



# FACT SHEET



United States Department of Agriculture  
Web: <http://www.usda.gov>

United States Department of Interior  
Web: <http://www.doi.gov>

## Healthy Forests Initiative Update for Oregon

### Partnerships Address Current Forest Conditions

Oregon has one of the most diverse landscapes in the United States. Its forests range from wet coastal zones, to dry interior sites to alpine regions. The State possesses extensive rangelands as well as lakes, rivers, and volcanoes. Oregon also provides a showcase for how partnerships and community involvement are supporting forest restoration and hazardous fuel reduction projects across the landscape.

Research and experience shows that much of Oregon's vegetation faces an elevated risk from wildland fire. Of the State's more than 50 million acres of non-agricultural vegetated lands across all ownerships, recent estimates indicate some 35 percent (19 million acres) are in the highest category of risk and another 34 percent (18 million acres) are at a significant level of risk compared with historic conditions. Lands managed by federal agencies and Tribes bear the greatest proportion of this increased risk, with 16 million acres in danger of severe wildland fire.

This condition springs chiefly from the presence of unusually dense vegetation on the landscape due largely to decades of fire suppression, limitations on active management, insect infestation and diseases, and to the invasion of highly flammable exotic plant species, particularly cheat grass. On many drier site Ponderosa pine forests, more than 500 trees can be found where only 25 to 35 trees per acre once stood. This unhealthy condition results in smaller, weaker, and disease prone trees and puts communities at risk for abnormally severe fires like last year's Biscuit Fire.

Many people and communities in Oregon, along with federal and Tribal land managers, recognize the need to act quickly and decisively to restore the health of our forests and rangelands. The partnerships and community involvement in the Metolius Basin Forest Management Project and the Heritage Demonstration Project provide examples of how multiple interests can work together to plan hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration projects at a landscape level.

The projects are a successful demonstration of how professionally designed thinning and prescribed fire treatments can be applied across the landscape. Using two key elements of the Healthy Forests Initiative ? stewardship contracting and local collaboration ? communities benefit economically and ultimately the environment is left in a healthier condition.

### 2003 Fire Season

As of August 21, 1,719 wildland fires in Oregon had burned 49,324 acres. The most recent large fire (August 19) is the B&B Complex, which has consumed 4,500 acres on the Deschutes National Forest in central Oregon.

The largest wildland fire of the season thus far has been the Davis Fire that began on June 28<sup>th</sup> on the Deschutes National Forest near La Pine, Oregon. The fire was contained on July 6, 2003 after burning 21,181 acres and costing more than \$6 million.

Currently fire danger is very high to extreme throughout Oregon. Drought conditions are present throughout most of the Pacific Northwest with severe drought in eastern Oregon. August is typically the second driest month of the year, and forecasts do not indicate significant recovery during the next two weeks.

-more-

## **Resources for Fighting and Preventing Catastrophic Wildfires**

Fire preparedness funding for Oregon in 2003 is \$74.1 million compared with \$42.2 million in 2000, an increase of more than 40 percent. The Forest Service has a total of 1,387 firefighting personnel, 132 engines, 9 airtankers, 7 dozers, and 7 helicopters. DOI has a total of 474 firefighting personnel and 61 engines, 5 helicopters, 6 water/foam tenders, 2 dozers, 4 airtankers, and one other aircraft. The Forest Service provided \$119,800 for air and retardant work at the Medford Airtanker Base. Depending upon wildfire circumstances across the country, other national resources supplement the baseline firefighting force maintained by the two Departments.

Federal agencies continue to work with state and local partners to aggressively reduce hazardous fuels. Plans call for treating 162,000 acres in FY 2003, which will bring total treatments in Oregon since 2001 to some 519,000 acres.

In anticipation for the potential outbreak of large fires in the Western United States, Oregon received \$11.7 million from the Forest Service for additional firefighting preparedness and \$1.3 million in severity funding for the two-week period of July 13 through July 26, allowing for additional resources in preparation for the possible outbreak of fire.

For 2004, the Departments have already identified 29 hazardous fuel treatments on 17,800 acres that will use the new categorical exclusion ? as provided for in the National Environmental Policy Act and implemented as part of the Healthy Forests Initiative for hazardous fuels reduction. This new tool uses collaboration with state, local and tribal governments, and interested persons and reduces the documentation required for activities known to have no significant environmental impacts. Additional projects using the categorical exclusion will be identified in the months ahead.

## **Recovery Efforts from the 2002 Biscuit Fire are Ongoing**

The Biscuit Fire, located in southern Oregon and northern California, started from a series of lightning strikes on July 13, 2002. The fire, the largest in the state's modern history, eventually burned 499,965 acres and was contained on September 5, 2003.

More than 20,000 people were impacted by the fire, which consumed four homes and nine additional structures. Suppression costs total \$154 million. At the peak of the fire, 6,775 firefighters protected communities in the Illinois Valley (Cave Junction, Selma, O'Brien); Agness, Grants Pass, Brookings and Gold Beach; and the community of Gasquet, Calif.

A Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation (BAER) team completed work this past fall and winter on more than 8,400 acres. Emergency stabilization treatments costs were approximately \$7.5 million and included mulching (5,450 acres), aerial seeding (2,940), planting tree seedlings (10 acres), hazard tree removal (on 82 miles of road), emergency road treatments (213 miles), and other stabilization work. Road repairs are in progress, and hazardous trails and trees have been marked.

To date, eight categorical exclusion projects have been used to complete rehabilitation on 40 miles of trails and 200 miles of road, planting seedlings on 700 acres, and 5.4 million board feet of hazard trees have been removed on roads, trails, and in campgrounds. The Forest Service is currently working on an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for removing dead trees and hazardous fuels treatment, and reforestation; a complete draft is slated for release in fall, and the final EIS will be completed this winter.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>

August 2003