

# 2001 FIRE CHRONOLOGY

## **JANUARY**

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 6

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 6

Total Acres – 230.26

It's been a very pleasant winter. Towards the middle of January, an active jet stream brought showers and mountain snow to much of Oregon and the west. Most of the month was generally dry and seasonably cool. We are beginning to use the 'D' word (drought).

Southwest Oregon District was surprised to have two fires on January 7<sup>th</sup>. Both fires were caused by debris burning. District Forester Jeff Schwanke said, "The first thing we found is, we had to convince people we did have fires." Dry, warm and windy weather in Jackson County spawned the wildfires that burned 206 acres.

### **ODF Area Information:**

#### **Northwest Oregon Area:**

Area Director is Mike Bordelon in Forest Grove.

Districts in NW Area: Astoria, Clackamas-Marion, Forest Grove, Tillamook, South Fork Inmate Camp.

Protected Lands: 3.3 million acres

#### **Southwest Oregon Area:**

Area Director is Dan Shults in Roseburg.

Districts in SO Area: Coos, Douglas Forest Protective Association, Eastern Lane, Linn, Southwest Oregon, Western Lane, D.L. Phipps Nursery.

Protected Lands: 7 million acres

#### **Eastern Oregon Area:**

Area Director is Cliff Liedtke in Prineville.

Districts in EO Area: Central Oregon, Klamath-Lake, Northeast Oregon, Walker Range.

Protected Lands: 5.5 million acres.

## **FEBRUARY**

MONTH:

Lightning – 0

Human Caused – 13

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 13

Total Acres – 249.77

Dry conditions continued in Oregon and the rest of the Northwest. At this point, we're in the second driest winter in the past 100 years. And there is no relief in sight! Only one winter in the last 100 years has been drier than the current one.

## **MARCH**

### **MONTH:**

Lightning – 2  
Human Caused – 22

### **YEAR-TO-DATE:**

Total Fires - 24  
Total Acres – 338.10

With another drier-than-average month, 2000-01 cemented its place in history, remaining the second driest winter of the last century in most of Oregon.

## **APRIL**

### **MONTH:**

Lightning – 3  
Human Caused – 28

### **YEAR-TO-DATE:**

Total Fires - 31  
Total Acres – 364.27

Finally, a wet, cool month! This might be the case of ‘too little, too late,’ but we’re glad for any relief we can get at this point.

ODF averages about 1,200 wildfires a year in Oregon, 15 to 20 percent of those fires end up in liability claims. It costs millions to fight wildfires, and those who start them pay for some of the cost. Pete Norkeveck, Legal Services Coordinator said, “When we pursue a liability claim, essentially we are representing landowners who are paying fire-patrol assessments, when we recover those monies they are directly re-deposited back into the local fire-fighting funds that those landowners paid for to begin with. When a juvenile causes a fire – and that’s defined by any person under the age of 18 – parents are strictly liable up to \$5000. If the child is willful or reckless, that liability increases to \$7500. Of all the human-caused fires that we have, which is the majority of cases, 90 percent of human-caused fires have some preventable element involved.”

## **MAY**

### **MONTH:**

Lightning – 10  
Human Caused – 121

### **YEAR-TO-DATE:**

Total Fires – 131  
Total Acres – 889.50

May was warm in most of Oregon, and really warm in some places! Monthly temperatures were 2 to 4 degrees above normal, but some locations observed truly remarkable temperatures. Precipitation was spotty, however, most locations had below-normal amounts, but a few were well above normal. Drought conditions continue across Oregon.

Tanker pilots play a pivotal role in wildland fire fighting. They fly through choppy air, thick smoke, and over rough terrain to slow the fire’s advance with liquid retardant. Veteran tanker pilot Del Hunt of Moses Lake describes what it’s like. Much of the battle takes place in the air, and flying low over the forest presents special hazards. There are only about 50 pilots nationwide that fly tankers on fires. An air tanker is any fixed-wing aircraft that is certified by the FAA to transport and deliver fire retardant solutions to the firelines.

## **JUNE**

### **MONTH:**

Lightning – 15

### **YEAR-TO-DATE:**

Total Fires – 224

Human Caused – 209

Total Acres – 1,055.93

June was generally cooler and wetter than normal. Even with the above-normal rains. The state faces significant water problems this summer. The summer fire season is now under way, lakes and rivers continue to drop, and agricultural and hydroelectric water user’s worry about shortages.

ODF Fire Cache Manager, Jim Liesch, makes things happen at fire camp. “We go out to where there is nothing and we can set up camp for up to a thousand people. And we do that within a 24-hour period. We may get a call at early evening and expect to be there, set up and operating, by morning – which means early morning – shift change, five or six o’clock in the morning. We can feed two to three thousand people at fire camp. Our communications is an instant setup. We carry our own radio repeaters that we haul to the mountaintops so we can communicate down into the valleys; we can’t expect communications to always be where we’re at. We do a lot of work towards accountability where we track every item that we send out to the fires. I’m proud of the fact that I can tell you down to the pencil how much I’ve sent to a fire,” said Liesch.

**JULY**

MONTH:

Lightning – 276

Human Caused – 385

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 661

Total Acres – 1,932.72

July was a generally pleasant summer month with near-normal temperatures. There was some thunderstorm activity in eastern Oregon and over the Cascades, though it was not excessive. Fire danger remains high, but thus far this has been close to an average year for fires. Drought conditions continue across Oregon.

Oregon’s large fires grabbed media attention nationwide. The ODF districts logged an impressive performance in keeping the vast majority of fires out of the news. An example is Southwest Oregon District: during an eight-day stretch in July, district personnel responded to 100 fire starts. The pace continued throughout the month for a total of 186 lightning and arson caused fires. Quick action kept most starts at small size, with the largest fire of the period reaching 75 acres. The story was the same in other areas of the state. As the various districts and protections associations quietly went about their business of rapid initial attack under extreme fire conditions.

**AUGUST**

MONTH:

Lightning – 372

Human Caused – 538

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 910

Total Acres – 50,483.88

August was a warm summer month – much warmer than July. Most of Oregon was relatively dry, although some big storms late in the month brought significant precipitation to parts of western Oregon. Drought conditions remain in effect, and we are expected to do so until autumn rains begin.

Klamath-Lake District fought the first large fire of the season, the Indian Springs fire, burned over 1,600 acres. The fire was caused by equipment use, it began on August 3<sup>rd</sup> and control of the fire did not occur until the 14<sup>th</sup>.

The next large fire of the season was the Quartz fire near Ashland. The fire burned over 6,100 acres including to homes. The fire was caused by lightning and began on August 9<sup>th</sup>; control occurred on the 25<sup>th</sup>. News reports from across the nation traveled to Medford to cover the story of the fire. Gov. Kitzhaber toured the incident. There were 2,400 people at fire camp; multi-agency efforts were made as the local national forests and BLM pulled people from their own already depleted ranks to meet our needs.

The third incident and largest of the season was the Monument Fire Complex in Central Oregon District. The fire burned over 32,000 acres, caused by lightning. District Forester Bob Young said, "There were Red Flag warnings out for that Sunday. We'd already had a move-up of resources from around the state into the area and we started using them immediately. Then the second lightning storm came, starting about midnight, and it was completely dry. Neighbors started calling: they said they saw a huge glow north of Dayville. That turned out to be the Timber Basin Fire. We thought we had a good complement of resources to fight it, even with several other fires going. We'd actually set up at the Monument office the beginnings of a Type III team. It was uncanny because, by 3:30 p.m. Monday we thought everything was fine. We were managing and making progress. Then at 4 p.m., seven of the fires all blew up at the same time. By 4:30 p.m. we were calling for a team to manage all those fires." The fire began on August 13<sup>th</sup> and control was not made until the 24<sup>th</sup>.

When lightning swept through the John Day River Basin on August 13<sup>th</sup> and ignited the Monument Complex blazes, it also reached to the Northeast, sparking the Bridge Creek Fire. The fire was also ignited on August 13<sup>th</sup>, burning 9,230 acres.

Thanks to Gov. Kitzhaber's timely state of emergency declaration at the peak of the season, ODF was able to bring into play additional firefighters and helicopters from the Oregon National Guard. A major training effort in 2000 that certified 752 soldiers as firefighters shortened the lead-time in 2001 considerably. Protection's training officer, Ed Daniels, and an interagency cadre gave a one-day refresher course to returning Guard firefighters at several locations in the state. The military crews were then immediately dispatched to fires, where they served in a valuable role mopping up burned areas to prevent re-ignition and spread of fire. While ground-based firefighters were in training, National Guard helicopters arrived at the scene of the action only hours after the governor's announcement. The Chinook and Blackhawks were a welcome sight to ODF incident commanders, as they augmented the air attack vital to slowing expansion of the fast-running fires.

When wildfires blazed across Oregon this month, the state's prison inmates joined the battle. Department of Corrections made 28,000 sack lunches by the end of August. Debra Slater coordinates work programs for the Oregon Department of Corrections. Here is one food service that even delivers to the backwoods. "We just changed the way we do business routinely and we're able to free up resources enough to help the department get those lunches to them. We were putting together lunches to meet the calories and the types of things that ODF was asking for – the Gatorade packets to provide the electrolytes, the 100 percent juice. This give the inmates an

opportunity to give back, to really be involved in something that's happening today, and they also can see the results of their efforts, and that's important," said Slater.

### **SEPTEMBER**

MONTH:

Lightning – 483

Human Caused – 645

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,128

Total Acres – 50,745.17

September was a warm month in most of Oregon and drier than average. Drought conditions continue across the entire region.

### **OCTOBER**

MONTH:

Lightning – 483

Human Caused – 736

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,219

Total Acres – 51,008.70

October started warm and dry. By mid-month the jet stream had become much more active and cooler. Wetter weather was affecting the northern two-thirds of the state; unfortunately, the southern counties, which were hit hardest by last year's drought, received very little precipitation.

The intense 2001 fire season burned over 51,000 acres of ODF protected lands, nearly quadrupling the 10-year average. The on-slaught stretched Protection from Fire Program resources thin, but field and staff personnel responded to the challenge. Excluding the four large project fires, department suppression forces held the average fire size to only eight acres via swift initial attack.

### **NOVEMBER**

MONTH:

Lightning - 484

Human Caused – 752

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,236

Total Acres – 51,085.64

After a slow start, November weather really kicked into high gear. The last ten days of the month were wet, snowy, windy, just what we have come to expect in Oregon in winter. We are still in draught, but we have a great start to recovering from it.

After September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attack, civilian aircraft were grounded for a while. During this time the skies seemed strangely empty; no planes could be heard, no contrails seen. Many people missed seeing the contrails in our skies, perhaps it was one more indication of how much had changed. Aircraft jet engines directly emit water vapor and a variety of other gases and small particles, thereby producing a condensation trail (contrail). These clouds quickly evaporate if the humidity is low. But during times with higher humidity in the upper atmosphere, contrails can persist and grow through further interaction of the cloud with ambient water. Generally temperatures of 40 degrees or lower are necessary for significant contrail formation.

### **DECEMBER**

MONTH:

Lightning – 484

YEAR-TO-DATE:

Total Fires – 1,236

Human Caused – 752

Total Acres – 51,085.64

Wet, mild weather, which began just before Thanksgiving, continued in December. Most of western Oregon and much of central and eastern Oregon reported above-normal precipitation.