

Lawmakers: More resources needed to fight wildfires

Analysts said Oregon fire season will be above average

By AUBREY WIEBER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — Saturday marked the official start of Oregon's wildfire season, but without new resources the state is only incrementally more prepared to combat fire this summer than in past years.

Over consecutive summers, fire ripped through iconic landscapes, endangered communities and choked towns with blankets of smoke. The state has already seen more than 1,000 acres burn this year.

In a winter where priorities abound, wildfire preparedness has not come out a winner.

"In this biennium, we need a lifeline for our communities," said state Rep. Pam Marsh, R-Ashland. Marsh's district was ablaze through much of the summer, with fire coming dangerously close to structures.

In addition to putting the community in danger, wildfires had massive economic impacts. The famous Shakespeare festival had to cancel



Photo courtesy of Oregon Department of Forestry

Lawmakers call for more resources as Oregon heads into another fire season analysis say will again be above average.

events, costing it an estimated \$2 million.

Firefighters checked the wildfires, Marsh said, but the scorched town of Paradise, California, is a reminder that Ashland may not always be so lucky.

Marsh said that's why Gov. Kate Brown's proposed budget "set off" her constituents. It included resources to staff a wildfire council, which Brown created through executive action this winter, but that council won't have any impact until the fall at the earliest. Then, funding would still need to be acquired to carry out recommendations.

Brown proposed no additional funding to bolster the state's response to this summer's fires.

"It didn't have any immediate relief for the community," Marsh said. "What it had was a wildfire council. People were upset that there seemed to be long-term thinking, but nothing to provide something for this season."

Despite a strong snowpack, a state analysis predicts another above average fire season. It's what's referred to as "the new normal."

That's why Marsh is working to get \$6.8 million for wildfire mitigation and suppression before the 2019 legislative session ends. The package would give the Oregon Department of Forestry more resources to fight fire, help communities implement smoke shelters to shield vul-

nerable people when heavy smoke billows into town and provide more resources to the front lines to stop fires from growing.

The plan is endorsed by representatives David Brock Smith, R-Port Orford, Jack Zina, R-Bend, Paul Evans, D-Monmouth, Kim Wallan, R-Medford, Tiffany Mitchell, D-Astoria, Anna Williams, D-Hood River, Marty Wilde, D-Eugene, Gary Leif, R-Roseburg, Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, Andrea Salinas, D-Lake Oswego, Cheri Helt, R-Bend and Sen. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland.

It's a stopgap measure, Marsh said, but a much needed one. Marsh supports Brown's fire council, which she hopes will push the state to a more proactive approach that includes better land management, prescribed burns and more resources.

"We are coming into this session having just experienced the two most expensive fire seasons in our state's history," Marsh said. Last summer's season cost \$514 million.

Marsh is hoping to get the money in June through agency budgets rather than a bill.

She has wide support, but she's lacking an endorsement from Brown. Brown has signaled to lawmakers that she wants the council to come up

with recommendations first, then get money.

It's what Evans, chair of the House Veterans and Emergency Preparedness Committee, called a "measure twice, cut once," approach.

Evans is also pushing a proposal. He introduced HB 3439, which seeks to simplify the state disaster response process. It would also make it easier to make an emergency declaration. Evans wants dedicated personnel assigned to vulnerable fire areas so they can strike as soon as the sparks do.

"We made decisions through land use, and quite frankly market economics, that allowed for people to build in areas where there are great views," Evans said. "Unfortunately, places where there's a great view are also places fire wants to go to most."

At Brown's request, Evans isn't pursuing his legislation, but intends to bring the concept up next session.

"There were a lot of other issues that were on her table, and she wanted to give this appropriate time and study," Evans said. "It was a proposal that was new to her."

When asked about where her priorities lie, Brown said the state is more prepared going into this season than last. She said the state is better aligned with the federal fire-

fighting resources. Oregon will have access to new infrared technology to see through thick smoke.

But Brown said she wants to see more thinning and prescriptive burns on federal lands. Steps she can't directly act on.

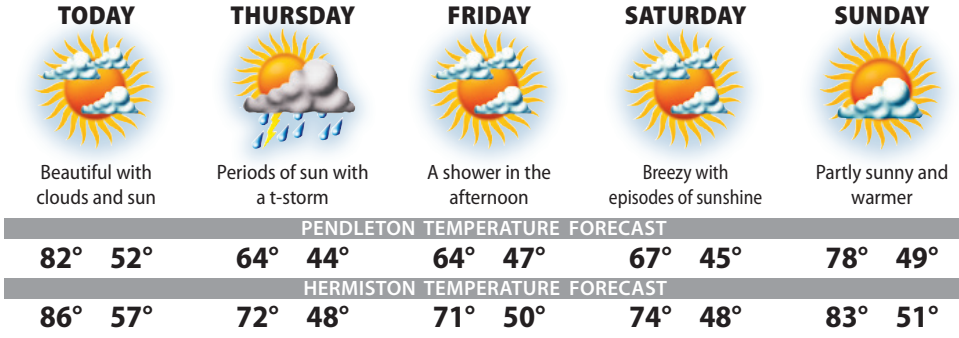
"We are going to continue to advocate — I am going to continue to work with my governors, Republican and Democrat in the West — to continue to push for more resources on the local level," Brown said.

Brown's natural resources policy advisor, Jason Miner, said there are two National Guard battalions in Oregon trained for the season with a third coming. The Forestry Department is training 600 seasonal firefighters, and has 230 more on the way.

Miner said the wildfire council would pursue long-term changes as well. Marsh and Evans say constituents are uneasy after watching the state burn year after year.

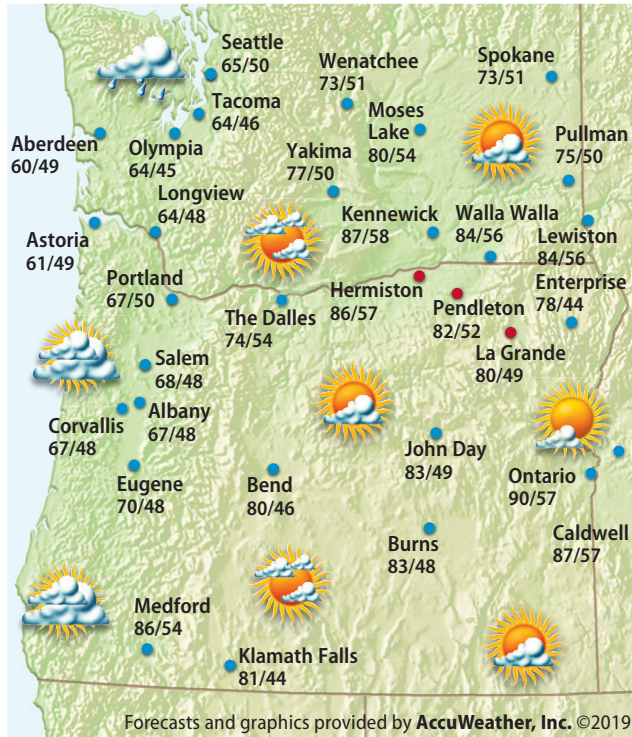
"I don't want to get in the way of what the governor is trying to do with her council," Evans said. "That said, I'm very committed to reorganizing, in a rational way, our entire emergency management delivery system. What we have right now made sense 20 years ago. It doesn't make sense for tomorrow, and it really warrants our attention."

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



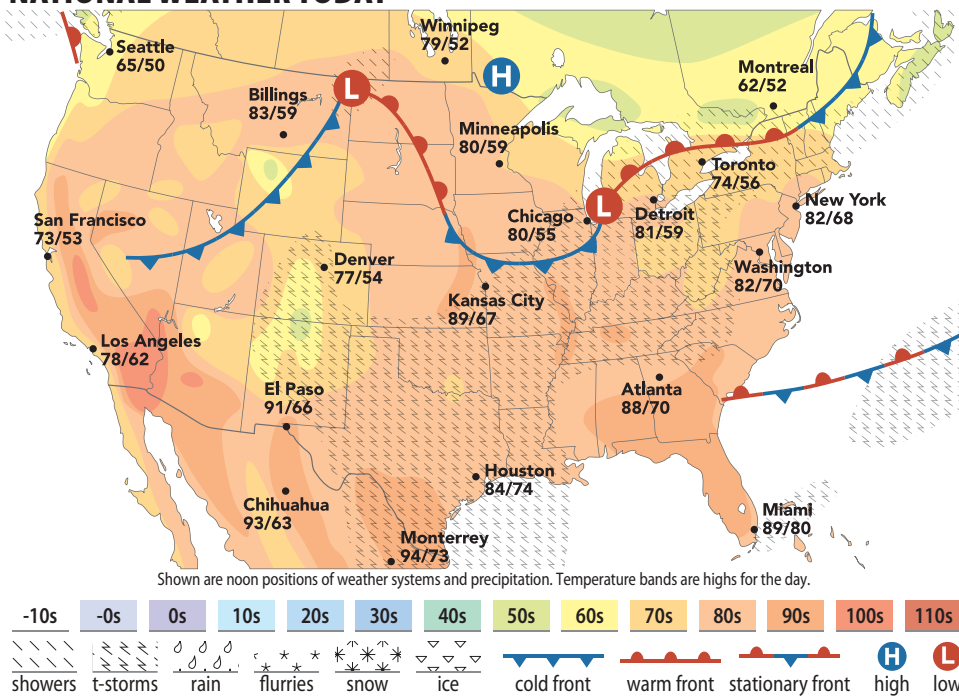
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	80°	45°
Normals	75°	51°
Records	98° (1969)	35° (1991)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.24"	
Year to date	9.28"	
Last year to date	6.07"	
Normal year to date	6.75"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	84°	54°
Normals	77°	51°
Records	100° (1970)	40° (1980)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.11"	
Year to date	4.42"	
Last year to date	4.96"	
Normal year to date	5.22"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Thu.	Thu.
Boardman	WSW 7-14	WSW 8-16
Pendleton	WNW 6-12	WSW 7-14
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:07 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:40 p.m.	
Moonrise today	7:18 a.m.	
Moonset today	11:12 p.m.	

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 104° in Needles, Calif. Low 27° in Leadville, Colo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



BRIEFLY

Oregon house approves bill making it easier to expunge old marijuana convictions

SALEM (AP) — Those with outdated marijuana convictions will be able to have their records expunged faster under an Oregon bill approved by the House.

Lawmakers voted 42-15 on Tuesday to ease some of the bureaucratic hurdles involved in setting aside marijuana convictions that occurred before the state legalized the drug in 2015.

Those seeking expungement will no longer have to pay a fee nor will they have to provide fingerprints or undergo a background check.

Rep. Janelle Bynum says those with outdated convictions have trouble securing housing and employment and that they are "still paying the price for actions that we have decriminalized."

Bynum, the only black member of the House, adds that this issue disproportionately affects people of color. The ACLU reported in 2013 that blacks were 2 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana possession in Oregon than whites.

The Senate already approved the measure

but has to approve a technical change before it heads to the governor.

Appeals court upholds the dismissal of three Oregon basketball players

SEATTLE (AP) — A U.S. appeals court has rejected an appeal brought by three University of Oregon basketball players who said they were discriminated against when they were kicked out of school over rape allegations.

A female student accused Dominic Artis, Damyean Dotson and Brandon Austin of raping her at a party in 2014, allegations that prompted protests on campus. No criminal charges were filed and the three maintained the sexual contact was consensual, but the school dismissed them over code-of-conduct violations.

The players sued in 2015, saying they suffered gender discrimination, among other claims. A federal judge threw out their lawsuit. On Tuesday, a three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously upheld that decision.

The panel said the three failed to make a plausible claim of discrimination.

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