

## Summit explores state's wealth gap

By **JULES ROGERS**  
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Black and Latino homeownership rate is lower than average across every age group, and Black and Latino households see less generational wealth, affecting individual net worth. This is true across the nation and in Oregon, according to industry experts.

This was one takeaway from the 2022 Housing Economic Summit, which featured nationally recognized speakers as well as local experts in the areas of housing, regulation and economics and a variety of issues that will impact housing in Oregon in 2022 and beyond.

At the summit, presenter Alexandra Lee, economist with Zillow, said that racial disparities in housing and wealth have persisted for decades. Lee said her research shows the Black and Latino homeownership rate is about 30% lower than white and Asian homeownership rates in Portland, and persists across every age range.

“Because homeownership is lower in minority households, that means less opportunities for families to build wealth through gains in home equity,” Lee said. “The lower homeownership rate and home values among Black and Latinx households to begin with further contributes to cycles that contribute to lower wealth across generations. While the wealth of white households continues to increase significantly after primary productive years, Black and Latinx households see much smaller gain across age.”

Homeownership makes up a larger share of Black household total assets, at an average of 68%, compared to white households, whose homeownership makes up about 58% of all assets, her research found.

“This means Black and Latinx households have a lot to gain, but a lot to lose from continued disparities because a lot of their wealth is tied to their home,” Lee said.

Lee’s research shows the wealth gap between white and Black households is at \$3 trillion.

“Those disparities are in large part because of disparities in the market,” Lee said. “People of color are more likely to be victims of predatory lending, or not have credit history at all. Credit history is the No. 1 reason home loans are denied to Black applicants. Credit could be a main driver in closing that wealth gap.”

Lee said some institutions buck this trend, and small lenders had much lower denial rates than medium and large institutions.

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Lee



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The Biden administration plans to significantly expand efforts to stave off catastrophic wildfires that have torched areas of the U.S. West by more aggressively thinning forests around areas called “hotspots” where nature and neighborhoods collide.

# WILDFIRE FIGHT

## Biden administration plans to significantly increase efforts to stave off catastrophic wildfires that have been torching areas of the U.S. West

By **MATTHEW BROWN**  
The Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — The Biden administration plans to significantly expand efforts to stave off catastrophic wildfires that have torched areas of the U.S. West by more aggressively thinning forests around areas called “hotspots” where nature and neighborhoods collide.

As climate change heats up and dries out the West, administration officials said they have crafted a \$50 billion plan to more than double the use of controlled fires and logging to reduce trees and other vegetation that serves as

tinder in the most at-risk areas.

They said work will begin this year and the plan will focus on regions where out-of-control blazes have wiped out neighborhoods and sometimes entire communities — including California’s Sierra Nevada mountains, the east side of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, and portions of Arizona, Oregon and Washington state. Homes keep getting built in fire-prone areas, even as conditions that stoke blazes get worse.

“You’re going to have forest fires. The question is how catastrophic do those fires have to be,” Agri-

culture Sec. Tom Vilsack told the Associated Press in advance of a planned public announcement of the administration’s wildfire strategy at a Tuesday, Jan. 18, event in Phoenix.

“The time to act is now if we want to ultimately over time change the trajectory of these fires,” Vilsack said.

Specific projects weren’t immediately released, and it’s not clear who would pay for the full scope of work envisioned across almost 80,000 square miles — an area almost as large as Idaho. Much of that area is privately owned or controlled by states or tribes.

Reaching that goal would require an estimated \$20 billion over 10 years for work on national forests and \$30 billion for work on other federal, state, tribal and private lands, said Vilsack spokesperson Kate Waters.

Vilsack acknowledged that the new effort will also require a “paradigm shift” within the U.S. Forest Service, from an agency devoted to stamping out fires into one that uses what some Native Americans call “good fire” on forests and rangeland to prevent even larger blazes.

Forest Service planning documents indicate the work will focus on “hotspots” that make up only 10% of the fire-prone areas across the U.S. but account for 80% of risk to communities because of their population densities and locations.

The recently-passed federal infrastructure bill put a down payment on the initiative — \$3.2 billion over five years that Vilsack said will get work going quickly.

Wildfire expert John Abatzoglou said lessening fire dangers on the amount of land envisioned under

the administration’s plan is a “lofty goal” that represents even more acreage than burned over the past 10 years across the West. But Abatzoglou, a University of California Merced engineering professor, said the focus on wildfire hazards closest to communities makes sense.

“Our scorecard for fire should be about lives saved rather than acres that didn’t burn,” he said.

Dealing with western wildfires is becoming increasingly urgent as they get more destructive and intense. There have been rare winter blazes in recent weeks, including infernos in Montana and Colorado, where a wildfire on Dec. 30 tore through a suburban area and destroyed more than 1,000 buildings, leaving one person dead and a second still missing.

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## ‘It’s happening faster than we thought’: 2021 was Oregon’s fifth-warmest year since 1895

By **ZACH URNESS**  
Salem Statesman Journal

SALEM — Oregon’s string of hot years continued in 2021, which finished as the fifth-warmest in records dating back to 1895.

It was also a dry year — and an exceptionally dry summer — although the impact was far worse on the east side than on the west side, according to NOAA data from weather stations across the state.

Oregon’s statewide average temperature was 49.2 degrees in 2021, which is 2.5 degrees warmer than normal and adds another recent year to the list of hottest years on record.

Of the 12 hottest years ever recorded, eight have been recorded since 2000 and six have come since 2010, as climate change moves Oregon’s weather closer to California than Washington.

“What’s most concerning is that this was a La Nina year, when we’d traditionally expect colder or at least historically normal tempera-



Alex Wittwer/The Observer, File

The La Grande Fire Department offers free water outside its building on Sunday, June 27, 2021. The La Grande area experienced much warmer than normal temperatures during the month of June, according to preliminary data received by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Weather Service Office in Pendleton.

tures,” Oregon state climatologist Larry O’Neill said. “Instead, we got extreme heat in the summer. We did have somewhat cooler weather in the winter, which is why this year didn’t end up as the hottest.”

A late December drenching allowed Oregon to make up a lot of ground in precipitation totals, finishing with a statewide average of 28.47 inches, which is 88% of normal

or the 30th driest year on record in 127 years of data.

The Oregon Coast was actually wetter than normal in some areas and about normal temperature wise. The Willamette Valley ended the year slightly on the dry side — except in Salem — while towns east of the Cascades saw some of their driest years on record.

“That’s our other big picture concern,” O’Neill said. “Both in terms of

observed data and some new studies, there is evidence that the rain shadow is intensifying, which would be bad news for the east side of the Cascades.

“One worrying thing is that changes in climate is happening faster than we thought. It’s not clear if this is just a rough couple of years or becoming a normal cycle. The local-scale impacts of climate change are the hardest ones to resolve.”

## Record-setting heat in the Willamette Valley

Oregon’s valley cities generally mirrored statewide trends when it came to heat. Many valley cities, including Salem, saw their hottest summer on record and hottest temperature ever recorded, with Salem hitting 117 degrees on June 28.

Those extreme highs fueled Portland and Eugene to the second warmest years on record, at 56.5 and 55.1, respectively, while Salem (55.8) had its third hottest year. All three were about 2.5 to 3 degrees hotter than a normal year.

Out on the Coast, Astoria was exactly normal at 51.2 degrees while east of the Cascades, Bend (49.5) and Pendleton (53.9) had their sixth and 12th warmest years on record, respectively.

Medford, in southern Oregon, recorded an average temperature of 57.7, the fourth warmest on record.

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