

2021 Pacific Northwest Wildfire Summary: Bootleg Fire

Oregon’s Third Largest Fire

On July 6, 2021, the Bootleg Fire was ignited when lightning struck near the small community of Beatty, Oregon in the Fremont-Winema National Forest. Six days later, a separate incident, the Log Fire started nearby. By July 20, the two fires merged to be managed as the Bootleg Fire. By August, it was the third largest wildfire in Oregon’s history, burning over 413,000 acres.



Photo: A smoke column rises miles above the Bootleg Fire in southern Oregon on July 14, 2021. Photo credit: InciWeb.

Moving Fast

The Bootleg Fire moved rapidly through Klamath and Lake Counties, with extreme fire behavior driven by high temperatures, high winds, and exceptionally dry fuels. At one point, the fire grew about 1,000 acres in just one hour. Level 3 evacuations (Go!) were issued on July 13, and it wasn’t until August 9 that all evacuation levels were finally lifted.

The Eyes of the Nation

At the height of incident response, the Bootleg Fire was the nation’s largest wildfire, with over 2,200 assigned resources, from personnel to heavy machinery, aircraft and more. It soon garnered

national media attention. Over 3,000 news articles have been published about the fire and its impacts to date.

39-Day Firefight

By the time the fire was contained on August 15, 408 structures and 342 vehicles had been destroyed, and 20 people were injured. It was the nation’s second largest fire of 2021. In addition to battling the fire, the COVID-19 pandemic handed fire managers another set of challenges—2020 mitigation protocols were reinstated partway through the 2021 fire season.

Big Fire in a Big Fire Year

Context is critical—2021 was a record-breaking fire year. From drought to Preparedness Level (PL) 5, firefighters faced one of the most significant fire years in Oregon and Washington. The Bootleg Fire is a main reason why the Pacific Northwest Region set regional records for the earliest date (July 14) at PL 5 - the highest level of wildfire activity, resource demand, and readiness - as well as the greatest number of PL 5 days in a fire year (65).



Photo: Smoke from the Bootleg Fire is said to have spread as far as the East Coast. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service.