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requesting the agency detail the steps it has taken to make it easier and faster to deliver disaster assistance in the wake of a catastrophic wildfire.

In a letter to FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell, the legislators stated,

“As you know, Oregon, and the rest of the West, experienced an unprecedented and destructive wildfire season in 2020. Over 50,000 fires burned 10 million acres, with fires lasting well into the fall. As we approach another potentially catastrophic wildfire season, many Oregonians continue to struggle to return to the pre-disaster state of normal. The approval of the long-awaited cost-share adjustment for the 2020 wildfire season is critical to our recovery efforts and we thank you for that.”

The delays in receiving approval for insurance payments and other forms of federal assistance has been disappointing to many residents who have had to delay rebuilding due to complex and often unclear requirements from state and federal agencies.

The joint letter came as the Bootleg fire in Southern Oregon has destroyed at least 21 houses and is putting nearly 2,000 more at risk. The blaze, the origins of which remain under investigation, has killed cattle and has caused urgent evacuations. It continues to be the largest uncontrolled blaze in the country.

Two other large fires, the Jack Fire in Southern Oregon and the Grandview Fire in Central Oregon, have also forced evacuations.

The disruption caused by 2020’s devastating fires destroyed 3,000 structures and continues as hundreds of people remain displaced or unemployed as a result of the fires.

Locally, members of Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue have sent support to firefighters working to suppress and contain the Bootleg fire, according to Fire/EMS Chief Michael Schick.

“We sent two firefighters there, Captain Tony Miller and Lt. Blair Campbell, and they have been checking in with us daily. Right now, this is a weather-controlled fire and will likely be burning until nature helps out with some moisture,” Schick reported. “The other fire we are watching closely is the Jack Fire in Douglas County. We have not been asked to send any additional resources to either fire. At this time, we prefer to keep the rest of our resources close to home.”

The response to the Holiday Farm Fire near Blue River, which destroyed 788 structures but also burned more than 175,000 acres of land, has drawn criticism of FEMA’s level of preparedness and engagement.

As a result, state and federal representatives want to avoid a repeat in the delays experienced in providing meaningful assistance to those impacted.

There are currently three major wildfires in Oregon and the expectation that this is only the beginning of a very difficult season for firefighters and their communities, was a major reason for the concerns expressed to Criswell.

The delegation’s letter went on to pose questions to FEMA, including about resources, natural disasters during the COVID-19 pandemic and more.

Recent analysis found that in 2020, 2,215 different fires burned a total of 1,141,613 acres of Oregon land. Out of all states, Oregon is second most impacted by more than 2020 wildfires.

Locally, the Siuslaw Region is considered at “high” fire danger. Look for the chart and read more about fire restrictions at www.svfr.org.



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