

2000 FIRE CHRONOLOGY

JANUARY

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 0

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 0

Total Acres – 0

The unexpected dry weather of the last half of December changed suddenly at the end of the month as the first in a series of storms reached Oregon. The wet, stormy weather continued for much of January. In general, the month was milder and wetter than normal.

No fires were reported in January.

FEBRUARY

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 0

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 0

Total Acres – 0

Most of the state was wetter than average with above-normal temperatures.

No fires were reported in February.

MARCH

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 4

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 5

Total Acres – 0.46

Most temperatures in March were slightly below normal, a pattern that persisted statewide. The only weather stations with significantly warmer-than-normal temperatures were a few sites in the extreme eastern Oregon. The majority of Oregon had below-normal precipitation for the month.

APRIL

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 31

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires - 31

Total Acres – 64.52

April was rather wet across southern Oregon and along the eastern border and drier than average elsewhere. The month was very warm throughout Oregon.

MAY

MONTH:

Lightning – 3

Human Caused – 61

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 64

Total Acres – 114.56

May saw a return of cooler, wetter, spring-like weather. Western Oregon had mostly above-normal precipitation totals, as a steady supply of moist, stormy weather from the Pacific brought numerous rainy days. Most of this was depleted by the time the air masses reached eastern Oregon. Mild eastside temperatures prevented thunderstorm activity from firing up, so eastern Oregon remained mostly drier than average for the month.

Fire season began May 5th with out-of-state dispatch requests for overhead and contract crews and it didn't end until November 3rd. A total of 95 ODF support personnel were dispatched to fires in Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina and Washington.

Fire lookouts play an important role in the early detection of wildfires. As they have for decades, men and women climb the towers every summer. Many people enjoy not only the view, but also the wildlife that live in the area. Lightning storms provide an incredible display of Mother Nature. ODF staff about 30 lookouts across Oregon.

JUNE

MONTH:

Lightning – 3

Human Caused – 152

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 155

Total Acres – 222.27

A warm beginning, cool middle, and hot ending – that's how June turned out. Overall, most stations in Oregon were warmer than average, and drier.

Roy Woo has been selected as the new Deputy State Forester in Salem. Woo brings 28 years of experience with the department to his new post. Woo will oversee ODF field operations and field staff.

Oregon sent a special ODF investigation team to New Mexico in June 2000 during their early fire season conflagration. The team was busy for three weeks investigating several fires of suspicious origin. There were well received in New Mexico and their work opened future opportunities for shared training and experiences.

JULY

MONTH:

Lightning – 73

Human Caused – 304

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 377

Total Acres – 630.56

The month began with rather cool, wet weather. The fourth of July was unusually cool. Several days early in the month had significant thunderstorm activity. On the 21st, widespread thunderstorms occurred near the Cascades. In addition to lightning, there were gusty winds, hail, and heavy rains. Thunderstorm activity caused dust storms south of Walla Walla near the Oregon border, hail near Umatilla, and strong winds near Cove; the latter broke tree limbs over five inches in diameter.

All forestland protected by the Oregon Department of Forestry will be in fire season beginning July 1st. The agency is declaring fire season a week earlier than last year. A wet spring combined with winds and increasing temperatures produced drier conditions.

The Salem Coordination Center dispatched thirteen contract fire crews to fires in Oregon and Nevada on the 19th and 20th.

Nez Perce Tribe forge fire protection agreement with ODF. The Nez Perce name for it means ‘precious lands.’ The tribe’s 12,000-acre tract in northeastern Oregon now has fire protection. “We wanted to make sure that we protect some resources, we have a few cabins on the site as well as any improvements we’ve made to the habitat. We wanted to cooperate with Oregon Department of Forestry in an agreement to provide those kinds of services for the area. We recognized early on that in this type of ecosystem fire was a high probability event, with the very dry nature of the canyons and the buildup of fuels from the bunchgrasses,” said Angela Sondenaar of the Nez Perce Tribe.

AUGUST

MONTH:

Lightning – 145

Human Caused – 501

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 646

Total Acres – 12,986.23

August was a warm, dry summer month. Temperatures were generally quit close to normal, but precipitation totals statewide were quite low. More than 1,900 lightning strikes occurred mostly in northeast Oregon along the Idaho border within 24 hours on August 2^{3rd}.

The largest fire of the 2000 season was the Tamarack Creek Fire in August that burned 7,900 acres in CO District. The fire was caused by debris burning and took ten days to gain control of.

Governor John Kitzhaber declared a ‘State of Emergency’ due to the imminent threat of wildfires on August 9th. “This has all the makings of a severe fire season in Oregon, combined with the extreme conditions around the West, it’s vital we be ready with additional firefighters should the need arise,” Kitzhaber said. That’s when part-time soldiers become fulltime firefighters. “One of the main reasons that people sign up to join the National Guard is to serve the state, and opportunities like this are very exciting for us to get out and show our skills and prove what we can do for the citizens of Oregon,” said Maj. Jeff Julum. ODF officials at Camp Rilea near Astoria trained 400 National Guard troops in a five-day course. This is the first time the National Guard have been called up to fight fires since 1996.

The Squaw Creek fire started on the 2nd in the West Oregon District. The 20-acre blaze across from the Benton County Fairgrounds burned in glass fuels, then spread to an adjacent Christmas tree farm. The City of Corvallis and ODF controlled the fire. Cause of the fire was railroad activity.

Pendleton Unit of the Northeast Oregon District fought to control the ‘Mile Post 44’ fire that began on August 15th. The fire was caused by railroad burning a total of 4,098 acres, 484 of

which were ODF State protected lands. Control of the fire occurred on the 21st with the help of Oregon National Guard. The fire was difficult to fight because of the terrain.

August 24th: 67 years ago today, at least two fires had been burning for ten days in the Gales Creek area northwest of Forest Grove. Humidity “skidded to 26% . . . and extremely dry east wind sucked up moisture. . . suddenly the fire blew up. . .” In the next twenty hours, 220,000 acres burned. The first Tillamook fire ended two weeks later it rained. . . after burning 311,000 acres. This is from the Tillamook Burn Country, by E. Lucia.

SEPTEMBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 155

Human Caused – 609

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 764

Total Acres – 13,073.58

September was mostly drier than average (with some notable exceptions in eastern Oregon, where thunderstorms brought significant downpours), with near-normal temperatures.

The Oregon Board of Forestry assessed civil penalties of nearly \$80,000 against a forest landowner and a logger whose harvest activities violated the Oregon Forest Practices Act and damaged a bald eagle nest site. The violation occurred near Klamath Falls, harvesting 15 trees within a 300 foot no-cut zone around an identified eagle nest site, and yarding and loading trees near another eagle nest site during the nesting season. The size of the penalties is larger than usual because of the severity of the resource damage. Also, the board took into consideration that the illegal action resulted from a conscious economic decision and was not a matter of inadvertence or negligence.

OCTOBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 160

Human Caused – 671

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 831

Total Acres – 13,192.21

Cooler and wetter than average was the month of October. In the second week of the month, our ‘fall transition’ occurred, with dry late summer weather being replaced by mild, humid Pacific air typical of our wet season.

Cool, wet weather conditions put an official end to the Oregon Department of Forestry’s fire season on October 20th.

NOVEMBER

MONTH:

Lightning - 160

Human Caused – 678

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 838

Total Acres – 13,202.98

A persistent ridge of high pressure caused November to be much cooler and drier than normal throughout Oregon. ‘Storm watchers’ say it was one of the most boring Novembers ever!

DECEMBER

MONTH:

Lightning – 160

Human Caused – 679

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 839

Total Acres – 13,202.99

The high-pressure ridge, which dominated November weather, persisted for much of December. Nearly every location in Oregon had below-normal precipitation, but unusually clear skies caused temperatures to be generally above average.

The Salem Coordination Center dispatched resources to a total of 103 fires (54 fires out-of-state and 49 fires in state) in 2000.