



- BACKGROUND -

# Protecting forests from fire

Promoting and practicing sustainable forestry

**An overview**

**Safeguarding many values**

**Rapid, aggressive initial attack**

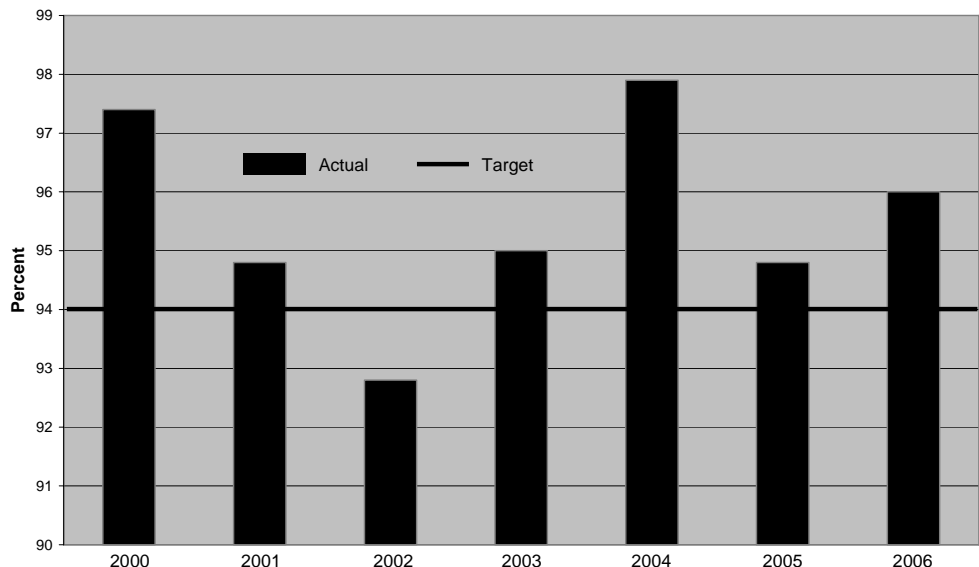
**Fire protection, the department's top priority, benefits communities and the environment, as well as economic assets.**

The Fire Program protects 15.8 million acres of private and public forestland from wildfire. This total includes some 3.5 million acres of **wildland-urban interface**, where homes and other structures are built in or near forests.

In the course of protecting Oregon's valuable timber resource from wildfires, the Fire Program also safeguards other important values, such as clean water, habitat for wildlife and fish, and recreational opportunities.

Attacking a wildfire rapidly usually prevents large losses to the forest resource. This often involves precision use of firefighting aircraft to limit spread until ground forces arrive. This strategy has paid off repeatedly by preventing fast-moving blazes from becoming major incidents.

## Percent of forest fires controlled at 10 acres or less



**The Fire Program seeks to put out 94 percent of all wildfires at 10 acres or smaller. This performance measure has been exceeded six of the past seven fire seasons, including some, such as 2006, with unusually severe fire danger.**

**Many fires are preventable**

**Managing smoke: an important forestry function**

**Partners in forest protection**

**Budgeting for effectiveness**

**Protecting rural communities is a growing challenge**

On average, **about two-thirds of the 1,100-odd fires on state-protected lands each year are caused by people, with the majority of them preventable.** In 2006, 955 of the 1,343 wildfires were human-caused, the highest number in 25 years. In partnership with the Keep Oregon Green Association, the Fire Program is stepping up its efforts to educate forest landowners, other rural residents and the public about the threat of wildfire and actions they can take to lower the risk.

Under the federal Clean Air Act and state implementing laws, the Fire Program is responsible for regulating forestland burning in the state. Controlled burning after timber harvest reduces residual fuel hazards and prepares the site for replanting by releasing nutrients and removing competing vegetation. In spring and fall, meteorologists monitor weather conditions as they coordinate hundreds of burning requests from private and public forest landowners. The department's implementation of the Oregon Smoke Management Plan seeks to enable landowners to manage their forests and reduce fire hazards while maintaining air quality in populated areas.



photo courtesy of the Mail Tribune

**Wildland fire protection in Oregon is a partnership.**

The Fire Program works with private forest landowners, the Oregon State Fire Marshal, local fire districts, and federal and tribal resource agencies to provide a complete and coordinated fire protection system.

The same factors that drive up the cost of doing business in other public and private enterprises – rising labor and equipment rates – also affect the state's Fire Program. To ensure that firefighting resources are budgeted at the most efficient level, fire managers use a method known as "cost-plus-loss," which takes into account both resource damage and fire suppression as

costs to forest landowners and the state. At the same time, managers avoid keeping too large of a standing firefighting force, since that can add costs while in average fire seasons having little effect on losses.

**Population expansion into rural areas has increased the risk of human-caused fires in the forest.** It has also placed more lives and property in the potential path of fires from forestlands. **Today, more than a quarter-million homes in Oregon are at high risk from wildfire.**

In addition to its other protection strategies, the Fire Program is taking two key approaches to the interface problem: implementing the **Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act** (State Senate Bill 360 passed in 1997), and administering **National Fire Plan grants to rural communities**. These measures educate homeowners on how to make their homes survivable and fund projects via federal grants to reduce forest fuel buildup on community perimeters. After pilot implementation of Senate Bill 360 in selected counties, the Fire Program is moving ahead to implement the act more broadly across the state.

## **P**rogram highlights in 2006

## **F**or more information

**More fires, fewer acres** – Last summer brought extraordinarily dry forest conditions and more dry lightning, a major fire cause, than usual. The department fought 300 more fires than the 10-year average, but held the total acres burned to half of that average.

**Best-value contract** – In 2006, the Fire Program spearheaded a new regional agreement for hiring contract fire crews. “Best-value” goes beyond the conventional low-bid contract to also give weight to a crew’s previous performance. Fire crew work quality improved markedly this past season.

**Interagency cooperation** – The Department worked closely and successfully with the U.S. Forest Service, including frequent, well-coordinated sharing of staff, contract aircraft and other resources.

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