

\$220M wildfire bill progresses despite 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 Tuesday, 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 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



Kari Greer/U.S. Forest Service, File

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

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 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 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 Drazen, 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-Scap-

poose, 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 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.

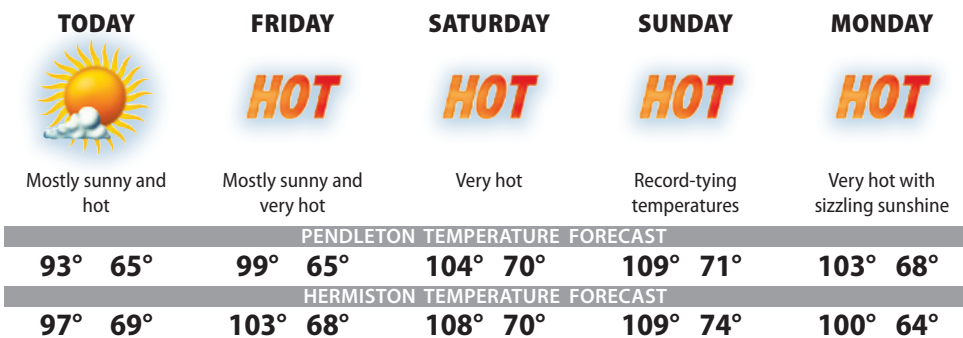
Rep. Jeff Golden, D-Ashland, said only the "extreme" and "high risk" classes within the wildland-urban interface would face regulation under SB 762.

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.

The "dystopian image" of a clear-cut "scorched earth" landscape is not what the bill aims to accomplish, though some landowners will face requirements they don't like, Golden said.

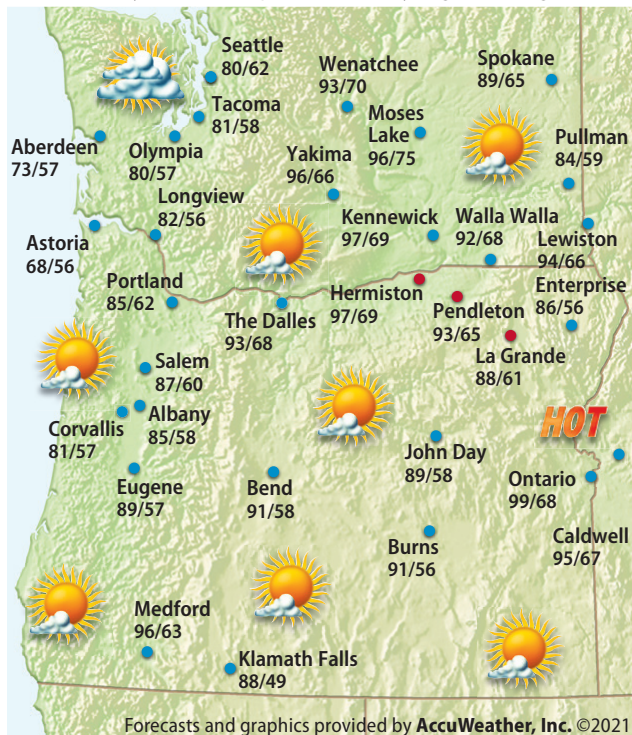
"The defensible space is the crux of this. There is no more important element," he said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



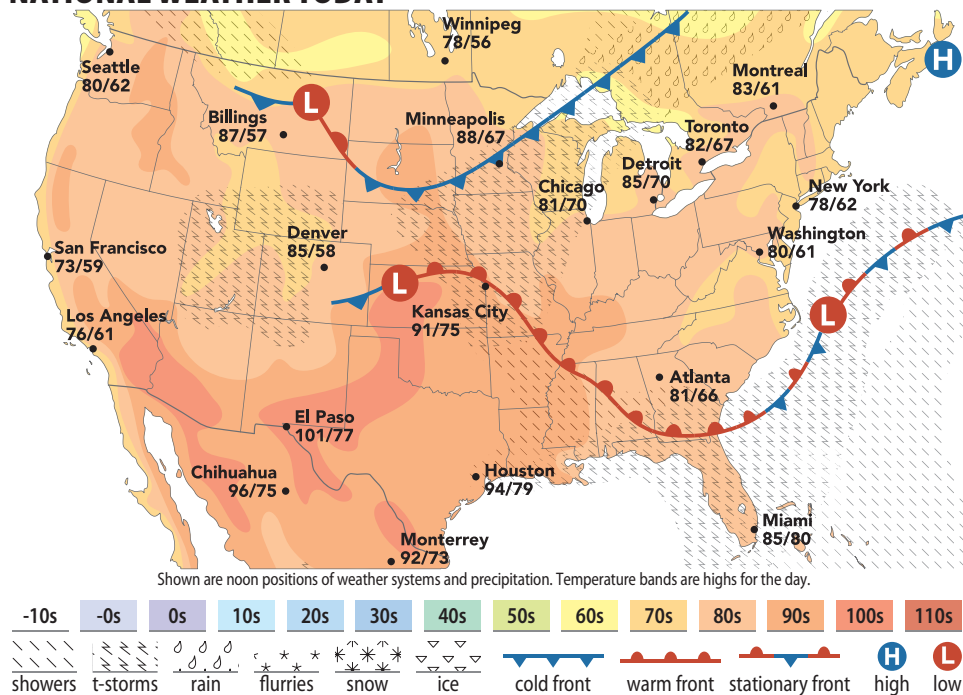
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	93°	64°
Normals	81°	54°
Records	102° (1992)	40° (1920)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.28"	
Normal month to date	0.97"	
Year to date	4.31"	
Last year to date	8.55"	
Normal year to date	7.48"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	98°	70°
Normals	82°	55°
Records	106° (1958)	40° (2009)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.23"	
Normal month to date	0.49"	
Year to date	1.93"	
Last year to date	1.61"	
Normal year to date	5.60"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Fri.	
Boardman	WSW 6-12	NNE 6-12
Pendleton	W 7-14	NW 6-12
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	5:07 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	8:49 p.m.	
Moonrise today	9:22 p.m.	
Moonset today	4:44 a.m.	
Full	Last	New
June 24	July 1	July 9
		July 17

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 108° in Borger, Texas Low 26° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



SAR training planned this weekend

East Oregonian

ENTERPRISE — Eastern Oregon Search and Rescue will hold an annual training at Salt Creek Summit from Friday, June 25, through Sunday, June 27, according to a press release.

Travelers taking the U.S. Forest Service 39 Road to Halfway or Hells Canyon this weekend can expect some delays, along with all-terrain vehicles, pickups, people and maybe even extra help if trouble occurs. Search and rescue units from across Eastern Oregon will hold their annual training exercise in the Salt Creek Summit area this weekend.

"This training is a huge value to all of our volunteers to be able to network and train with multiple agencies from Northeast Oregon," Wallowa County SAR Capt. Brent Neely said. "Participating counties frequently call on each other for mutual aid for specialized rescues or extended searches and having experience training with each other's teams is invaluable."

There may be significant traffic and utility vehi-

WHO TO CONTACT

For more information, contact Ellen Morris Bishop, Wallowa County SAR public relations, at 541-398-1810 or paleobishop@gmail.com; or Paige Sully, Wallowa County SAR, at 541-426-0535.

cles and ATV congestion in and around the Salt Creek Summit parking area during the training time. The parking lot will be open to the public, but parking may be limited due to the volume of SAR equipment and tents staged there.

About 100 search and rescue volunteers from 10 Eastern Oregon counties (Baker, Gilliam, Grant, Harney, Malheur, Morrow, Union, Umatilla, Wallowa and Wheeler) are expected to take part in the exercises. Most will be camping in the Salt Creek Summit area, near where most of the training will take place. Wallowa County SAR volunteers are hosting the event.

The training includes work in fast-tracking, responding to a swiftwater (water rescue) emergency, advanced incident command, land

searches, K-9 land searches, civil air patrol searches and searching using a drone.

"If you plan to recreate or travel in this area, please be aware of this training," Wallowa County Search and Rescue event coordinator Paige Sully said. "However serious it may appear, we are not engaged in an actual search and rescue incident response."

The Wallowa County SAR volunteers have developed the training exercises that also include equine packing and rescue.

"There are thousands of volunteer hours that go into planning and training at this event," Neely said. "I want to say 'thank you' to all the SAR members for the personal time, energy, and money they donate to make our Northeast Oregon SAR teams the best they can be."

IN BRIEF

Baker City man accused of defrauding construction clients

BAKER CITY — A Baker City man is accused of receiving money from clients for construction projects that he failed to start or finish.

Kenneth Edward Hackett, 51, was arrested at 9 a.m. on Saturday, June 19, in Baker City on two counts of aggravated theft and one count of first-degree theft.

The warrant from Baker County Circuit Court stems from investigations by the Baker City Police Department and Baker County Sheriff's Office related to construction fraud complaints, according to a press release from Ray Duman, interim administrator for the Baker City Police.

The two agencies investigated two incidents with a combined loss of \$78,000, according to the press release.

A third case, from Union County, also was reported to Baker City Police.

Three other cases reported to Baker City Police were settled by civil action between the residents and Hackett, according to the press release.

According to the Oregon Contractor Construction Board, Hackett has never been a licensed contractor in Oregon.

The agency fined Hackett five times between 2009 and 2021 for working without a license, and he owes \$25,491 in penalties, including interest, said Leslie Culpepper, communications and education manager for the Contractor Construction Board.

Hackett is one of two defendants in a civil lawsuit for breach of contract filed March 3, 2021, in Baker County Circuit Court by Jerry P. Martin of Baker City.

The other defendant is A+ Affordable Construction LLC, a Baker City company owned by Joanna Dixon, a Baker City City Council member.

Dixon's company's license with the Construction Contractors Board has expired, according to agency records.

—EO Media Group

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