

Bureau of Land Management and other federal agencies work with state, local and tribal officials to fight and prevent wildfires.

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, meanwhile, said national forests have suffered from “gross mismanagement”

for decades.

“The fuel loads are up. The density of our forests is historical. We have dead and dying timber,” Zinke said at a Cabinet meeting at the White House.

“This is unacceptable that year after year we’re watch-

ing our forests burn, our habitat destroyed and our communities devastated,” Zinke added. “And it is absolutely preventable. Public lands are for everybody to enjoy and not just held hostage by these special-interest groups.”

The focus on wildfire comes as California and other states face longer and more destructive wildfire seasons because of drought, warmer weather attributed to climate change and homes built deeper into forests. Yosemite National Park’s scenic valley in Northern California reopened Tuesday after a 20-day, smoked-forced closure, and hundreds of people were evacuated from Glacier National Park in Montana after a wildfire destroyed at least nine homes and cabins in one of the park’s historic districts.

In Washington state, mean-

while, officials have distributed masks to combat unhealthy air filled with smoke from wildfires that have blanketed the Northwest.

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., said the crisis underscores the importance of preventing wildfires. “It is unacceptable to me to have Northwest seniors and young people being afraid to open their doors in the morning because they are afraid of smoke,” he said.

Longer and hotter wildfire seasons are the “new normal,” said Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., “and we have to meet it with a very, very aggressive response” that includes drones, satellites and other technology.

Not all efforts will be popular, Cantwell said, noting that some Seattle-area residents opposed controlled burns this spring because they feared the smoke.

## Firefighters: ‘We don’t normally end up right in front of the flame front’

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large spot fire and got his first chance to engage a wildfire directly.

Over the next four days, the main work for the task force was to patrol for spot fires and protect homes by clearing out surrounding brush and wetting down yards and rooftops.

But during the night of Aug. 2, the task force was sent out to a road that turned out to be one of the main fronts of the now-contained 20,000-acre fire. Spencer remembers all the firefighters falling silent, as everyone started to pull line and prepare for the flames creeping forward 200 yards away. Eventually, the wind shifted in their favor.

“We don’t normally end up right in front of the flame front,” Spencer said. “It’s a very surreal experience to have flames shooting up over the tree line at you.”

One of the most rewarding aspects of the job is getting to meet the people you are serving, Savage said. In Dufur, much of what was being protected was farmland, and firefighters were often working side by side with ranchers.

“They don’t have a bunch of rules and standards to follow like we do. They are just kind of winging it with their own equipment,” Savage said. “It



**Josh Como**

**Ron Britton, left, works in the smoky haze of the South Valley Fire in August.**

was amazing to see them risk their own work trucks and lives to help out their neighbors.”

Though the days and nights are long, often ending only in a few hours of sleep in a tent, what makes going on trips difficult is rarely the firefighting itself.

For James Hutchinson, of the Gearhart Volunteer Fire Department, watching someone’s cash crop singe into black dust was often a humbling and somber experience.

“I remember on one fire someone came up to me and asked to use my phone to call home. Their phone wasn’t working and they needed to let someone know the farm was gone,” Hutchinson said. “In those moments you take a step into their shoes, and it can be hard. But you have to make it a motivation and remember you are there to help.”

Gearhart Fire Lt. Josh Como, who has been deployed three times, said leaving

home can be difficult. Finding employers who are flexible enough to allow unplanned deployments, as well as balancing family dynamics, can be a challenge.

“Life goes on while you are out there,” Como said. “Everything is going on at home, plus the people you love are worrying about whether you’re OK. That’s why it’s important to take lots of photos to let them know you’re safe.”

But the challenges are over-

shadowed by what everyone agreed was the best part of the job: gratitude.

“You see these things happen on TV, but until you’re actually there, meeting the people you’re helping face to face ... that kind of gratitude you can’t understand or see unless you’re there.”

### A new reality

With conflagration calls on the rise, local fire departments are adjusting to a new reality. Every request from the state means a local chief is making a judgment call on whether the department can afford to lose personnel — often at the height of the summer tourism season, when first responders are the busiest.

“The biggest challenge is making sure that when we send crews out we’re making sure there’s enough crew to respond to our own emergencies,” Lewis and Clark Fire Chief Jeff Golightly said.

Fire departments have yet to face any issues answering emergency calls, as they all have an interagency agreement to help each other. But whether the department has enough people available is something Gearhart Fire Chief Bill Eddy always has on his mind.

“That’s always a concern with a volunteer department.

In a volunteer department you have no way to backfill when people go,” Eddy said. “You just plan, train and prepare the best you can.”

Fire departments have also had to adjust how they budget as the costs of conflagration continues to rise. While the state reimburses local departments, local departments have to be ready to foot the bill ahead of time — some now even creating a line item in the budget in anticipation. Some departments, like Gearhart, are still waiting on some portions of reimbursement for work done at the California fires, and have had to request temporary general fund transfers to make it through.

Golightly estimates more than half a million dollars was paid out to Clatsop County departments last year.

While there may be some inconvenience, Cannon Beach Fire Chief Matt Benedict thinks the connections and skills volunteers bring back from these trips make the county more prepared.

“A lot of the citizens are thanking us for helping out, and offering to be there for us if we ever need help,” Benedict said. “I love getting to send people out. You don’t get to use all those skills you train for until you’re out there.”

## Tolls: Policy advisory committee to study the issue over eight months

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The transportation department convened a policy advisory committee to study the issue over eight months. The committee in July recommended starting a pilot program to toll all lanes of I-5 between Northeast Going/Alberta Street and Southwest Multnomah Boulevard and the Abernethy Bridge on I-205. Revenue from the bridge toll would go toward paying for construction of a third lane on the two-lane stretches of I-205, from Highway 99 East to Stafford Road.

Revenue from other tolls would be dedicated to expanding capacity, increasing the number of people in each vehicle or augmenting traffic.

The idea behind a pilot program is to show how the tolls work at changing driver behavior and reducing congestion, committee members have said.

One option is to make the tolls variable so that prices would be greater during

higher levels of traffic and lower or nonexistent during low congestion periods, such as late at night. That strategy encourages drivers to get on the freeways when traffic levels are lower.

The recommendation also calls for measures to mitigate the impact on low-income residents, such as increasing access to public transportation and financial assistance.

It would take several years to implement tolling just for the pilot program, transportation officials have said.

Meanwhile, Gladstone Planning Commissioner Les Poole and Republican state Reps. Mike Nearman, of Independence, and Julie Parrish, of West Linn, are trying to get an initiative on the 2020 ballot that would require voter approval for tolls on existing roadways in certain circumstances.

Initiative Petition 10 would require voter approval for tolling existing roadways when proceeds of the tolls are used to pay only

for “new net capacity” on the road or bridge on which the toll is assessed. That essentially means building additional lanes.

For example, under the initiative, the state could toll new lanes on I-5 without seeking approval from voters, but if the state wants to toll the existing lanes, voter approval would be required.

The commission made its decision Thursday during a meeting in John Day.

The commission sometimes takes its meetings on the road to reach out to constituents around the state and see the state of the transportation system. Last month, the commission convened a listening session in Portland to hear about the I-5 and I-205 tolling proposal. Forty-three members of the public came forward to speak. There were no public comments at Thursday’s meeting.

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

## Case: Shooting remains under investigation

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In the background, the radio station 93.3 “The Rock” FM boomed — a nod to Case’s habit of blaring rock ‘n’ roll music at the gas station during his shift.

Around a barbecue, friends remembered a man who worked hard, and “would give the shirt off his back” to help anyone he thought needed it.

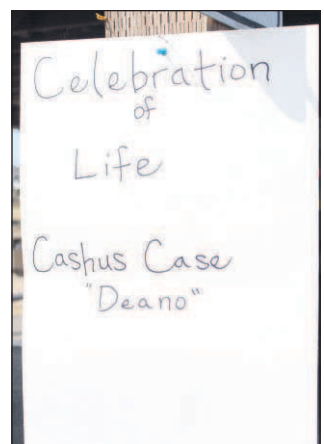
They remembered his love for his green motorcycle, which always had a stuffed Gorilla on the back to show his company pride, and his extreme attention to detail when it came to making sure the store was spotless.

“I’m the manager, and he was probably there more than I was,” Jones laughed.

Now, the gas station is quiet.

“It went from alive to feeling stale. (Gorilla Gas) has lost a lot of energy,” said Katie Kirtley, who owns the gas station. “He brought a lot of drive to make it better.”

Case was scheduled to work the day he died. Jones and Kirtley remember hearing rumors of a shooting at



**Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian**  
**A sign marks the celebration of life for Cashus Case, who was killed last month by Seaside police.**

the RV park where he lived, hoping it wasn’t their friend. After calling him repeatedly to no avail, Kirtley headed to the Seaside Police Department, where she was notified of Case’s death.

It was disorienting for both Jones and Kirtley — who knew Case as a bombastic but ultimately sensitive and kind man — to imagine him dying this way.

“We’re all just so confused. We don’t know why this happened,” Jones said. “That’s what is killing me. Justified (shooting) or not, that’s what is getting us — the not knowing. Could something have gone differently?”

The shooting, which occurred after Case helped a man injured in a dog attack, remains under investigation.

Case’s father, Ken Case Sr., said nothing will take away the pain he feels from losing his son. But getting some answers would help.

“All I want is justice,” he said. “If that happens, I walk. But if I don’t get justice, and this isn’t done fairly, I won’t be quiet.”

## Bakery: Tilanders are in no hurry to sell

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“We’d like to see someone pick up where we left off,” she said.

The announcement comes after Astoria’s other longtime bakery, Danish Maid, closed last year shortly after the death of co-owner and baker John Lindstrom. The downtown space has since been turned into Good to Go, a gourmet lunch counter.

The 5,000-square-foot, 1928 Home Baking Co. storefront at 2845 Marine Drive has been listed for \$400,000 with local real estate agent Victor Kee. The entire business, including the building, name, equipment, and online presence, is available for \$650,000.

In the bakery’s spacious backroom is a museum of working, World War-II vin-

tage equipment, including a 10-rack commercial oven filling most of the former garage.

“This place is big,” Jim Tilander said. “A young person could run four bakeries and deliver all around the region.”

He also sees potential to restore the historic building and add a restaurant, while expanding the export of the bakery’s cinnamon toast, a

specialty shipped to independent grocery stores.

In no hurry to sell, the Tilanders are waiting to see who steps forward to potentially continue Home Baking’s long history, even offering to teach a new owner their recipes and production methods.

“I’m just going to list it and see what happens,” Jim Tilander said.

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