

# National Guard troops ready to help in wildland fire suppression

Members of the Oregon National Guard trained this week in wildland firefighting.

The training was federally funded this year as a way to help the state prepare for fire season. By having Guard members trained in advance, they can be called up for assistance much faster.

Oregon and other western states have seen devastating wildfires in recent years. The National Guard would be used if other fire agencies become overwhelmed.

Their training was the same as required of all public and private wildland firefighters.

About 180 Guard members attended a certification refresher course last weekend at the Oregon Public Safety Academy in Salem.

And then on Monday, 300 Guard members who had not trained previously began the weeklong academy.

"The training ... will allow these citizen-soldiers and citizen-airmen to be safe and effective in their work in case they are required this year to help support the efforts of wildland firefighters around the state," said Eriks Gabliks, director of the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training, which oversees the academy.

"We salute the men and women from the Guard for their dedicated service to our country, both at home and around the globe."

Because of the size of the group, the agency supplemented training with instructors from Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Military Department Wildland Firefighting Section, United States Forest Service, Illinois Fire Service Institute, and the New Jersey Forest Fire Service.

Oregon National Guard has a track record in recent years of supporting wildfire suppression efforts from the air and on the ground.



**Above:** A Guard member participates in a training exercise (courtesy Department of Public Safety Standards and Training).  
**Left:** Brig. Gen. Donna Prigmore, air component commander, speaks with one of the service members during training (Amy Elker/Joint Force Headquarters Public Affairs).

In 2015, members of the Oregon National Guard assisted with wildfires in John Day and Enterprise.

In 2017, more than 400 Guard members worked the High Cascades Complex fire near Crater Lake, and the Chetco Bar, Blanket Creek, Horse Prairie, and Milli fires.

"This has truly been a successful partnership ... for many years," said Maj. Stephen Bomar, director of Public Affairs for the Oregon Military Department. "This is what we do. We train to be prepared, so when we're

needed we are there."

The Guard has an agreement with the Department of Forestry that spells out how Guard members are used to assist in annual firefighting efforts, if needed.

The agreement is reviewed annually by both agencies and the Governor's Office.

"Previous years have shown the value of this partnership as members of the Guard have been deployed to support wildfire suppression efforts around Oregon when all public and private resources were depleted," Gabliks said.

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