



2024 Wildfire Year: Record-breaking Intensity and Resilience

In 2024, Oregon and Washington faced one of the most intense fire seasons on record, a testament to the compounded effects of extreme drought, severe lightning events, and prolonged hot weather across the Pacific Northwest. Firefighters, local communities, and interagency partners responded with unparalleled resilience to protect lives, landscapes, and livelihoods.



Fire retardant slows the spread of the Durkee Fire. A portion of the fire burned on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest. By July 25, Redmond Air Tanker Base had dispensed over a million gallons of fire retardant—reaching this milestone earlier than ever before.
Credit: USDA Forest Service, Lauren Bond

Total Burned Area: Over 2.2 million acres burned across all land ownerships in the Pacific Northwest, including over 700,000 acres on national forest lands. This was a new record, underscoring the severity of the season.

Peak Personnel: At the height of fire activity, the region commanded 47% of the nation’s wildland fire personnel—more than 14,400 firefighters. Support came from all 50 states and international partners, including crews from Australia and New Zealand.

Early Season Challenges: A Rapid Escalation

The season’s intensity began early, with record-breaking dry conditions and a surge in human-caused ignitions.

Human-Caused Fires: By early July, over 100 human-caused fires had been recorded on national forests, setting a challenging pace for suppression efforts.

Unprecedented Dryness: Vegetation moisture levels reached record lows across Oregon and Washington, with 12 daily records broken in one week by mid-July. Some forests experienced over 75 days without wetting rain.

In response, by July 23, all 17 national forests and the region’s grassland enacted campfire restrictions—an unprecedented step aimed at reducing human-caused ignitions.

Mid-Season: Managing High-Risk Conditions

As summer progressed, the region’s preparedness level remained at its highest, marking a critical time for suppression and resource management.

52 Days at Preparedness Level 5: The region spent 52 days at the highest preparedness level, mobilizing resources from across the nation and internationally.

Widespread Lightning Events: Between August 15 and 18, over 8,000 lightning strikes ignited fires across the region, adding to suppression demands and stretching resources.

Significant Fires that Impacted Forest Service-managed Lands		
Fire Name	Acres	National Forest
Battle Mountain Complex	183,026	Umatilla
Rail Ridge	176,661	Ochoco
Falls	151,689	Malheur
Crazy Creek	86,968	Ochoco
Telephone	54,005	Malheur
Pioneer	38,735	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Williams Mine	13,092	Gifford Pinchot
Homestead Complex	12,917	Umpqua
Willamette Complex	36,202	Willamette
Whisky Creek	3,145	Mt. Hood
Acres for all land justifications as of Sept. 30, 2024		

Collaboration and Support: Resources Stretched, Aid Extended

Firefighters faced resource shortages and intense competition for personnel, with additional reinforcements arriving in late summer.

Resource Limitations: Early in the season, over 150 firefighters were sent to Alaska. By July, wildfire activity across the Western U.S. limited the availability of critical resources like helicopters and hotshot crews.

International and National Assistance: In August, over 60 firefighters from New Zealand and Australia joined the fight, supplementing exhausted teams on the ground. The Pacific Northwest hosted 30 of the nation's 44 incident management teams, accounting for nearly 800 assignment days across the region.

Supporting Our Firefighters: Meeting the Physical and Mental Challenges

The toll on firefighting personnel was substantial. Fire managers prioritized mental health and physical recovery, addressing the demands of what is now a year-round commitment.

Extended Fire Seasons: With wildfire seasons now 78 days longer than in the 1970s, the Forest Service emphasized firefighter support through critical incident stress teams, 24/7 counseling services, and holistic safety practices.

Year-Round Training and Preparation: Firefighters continue preparing outside the active season through prescribed burns, training, and equipment readiness.

Confronting the Wildfire Crisis Head-On

Efforts to reduce wildfire severity through prescribed burns and thinning yielded positive outcomes in 2024, allowing firefighters to engage more safely and protect communities.

Risk Reduction Successes: Proactive fire management helped reduce high-intensity fires, notably lowering risks to communities. In high-risk cases, over 650 residents experienced Level 3 evacuations, including entire communities like Stehekin, Washington, during the Pioneer Fire.

Commitment to Future Prevention: The Forest Service remains focused on expanding preventive treatments, ensuring communities are better prepared to live with the risks of fire in the Pacific Northwest.



Yakama Nation hand crew hauls hoses on the Williams Mine Fire, Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Credit: USDA Forest Service

Reflecting on the Season and Looking Ahead

This season underscored the importance of proactive resource allocation, community outreach, and cross-jurisdictional partnerships. The 2024 fire season was a reminder of the resilience needed to confront the wildfire crisis and adapt our strategies to a changing environment. Going forward, investments in community fire education, adaptive technology, and risk reduction will continue to shape the path towards sustainable and resilient land management.

Learn more at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r6/fire-aviation>

<https://www.nifc.gov/fire-information/statistics>