

# State says fire season over for half of Oregon

By JACK FORREST  
The Oregonian

SALEM — Half of Oregon is officially free of fire season, while the state's eastern and southern regions need significantly more rain before they're in the clear, experts say.

Record-breaking September rainfall, longer nights and more humid air have signaled the beginning of the end of a historic 2021 fire season. But fall rains have a decades-long drought to overcome in most of the West, meaning thicker fuels like timber aren't yet saturated by the season's precipitation.

"We got what seemed like a lot of rain, but it very quickly soaked into the soil and is running off," Larry O'Neill, an Oregon State professor studying how weather impacts wildfires, said Thursday, Oct. 7. "So it was a very good start to a good wet season, but it really didn't do much to decrease the severity of the drought conditions."

The Oregon Department of Forestry has announced an end to the fire season in five of its 10 districts. Those districts include Washington, Clatsop, Columbia, Tillamook, Lane, Benton, Lincoln, Polk and Yamhill



Bootleg Fire Incident Command via The Associated Press, File

**A tanker drops retardant July 17, 2021, over the Mitchell Monument area at the Bootleg Fire in Southern Oregon.**

counties, as well as the southern part of Linn County.

The five districts that include most of Southern and Eastern Oregon still remain in fire season.

The end to fire season lifts restrictions on industrial operations in Oregon's forests — most notably the need for a fire-watch service, or an on-site worker trained in firefighting.

Weather forecasters expect Oregon to get

above-average rainfall this autumn, but O'Neill is tempering his expectations. Forecasters also expected last fall to be wetter than average, he said, but the season ended up being far drier.

"We've had this trend, especially the last 10 years, where we've had dry falls," O'Neill said. "So basically, we need to actually see the rain in the rain gauge before we can really be sure."

If history is any indication, short stints of warm, dry October weather can slow progress made by early-fall rains, O'Neill said.

The threat of wildfire also never truly goes away, said John Saltenberger, a fire weather meteorologist for the Northwest Interagency Coordination Center in Portland.

A wildfire still can crop up in the middle of winter, Saltenberger said. But the

convergence of extreme fire weather, dry conditions and ignition sources such as lightning or campfire sparks is what makes wildfires particularly costly and dangerous.

The odds of such a convergence are already decreasing, Saltenberger said, as the region sees fewer thunderstorms and more rain that dampens fuels like timber and brush.

"That's not to say it's impossible," he said, "but it's unlikely."

Historically there's a small jump in new fires when Oregon's deer hunting season begins in early October, but those fires rarely cause widespread damage, Saltenberger said.

### Looking back

Oregon's 2021 fire season will go down as one of the state's all-time worst, Saltenberger said, but it's been far less destructive than the 2020 fire season.

At least 1,863 fires have burned more than 800,000 acres in Oregon so far this year, according to the state Department of Forestry. Nearly 2,000 fires burned more than 1 million acres last year.

President Joe Biden declared Oregon's 2020 fire season a federal emer-

gency, giving the state support from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and prompting the Oregon Office of Emergency Management to better document the season's human toll.

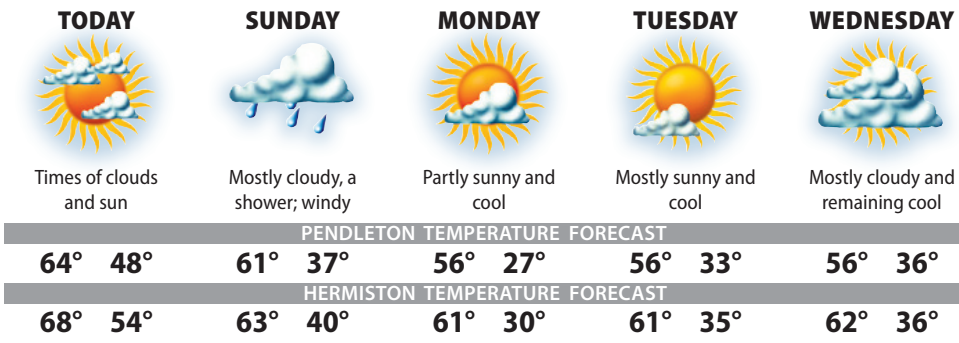
Last year's wildfires killed nine people and destroyed 4,132 homes, according to the state emergency management agency.

Damage from the 2021 season has been far less documented, though state officials say at least 91 homes were destroyed in the 413,765-acre Bootleg Fire — the fourth-largest blaze in Oregon history. A firefighter from Medford also died when he was hit by a falling tree while fighting the Middle Fork Complex of wildfires east of Eugene.

But this year's fires burned largely in unpopulated or sparsely populated areas, sparing the state from the level of damage seen in 2020.

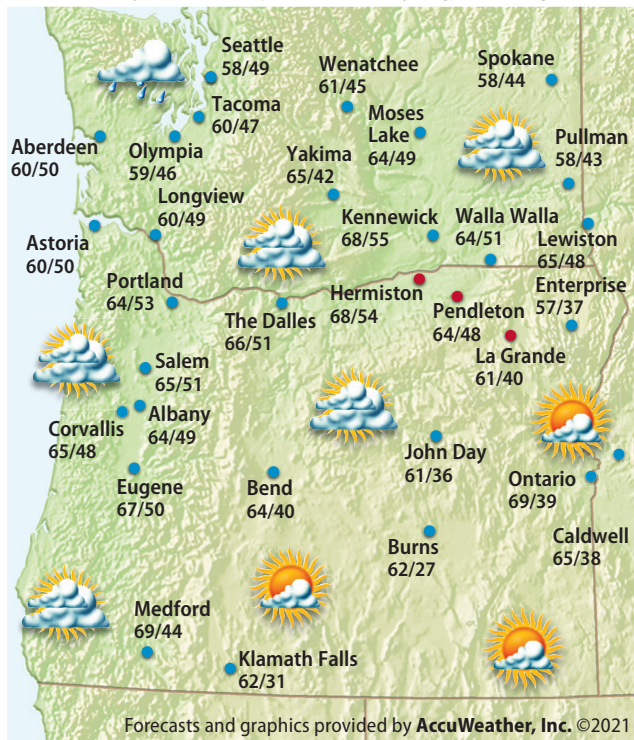
"There were some fires, and we lost a couple iconic lookout towers and burned through some beloved wilderness areas," O'Neill said. "I really feel that we were very fortunate, at least here in Northwest Oregon, because going into August things were looking so much bleaker."

## Forecast for Pendleton Area



## OREGON FORECAST

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



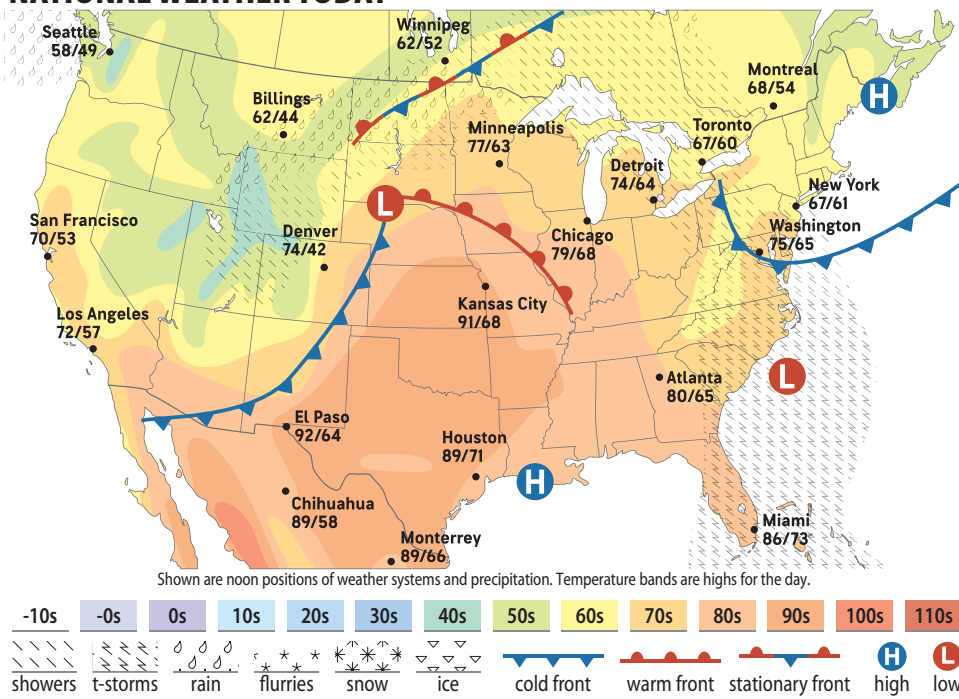
## ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	60°	35°
Normals	69°	44°
Records	93° (1911)	21° (1916)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.02"	
Normal month to date	0.24"	
Year to date	5.02"	
Last year to date	8.82"	
Normal year to date	9.45"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	65°	38°
Normals	71°	41°
Records	86° (1980)	26° (1931)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.00"	
Month to date	0.00"	
Normal month to date	0.17"	
Year to date	2.67"	
Last year to date	1.73"	
Normal year to date	5.84"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Sun.
Boardman	WSW 8-16	WSW 12-25
Pendleton	WSW 7-14	WSW 12-25
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:04 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	6:20 p.m.	
Moonrise today	11:09 a.m.	
Moonset today	8:22 p.m.	

## NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)  
High 100° in Vernon, Texas Low 18° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

## NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



# Survey: Oregonians split on whether state is on 'right track'

By ZACK DEMARS  
The Bulletin

SALEM — While half of Oregonians say the state is headed in the wrong direction, views on the state's economy have improved in recent months.

Those are two of the key takeaways from the Oregon Values and Beliefs Center, which surveyed more than 1,100 residents across the state over the course of a week late last month.

The first figure — with 49% saying the state is headed on the wrong track, compared to 45% who say its on the right track — is closer to the pessimistic lows of last winter than highs of this summer. In December, 52% held "wrong track" views, while only 42% said the same in May.

Chad Kernutt, a 31-year-old state employee in Albany, said COVID-19 restrictions passed down by state authorities while the public was restricted from most of the

year's legislative session was a sign of a state off track.

"The constant masking, the constant overregulation of businesses, telling them what they can and can't do, and now the mandates on vaccines," Kernutt said. "I believe it should be handled at the local level."

Feelings about the state's direction vary on demographic lines. The youngest and oldest groups were more likely to say the state's on the right track, and those in rural areas tend to be more pessimistic about the state's overall direction, according to the survey, which had a margin of error between 1.8% and 2.9%.

When it comes to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Oregonians (56%) believe it's not yet safe to open businesses and fully restart the economy. Just 36% of Oregonians said it's important to fully reopen the economy.

"No, I don't think we're quite there yet," said Deb Runkle, 62, of Bandon.

"Personally, it scares the crap out of me because I'm compromised in the first place. Coming from that standpoint, it upsets me quite a bit when people don't do what they're supposed to do."

Concerns about the pandemic center largely around the economy and community health more than individual health. Eight in 10 said they were "somewhat or very concerned" about the pandemic's impact on the economy, and more than three-quarters had the same level of concern about the health of their communities.

Meanwhile, just 60% said they were concerned about their own health.

Views on the state's economy are divided, too: About half say the economy is good or very good, while the other half calls it poor or very poor.

That's up from previous surveys. Just 30% of residents rated the economy as good or very good in April 2021 and June 2020, pollsters said.

## IN BRIEF

### Elbow Creek Fire cost more than \$25M to suppress

ENTERPRISE — This summer's Elbow Creek Fire cost more than \$25 million to suppress, according to a spokesperson for the Umatilla National Forest on Monday, Oct. 4. "Our records show the cost-to-date is \$25.3 million," said Darcy Weseman, public affairs officer for the forest.

The fire started on the afternoon of July 15 in an area along the Grande Ronde River upriver from Troy. At one point, the fire was burning nearly 23,000 acres in northern Wallowa County. More than 1,000 firefighters were mustered to fight the blaze in steep terrain as it covered the county with smoke for weeks. As of Aug. 2, the fire was 95% contained and extinguished not long after.

At present, Weseman said, the cause of the blaze is still under investigation.

### Bend bans sale, possession and use of fireworks

BEND — Despite a last minute push from opponents, the Bend City Council unanimously approved a ban on the sale, possession and use of all fireworks.

The new ordinance will take effect in November, said city attorney Ian Leitheiser, and violators can be fined up to \$750.

The council adopted the ban Wednesday, Oct. 6, as an attempt to reduce wildfire risk. "It just takes one random firework to start one major event," Mayor Sally Russell said after making a reference to the fireworks that started the Eagle Creek Fire in 2017.

The city council temporarily banned legal fireworks the week leading up to the Fourth of July in response to a historic heat wave and drought conditions.

—EO Media Group

**CORRECTIONS:** The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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