Overview

The Pacific Northwest experienced a relatively moderate wildfire season in 2025. Although drought conditions persisted across much of Oregon and Washington throughout the summer, periods of favorable weather, combined with strong preparedness and rapid response, helped keep fire activity near long-term average levels.

Fire managers focused on aggressive initial attack, limiting the number of fires that grew large and reducing overall impacts to communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Fire Activity and Acres Burned

Across all land ownerships in the Pacific Northwest, 4,466 fires burned nearly 500,000 acres in 2025. On Forest Service–managed lands, 1,404 fires resulted in 184,556 acres burned. Forest Service incidents represented approximately 31% of total fires and 37% of total acres burned across the geographic area. While the region experienced more fire starts compared to 2024, fewer fires exceeded 100 acres, contributing to lower overall burned acreage than the previous year and keeping totals close to the 10-year average.

Significant Fires on Forest Service Lands

Fire Name	Acres	National Forest
Lower Sugarloaf	42,980	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Labor Mountain	42,967	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Emigrant	33,129	Willamette
Bear Gulch	20,233	Olympic
Moon Complex	19,520	Rogue River-Siskiyou
Wildcat	15,592	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Katy Creek	4,680	Colville
Pomas	3,618	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Marks Creek	1,718	Ochoco

Fire Causes

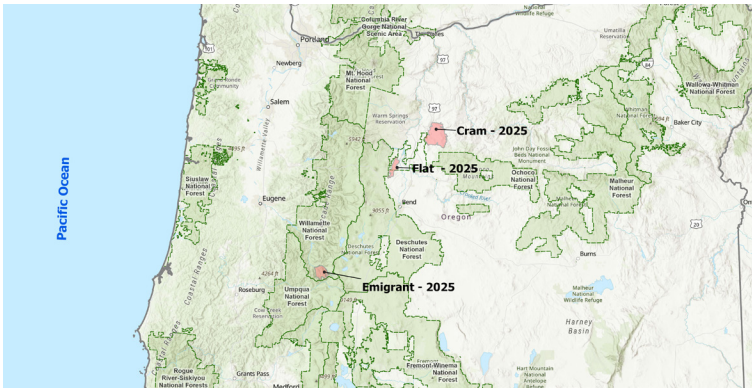
Human-caused fires accounted for 63% of all incidents, while lightning-caused fires made up 37%. Human-caused fires continued to dominate early and mid-season activity, reinforcing the importance of fire prevention, public awareness, and compliance with fire restrictions during periods of elevated fire danger.

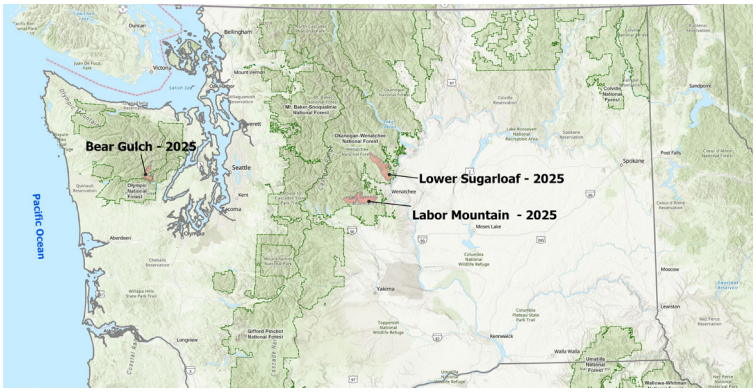
Initial Attack Success

The Forest Service achieved a 98.9% success rate at keeping fires from growing into large

"The 2025 fire year in the Pacific Northwest was active but manageable. We saw more fires than last year, but far fewer of them became large fires and our overall acreage burned stayed close to average. Nearly 99 percent of fires were contained during initial attack thanks to favorable weather windows, strong coordination, and the early use of aircraft when those resources were available. While that strategy increased suppression costs, it helped keep small fires from turning into large damaging incidents."

Shane Jeffries
Region 6 & 10 Director of Fire, Fuels and Aviation





LEFT: Map of Forest Service larger fires (over 20,000 acres) in Oregon in 2025. Oregon had 1,076 total fires on National Forest lands, burning 59,619 acres. 416 were human-caused. RIGHT: Map of Forest Service larger fires (over 20,000 acres) in Washington in 2025. Washington had 325 total fires on National Forest lands, burning 124,785 acres. 156 were human-caused.

fires (defined as 100+ acres in timber and 300+ acres in grasslands). This high success rate was a key factor in limiting the number of large fires and reducing overall acreage burned, despite dry fuels and periodic high fire potential.

Aviation and Suppression Strategy

Fire managers made extensive use of aviation resources early in incidents, including helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft. These resources were available nationally and not in high demand elsewhere, allowing the region to use them strategically during initial attack. While aviation use increased overall suppression costs, early engagement helped prevent fires from growing larger and becoming more complex and costly to manage over time.

Preparedness and Coordination

Throughout the 2025 fire season, the Pacific Northwest maintained a high level of preparedness. Although the region did not reach Planning Level 5, fire managers continuously assessed fire potential and strategically positioned resources to ensure rapid response capability. Coordination across Oregon and Washington, along with interagency and interregional support, played a critical role in keeping fires small and manageable during periods of elevated risk.

Summary

The 2025 fire year underscored the continued importance of rapid detection, aggressive initial attack, and national coordination in managing wildfire risk. With drought, unpredictable weather and high weather variability expected to remain ongoing challenges, early response, prevention efforts, and strategic use of resources will continue to be essential tools for protecting communities and landscapes across the Pacific Northwest.

Notable Fire Activity: Bear Gulch Fire

The Bear Gulch Fire started in July on the Olympic National Forest. This human-caused fire burned in an area with extremely steep and rocky terrain that previously burned in 2006. Steep terrain, standing dead trees, and hot and dry weather made it difficult for firefighters to conduct direct fire suppression tactics.

Fire managers relied on the use of aviation, creating defensible spaces on flatter terrain, and reducing fuels along roads as holding features to help slow the progress of the fire. The fire was contained in early November.

An album of photographs from the region's 2025 wildfire season can be found at https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjCt6sU