

Wildfire Q & A

Wildfire season is quickly approaching! Are you prepared? Who's protecting you, your property or home, and the land around you? Whether or not you live within Burns or Hines, or have a large ranch in the area, everyone can work on their readiness for and understanding of wildland fire.

How are wildland fires started? Contrary to popular belief, the majority of wildland fires are human-caused. This may not be true for Harney County alone, but on average, nationwide, campfires, burning debris, smoking and arson cause as many as 90 percent of wildfires each year. Lightning *is* the major factor in eastern Oregon, which, of course, can't be controlled. Nonetheless, there are a lot of common-sense things we *can* do to prevent wildland fire and protect our residences and property: keep campfires small and make sure they are cold to the touch before leaving, no parking in or driving across dry vegetation, create defensible space around homes and structures, and make sure your driveway and home are easily reachable for firefighter access or your own regress.

I see a steady column of smoke in the air. How do I report a fire? The best way to report a wildland fire is by calling the Burns Interagency Communication Center (BICC dispatch) at (541) 573-1000. The BICC will ask you a few questions about the smoke and its potential location and then dispatch firefighters from the Burns Interagency Fire Zone (BIFZ) to the scene. The BIFZ is an interagency workforce made up of employees from the BLM, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Oregon Department of Forestry, and firefighting resources such as engines, hand crews, and helicopters/Helitack crewmembers.

There is a wildfire on or near my property. What should I do? Contact BICC dispatch as soon as possible. The BICC will coordinate with and advise you regarding your safety, determine how your property might best be protected, and ask you for information that will assist in firefighting efforts. Remember – federal agencies are responsible managing wildfires on public land. You are responsible for your private property. If a wildfire is *on* your property, there is a likelihood a Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) may be available to help you out. The RFPAs are private, non-profit organizations established to help prevent and suppress fires on “unprotected” lands (those without federal or state jurisdiction). They represent a collaborative effort among local private landowners, the BLM and the State of Oregon Department of Lands. Either way – with fire *on* or *near* your property – federal agencies want to work with you to help ensure your safety and protection of your property.

What are the priorities for fire suppression? In order of importance: life, property, and resources. Firefighter and public safety are the highest priority for all fire management activities – no resource or facility is worth the loss of human life. Wildland fire managers use a risk-based decision process to assess values in jeopardy and make wildland fire management decisions.

How do I get fire information? You will be best served by calling the main BLM office at (541) 573-4400 or the BLM Public Affairs office at (541) 573-4519 for local fire information. You can also keep up on the latest fire news in the Pacific Northwest by tuning in to the weekly Wildland Fire Minute: <http://blm.gov/ksmd>

In large fire situations (over 100 acres in timber or over 300 acres on rangelands), updates will also be available online through the Oregon/Washington Facebook page and at Inciweb (<http://inciweb.nwcg.gov/>). Please do not contact BICC dispatch just for fire information. The BICC staff is generally going a mile a minute during an active fire and is focused on supporting firefighters and their needs on the ground.

And remember... despite the instant-information age we live in, obtaining details from the fire line during periods of intense, active fire behavior and extreme fire growth is not always immediate. Rest assured that information will be shared as soon as it is available.

