

1999 FIRE CHRONOLOGY

JANUARY

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 1

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1

Total Acres – 5

Temperatures were generally above average, some by more than five degrees. Eastern Oregon was especially mild with temperatures more than six degrees above normal.

Pendleton Unit of the Northeast District had the first fire of the year on January 2nd burning five acres. Cause of the fire was equipment use.

FEBRUARY

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 1

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 1

Total Acres – 5

February in Oregon was very wet! It was one of the wettest Februaries on record. There was danger of flooding in parts of the state. Temperatures averaged close to normal for the month.

No fires were reported in February.

MARCH

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 1

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 1

Total Acres – 5

Although the calendar said it was spring, it seemed more like late winter in most of Oregon in March. Temperatures throughout the state were below normal. The New Carissa, the rogue ship that was grounded twice off the Oregon coast near Coos Bay, figured in several weather stories. Several people saw a funnel cloud about 11:30 a.m. near the stern of the New Carissa.

Clark Seely began his new role as Assistant State Forester for Administrative Services this month. Seely will oversee the department's finance, human resources, field services, and information resources programs. Seely has been with the department for 25 years. Seely said one of the biggest challenges facing the division is to enhance that customer service effort in the face of increased demands for administrative resources.

No fires were reported in March.

APRIL

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 45

Human Caused – 45

Total Acres – 219.46

The early part of April was cold, more like an average March month. Temperatures warmed up in the second half of the month, but most of Oregon ended with below-average temperatures.

An Oregon State Park ranger was killed on the 27th and another injured after being shot by a man who then fled from Oswald West State Park in the rangers' vehicle. The suspect, who led police on a high-speed chase down Highway 26, was later arrested at a roadblock on Highway 202. The park is located along Highway 101 and is popular with surfers; the park is small with only 28 overnight campsites. The Governor has ordered flags to be lowered to half-mast for the rest of the day and through sunset on the 28th for the ranger who was slain today.

Forest Grove District had 12 fires in April burning a total of 69.87 acres. West Oregon had two fires burning a total of 45 acres.

An investigation into a fire that burned six acres of young trees on April 16th, on BLM land near Junction City, resulted in four juveniles being cited by the Lane County Sheriff's Department on charges of reckless burning and criminal mischief. ODF fire fighters suppressed the wildfire, which started when the youths allegedly attempted to set fire to a cow carcass on a ridge ten miles west of Junction City. The parents can be held liable for fire suppression costs and property damage, which is estimated at \$6,000.

MAY

MONTH:

Lightning – 1

Human Caused – 85

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 86

Total Acres – 654.98

This May will be remembered for the unusually cold temperatures and late skiing season. The coast and high elevations were above normal for precipitation, the valleys were normal and the southeast was below normal. The higher elevations were still receiving snow in late May.

Clackamas-Marion District had their first fire of the year on May 30th burning seven acres. Cause was debris burning. Central Oregon District has a total of 20 fires and 241.32 acres burned, to date.

JUNE

MONTH:

Lightning – 8

Human Caused – 189

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 197

Total Acres – 777.11

Cool spring conditions continued in June. Most of the blame goes to La Nina, which continues in the Pacific. Unlike most cool spring months, this was relatively dry in much of Oregon. Although farmers and growers were none too happy about the late start to the growing season, the generally dry conditions enabled them to work the fields. According to research by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Centers for Environmental Prediction (NCEP), La Nina will be around until next February, which means that the Pacific Northwest may see weather this winter similar to last winter's – very wet.

Salem Coordination Center sent two ODF personnel to Alaska on two separate fires.

Oregon State Police and Oregon Department of Forestry announced the start of the Wildland/Urban Interface Arson Prevention Project, a stepped-up law enforcement presence to curb arson-caused wildfires. The Arson Prevention Project fields retired officers statewide with a dual charge of enforcement and education. As they patrol their communities, the arson officers provide residents with ODF fire prevention information and safety tips. Community patrols are closely coordinated with local law enforcement and fire management officials.

JULY

MONTH:

Lightning – 47

Human Caused – 362

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 409

Total Acres – 3,640.11

July was one more in a strong of relatively cool, cloudy months in 1999. Many locations, especially west of the Cascades were wet and cool on the 4th of July but became considerably warmer and drier on the 5th. The real summer heat waves did not begin until the middle of the month. July ended with some spectacular thunderstorms over the Cascades and to the east.

Dan Shults has been appointed the new ODF Director for Southern Oregon Area. As Area Director, he oversees the administration of all department programs in eight Districts encompassing seven counties. Shults brings 25 years of professional forestry experience to the job, previously serving as District Forester for Eastern Lane and Linn Districts.

Fire season was declared on all state-protected forestland on July 8th. The Oregon Department of Forestry protects nearly 16 million acres of private, state, county and federal forestland in Oregon.

Central Oregon has a total of 86 fires and 2,428.39 acres burned, to date. The Schoolhouse Gulch fire was 2,100 acres (1,780 on state protected lands) caused by debris burning.

Klamath-Lake fought the Thomas Fire, which burned 353 acres of state-protected lands and 1,489 acres of federal lands in the Lakeview area. Cause of the fire was equipment use. The fire occurred on the 6th and control was made on the 14th.

AUGUST

MONTH:

Lightning – 337

Human Caused – 466

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 803

Total Acres – 5,721.54

After a quiet first half of the summer, thunderstorm activity developed over much of Oregon in late July, and continued in August. Lightning, hail, strong winds, and heavy rain were reported at many locations. Some areas received significant thunderstorm-induced precipitations, while others were generally dry.

Lightning fires increased this month. Lakeview Interagency Fire Center responded to 23 lightning fires in a 48-hour period. Klamath Falls Interagency Fire Center responded to 19. Both fire

centers have been supporting fire-suppression activity in Northern California. COD stayed busy this month fighting fires within each of their Units.

Two ODF personnel were sent to Nevada to assist on the Sadler Complex, 297,000-acre BLM fire.

SEPTEMBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 341

Human Caused – 645

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 986

Total Acres – 7,814.23

The month of September was characterized by warm (or even hot) days and cool (or cold) nights. This was one of the driest Septembers on record in Oregon.

ODF Incident Management Team 1 was assigned to the Sebastopol Fire in the Siskiyou National Forest near Cave Junction. The USFS placed the order for the ODF team to man and control the fire. The fire was burning in steep, rugged terrain with poor access. There was a threat to historical areas, mining cabins, cultural sites, and spotted owl habitats within the fire area. Approximate cost was expected to exceed \$1,000,000.00.

Western Lane District responded to the Austa fire, which burned 1,080 acres. Cause was determined to be smoking. The state's contract fire fighting crews were already deployed to other wildland fires in Oregon and California. The Department decided to tap correctional institutions throughout Oregon and Washington – seven in all. Oregon Department of Corrections, the Lane County Sheriff's Office and the Washington Department of Corrections mobilized trained inmate fire fighting and support crews to bolster the suppression effort near Veneta. The total number of inmates on the Austa fire was 243.

OCTOBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 341

Human Caused – 749

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,090

Total Acres – 7,928.29

The first three weeks of October were dry with warm days and cool nights. The last week of the month appeared to usher in the beginnings of winter, as several large Pacific storms brought wind, rain, and clouds, with snow in the higher elevations.

Forest Grove District had a 44-acre fire that burned grass, oak scrub and reprod. The Fox Ridge Fire was an escaped debris burn.

Salem Coordination Center dispatched ODF overhead to California, Utah, Texas and Wyoming to assist in their fire fighting efforts.

Fire season 1999 officially ended statewide at midnight on October 28th.

NOVEMBER

MONTH:

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Lightning - 341
Human Caused – 781

Total Fires – 1,122
Total Acres – 9,502.26

La Nina strengthened in the tropical Pacific during November. It is likely that cold episode conditions will continue for the next several months.

Rhae Creek fire burned a total of 750 acres in COD; 690 of those acres were on state protected lands, caused was determined to be recreationist.

Wildland fire season ended with a splash. Rains throughout the state closed out a season that will be remembered for its length. Early fires were fairly small, but the fire season continued virtually into the first week of November.

DECEMBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 341
Human Caused – 782

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,123
Total Acres – 9,504.26

December started like a typical December: wet, cool, with snow in the mountains, strong winds, and plenty of storms. Then along came a big ridge of high pressure, producing dry, sunny weather with mild days and cold nights, something quite unexpected during this La Nina winter. By the end of the month, things were getting back to normal.

Astoria had the ‘Nicolai Ballast’ fire, a two-acre, equipment use caused fire on the 27th. The fire occurred in second growth timber.

The 1999 fire season turned out to be a very busy one for the South Fork inmate fire fighters. South Fork crews were sent on 31 fires. Training crew members to meet Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group Fire Fighter standards is a very important element of the total fire fighting effort.

Congratulations to the employees of the following Districts whose safety efforts earned them the State Foresters’ Safety Awards for FY99:

- Co-winners for First Place with zero preventable accidents each are Astoria District, Clackamas-Marion District, and Linn District.
- Second Place with one preventable accident goes to Coos District.
- Co-winners for Third Place with two preventable accidents each are Forest Grove, South Fork, West Oregon, East Lane and West Lane.