

SUMMER/FALL
2022

CURRY *Currents*



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Fire Prevention Awareness

by Roy Miller

USDA Forest Service, Gold Beach Ranger District

As a species, we rely on the 'services' provided by forested watersheds for survival- food, water, and shelter. We are learning how to adapt our quickly growing needs as humans with the long-term needs of the natural resources that keep us alive and well. Large, intense wildfires affect downstream water quality in a multitude of ways. They alter forest vegetation structure and soil conditions, streamflow, erosion, nutrient export, water temperature, water chemistry, and many other ecosystem processes large and small.

Fire's role on the land is essential and indispensable. It removes dense accumulations of fuel, creates openings and snags for wildlife habitat, provides nitrogen to the soil, and is even necessary for seed dispersal or germination for various species. Without continuous landscape-scale burning like what was present before European settlement, combustible undergrowth has replaced open forest floor and meadow habitat.

Over the course of the last several hundred years, the role of fire on the American landscape has been altered dramatically by fire suppression and other land use practices. By now, most people living in the western United States understand that the policy of absolute fire suppression enacted by the US Forest Service in the early 1900's has resulted in overly dense, unhealthy forests prone to severe wildfire. This effect has been primed by a cultural shift in the previous few centuries, one that effectively eliminated indigenous burning and traditional land management practices in favor of European-style large scale agriculture.

Long before human presence was established in the area, it is very likely that frequent lightning storms would pass over the Kalmiopsis as they do now, causing one or more fires that burned over the course of several months. These fires may have even grown together and headed towards the coast on the heels of a significant east wind event. This has been the pattern we have seen with two recent large fires, the Chetco Bar in 2017, and the Klondike in 2018. For those with longer memories, this was also the case with the Biscuit in 2001, and even the Silver before that in 1987.



2018 Taylor Creek Fire, Grants Pass
Photo credit: Scott Stoddard/The Daily Courier via AP
OregonLive.com

The compounding effects of climate change and explosive population growth in the Wildland-Urban Interface have brought our relationship issues with wildfire to the forefront. Land and fire managers are tasked with feasibly addressing these concerns without causing more harm than good. There is simply too much fuel on the landscape to be removed by hand and machine thinning, and the fuels are too volatile to remove with prescribed fire without risking significant impact to human life or other values. This does not even begin to consider the constraints to landscape-scale fuels reduction work on public lands inherent to critical land management policy such as NEPA and the Endangered Species Act.

The Chetco Bar jolted all of us awake to the reminder that while we are shrouded by mist in the mornings and can look up at a gray sky some days, there may be an entirely different weather pattern going on just inland in a place like Agness or Marial. Our summer weather patterns often fly right in the face of conventional norms, with ridgetops and higher elevations being warmer and dryer than the valleys below. Add the Chetco winds to the mix, and you have a recipe for a somewhat unsuspecting population living just downstream from potentially devastating fire and post-fire flood effects.

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet or simple solution. We are still learning how to adapt the quickly growing needs of our societies with the long-term needs of the natural resources that keep us alive and well. Addressing forest health concerns realistically and mitigating these conditions for public safety and well-being will always continue to be the mission for fire and land managers.

The good news is that taking action is not exclusive to government agencies or private multinational companies- we can all make an impact by educating ourselves, engaging the challenge and taking action however we can, and inspiring others to do the same. Whether you are a fire management professional, landowner, homeowner, or just a generally concerned citizen, there are many ways that anyone can engage this challenge of responsible wildfire management.

Specific Fire Prevention Tips

Almost 90% of wildfires annually are caused by humans, meaning most starts and much of the potential impact from wildfire can be either be mitigated or prevented altogether.

There are many actions an individual can take that prevent or mitigate the impacts of wildfire. Clearing combustible vegetation around homes, cleaning gutters, keeping firewood piles away from the house, raking leaves- all of these are good first steps to home hardening. Check with your local Fire Department or Forest Protective Association for details and more information on Firewise Program offerings in your area. CalFire also has a great website with many how-to guides available at: <https://www.readyforwildfire.org/>. Please be careful with debris burning this spring and summer. Call your local fire management agency and ensure there is not a current burn ban in place. Attend your burn and make sure every last bit of heat is fully extinguished before leaving.

One way that everyone can prevent wildfires is to avoid parking on dry grass or vegetation. Tall grass and vegetation can ignite at temperatures of around 500 degrees Fahrenheit, while the underside of a vehicle after it has been running can often reach 900 degrees. If you need to pull off the road while driving, please be mindful to park on gravel or in areas otherwise free of vegetation.

Many forest users in Curry County are towing trailers to support work or recreation activities. A good habit to get into is checking your trailer's chains to make sure they are not dragging, and are high enough to clear the pavement or any other obstacles like speed bumps and potholes. Trailers with dragging chains have been known to spark multiple fires along a stretch of road or highway, and there are often structures and other values at risk nearby.

Throwing a cigarette or other burning material from a vehicle can readily ignite vegetation when conditions are right. This practice is illegal and punishable by heavy fines (not to mention the additional charge for littering). Do not burn toilet paper. Instead, dig a hole at least 6" deep, 200' from water sources, and bury it (or even better, pack it out).

Fireworks are not permitted on Federal lands, full stop. July 4 th is a wonderful holiday, but please leave the fireworks to the professional

displays. Many firefighters across the country celebrate our nation's independence by putting out a large fire started by a reckless forest visitor. Exploding targets are also a common cause of many wildfires, and are also not permitted on USFS land in the Northwest Region, no matter the time of year.

Finally, Smokey would be very disappointed if I didn't remind everyone to please put their campfires completely out before leaving the area. Never, under any circumstances leave them abandoned or unattended. Drown with water, stir the coals and ash with a shovel or other tool, and feel the air directly above the coals for any remaining heat. Repeat as many times as necessary.

Many folks reading this are likely already well aware of the ecological issues we face. I ask that you as the informed reader share some of these broader concepts and prevention tips above with others who may not be as engaged. That's what Smokey would do.



Seasonal Outlook

La Niña weather patterns in the Northwest over the past two years have been mirroring what is thought to be a larger macroclimate trend towards longer, wetter springs, and longer, dryer summer and autumn. The above normal precipitation levels and cooler temperatures will taper through the year but continue to be the dominant pattern for the region. As a general rule, fire season tends to progress from the Southeast and Southwest in the spring, to California and the Northwest in the summer and autumn.

The potential for significant fires across much of the Pacific Northwest is forecast to be near normal in June; however, elevated risk is forecast in central Oregon. For July, the elevated risk areas will expand to include southwest Oregon, southeast Washington, and southeast Oregon. By August, the elevated risk areas will expand further and also include north-central Washington and west-central Oregon. In September, elevated risk of significant fires will diminish but continue in much of the Cascades as well as most of western Oregon.

(See images to right.)

Other Resources

Monthly Fire Outlook

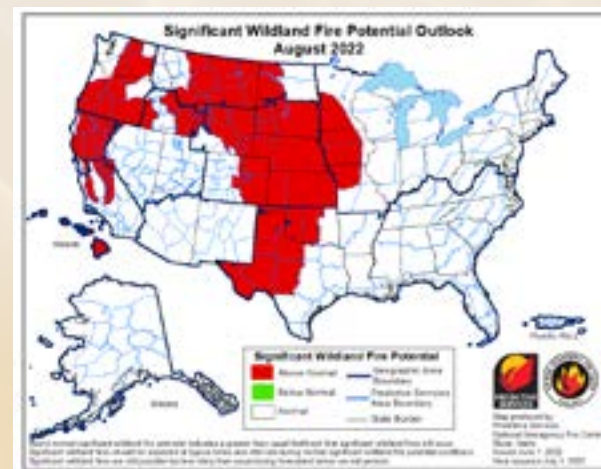
https://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/outlooks/monthly_seasonal_outlook.pdf

Home Hardening and Defensible Space

<https://www.readyforwildfire.org/>

Fire-Resistant Plants for Home Landscapes

<https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/pnw590>



Get Involved

Local Board Meetings. Please contact us for information on how to join.



Curry Soil and Water Conservation District - Last Tuesday of the month at 7:00 pm at the Curry Watersheds Partnership Office.

Contact Liesl Coleman for more information:
liesl.coleman@currywatersheds.org



Lower Rogue Watershed Council - 3rd Tuesday of the month at 5:30 pm at the Curry Watersheds Partnership Office.

Contact Kelly Timchak for more information:
kelly@currywatersheds.org



South Coast Watershed Council - 4th Thursday of even-numbered months at 3:00 pm, rotating location between Port Orford, Gold Beach, and Brookings.

Contact Miranda Gray for more information:
miranda.gray@currywatersheds.org

Upcoming Events & Community Resources



'Cherish the Chetco'

Saturday July 23rd, 9am - 2pm
Alfred Loeb State Park, Brookings

Help us Cherish our Chetco River by cleaning up trash at gravel bars, and along the river. Sign up ahead of time and reserve a kayak to float a stretch of river, with a guide, to pick up trash inaccessible by land, or sign up ahead of time and reserve a snorkel for a guided experience to see the amazing world below the surface of the water. Self Guided litter patrols on gravel bars of your choice are also an option, and/or you may participate in streamside Watershed Education & Activities at Loeb State Park Day Use Area. There will be a celebratory lunch for participants at 1pm. Contact Miranda Gray at 541-373-3127 or visit www.currywatersheds.org/chetco2022 for more information and to register.



Summer in the Riley Creek Garden
every Friday in July and August from 9am-12pm
Riley Creek Elementary School, Gold Beach

The school garden will be open to students, families, and community members. Folks stopping by the garden during these times can participate in planting and harvest, garden-based science lessons, and time to create art. The garden is open to all, though we do ask that children under 7 are accompanied by an adult when visiting. Any questions about summer garden opportunities can be directed to Annika Bratton, annika.bratton@currywatersheds.org.

Funding for Gorse Removal in Coos and Curry Counties

The Coquille USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) field office has new funding available to assist gorse removal on pasture, non-industrial forest lands, and surrounding cranberry bogs near Bandon, Langlois, Port Orford, and Brookings. You may be eligible to receive financial assistance for the following Practices and more:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| ✓ Brush Management | ✓ Woody Residue Treatment |
| ✓ Forage and Biomass Planting | ✓ Livestock Fencing |
| ✓ Tree and Shrub Establishment | ✓ Herbaceous Weed Control |

Coos and Curry NRCS
382 North Central Blvd. Coquille, OR 97423 (541) 824-8098

District Conservationist
katlyn.woodruff@usda.gov
(541) 824-8091

Soil Conservationist
cheyanne.rico@usda.gov
(541) 824-8093

Weed Alert!

Brooms and Gorse invade grasslands, prairies, pasture and rangelands, roadsides, cut-over forest lands and sand dunes. Over 12,000 seeds can be produced by each mature shrub, and seeds can survive in soil for up to 50 years. They both change soil nutrients, and provide highly flammable and dense fuels for wildfires.

STOP! Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*), Portuguese broom (*C. striatus*), French broom (*Genista monspessulana*), Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) – Shrubs grow to 6 feet tall with green stems, small, inconspicuous green leaves, and pea-like flowers. Gorse has distinctive 1-inch long thick spines that are not present on Brooms.

GO! Native replacements – Mock orange (*Philadelphus lewisii*), Tall Oregon grape (*Mahonia Berberis aquifolium*), Golden currant (*Ribes aureum*). These natives are suggested alternatives that may fit the bill for your needs.



Gorse



Rogue Scotch Broom



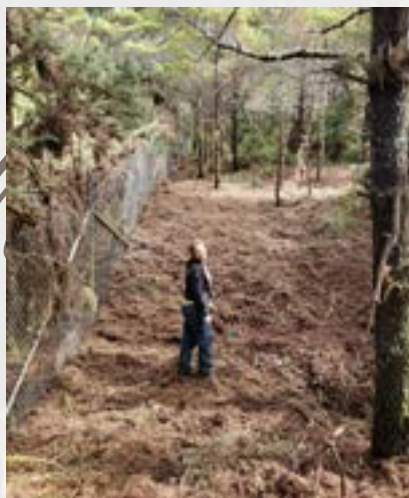
Tall Oregon Grape

Reports from the Field

Over the past few years we have received several significant grants that address wildfire risk in Curry County and southern Coos County by controlling highly flammable fuel load in gorse infestations across the landscape. Efforts begun in 2018-19 have taken aim at the larger core gorse infestations and large outlier populations that pose a threat to our communities. These efforts have been a result of years of coordinating, building partnerships with other land managers, and experience treating outliers. Projects in the New River Area of Critical Environmental Concern, Port Orford Drinking Water Source Area, Elk River and Sixes River watersheds, and the greater Brookings area have been the focus of our wildfire risk reduction efforts. These areas have strategic priority for different reasons, but overall the hazard presented by large contiguous gorse can only be addressed through cross-jurisdictional cooperation including funding, planning, and implementation. Those things have come together for these areas, and we are continuing the task of long-term management to ensure long-term success. Treatment work is a year-round affair depending on the site conditions. We have been busy working to make sure follow-up treatments are done while continuing to assist landowners with getting started on management activities.



Mowing gorse to reduce fire hazard



Contractor showing gorse fuels reduction. Notice the untreated gorse to the left of the fence.



In the lower Rogue watershed, we are promoting the growth of native oak seedlings by creating a more open forest canopy

and recruitment of oaks and pines. Furthermore, by modifying fuel structure to create more variability in tree size and density and retaining fire resistant species, we are promoting stand and landscape fire resilience to ensure these unique habitats thrive.



Modifying the horizontal and vertical fuel structure promotes fire resilience in native oak savannas and woodlands.



In the lower Rogue watershed, we have been working in the Agness area and around Kimball Hill to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic or undesirable fire effects, create opportunities to hold off wildfires near communities and private land, and to maintain and restore oak savannas and woodlands. We are thinning stands to promote resilience and vigor of Oregon white oak, California black oak, Canyon live oak, ponderosa pine, and sugar pine. Creating a more open forest canopy will promote regeneration

A moist, shady riparian forest typically presents much less fire danger on a ranch landscape than the alternative of a swath of noxious weeds like Himalayan blackberry (or worse, gorse). Fire-resistant plants contain more moisture, produce fewer volatile compounds, and accumulate less dry biomass than more flammable species. Fortunately, we have great native fire-resistant options on the Oregon coast and resources to investigate the fire susceptibility of individual species. We can't change the weather when designing riparian projects, but we can consider droughts and slope, and select restoration species with fire in mind.



*Osoberry aka Indian-Plum, *Oemleria cerasiformis*, is a native small tree or shrub listed as fire resistant in many databases and a favorite riparian restoration choice at low elevations. The small "plum" like fruit provides wildlife food sources, and its beautiful white flowers support pollinators.*



Fire-resistant natives including red-osier dogwood, osoberry, red-flowering currant, mock orange, and snowberry protect water quality and provide stream shade and wildlife habitat. At a June 2022 status review, our Middle Creek landowner expressed appreciation for the reduction in fire danger compared to the noxious blackberry underlain by dry, compacted soils replaced by this 2002 project.



A newly constructed fence intended to exclude livestock from sensitive riparian habitats in the Pistol River watershed



Plant establishment activities, such as controlling grasses that compete with plantings for water and nutrients, are critical to the success of riparian planting projects. The plantings above, caged to protect them from beaver and ungulate browse until they become established, were installed along Willow Creek (Floras Creek watershed) in 2019.

Throughout the spring and summer, we will be implementing plant establishment activities for approximately 11,000 native riparian trees and shrubs that have been planted over the last four winters. The plants were planted at three sites along two salmon-bearing streams on working ranches in northern Curry County. Additionally, 3,700 feet of fence was constructed to exclude livestock from sensitive riparian habitat. A livestock drinking water system will be installed on a ranch over the summer to facilitate the construction of riparian fence and subsequent exclusion of livestock from additional riparian habitat.

Youth Education



A temperature logger deployed in the field. The loggers float so we have to anchor them to rocks or fishing weights to secure them in the stream. The white housing around the logger is a tube of waterproof paper that acts as a solar shield to prevent direct sunlight from heating the logger and causing inaccurate

As summer heats up, that also means it's water temperature monitoring season for us. We monitor summer temperatures for a variety of reasons,

one of the main ones being to evaluate if conditions are suitable for juvenile salmon rearing. If conditions get too warm, which is often the case after intense wildfires, they can cause undue stress to juveniles, and in extreme cases even death. This year we will be monitoring water temperatures in more locations than we ever have before. Nearly 70(!) sites will be monitored throughout the New River, Elk, Sixes, Rogue, and Pistol watersheds. This effort includes multiple projects with different goals and objectives, but the process for collecting the data is all the same. After the spring rains cease, we deploy continuous temperature data loggers programmed to record a temperature reading at a set interval (either every hour or every half-hour depending on the project) all summer long. We then check on them once in mid-summer, and collect them before the fall rains begin. This process results in a very fine-scale view of how temperatures change throughout the season at each monitoring location, which gives us an excellent understanding of seasonal conditions. This knowledge is then utilized by our staff to inform much of the work we do such as restoration project locations, designs, and priorities, and to demonstrate the importance of healthy watersheds.

This spring has been a successful season for outdoor classrooms across the county, and students from Gold Beach and Port Orford have excelled in school garden spaces, wetlands learning, creek exploration, and outdoor school. Students are heading into summer break with skills in soil science, companion planting, trail building, and wetland ecology under their belts. High school science students practiced their

data collection in the field during a BioBlitz activity at the Mary D. Hume trail, observing and documenting the plants, wildlife, and birds present along the Rogue River estuary. The Youth Education Program even had visitors from the Rogue Valley when sixth grade Medford students came to Gold Beach as part of their week-long outdoor school trip and joined the Education Program for a dusk hike and lessons on animal adaptations.



Watch our new videos to learn more about our restoration and education programs.

You can view them on our YouTube channel here:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-DImJjA4SRCiuPYLnxnuWA>

or on our website:

<https://www.currywatersheds.org/about-us/>



Education Edition - Curry Watersheds Partnership



Rogue River Estuary - Curry Watersheds Partnership



Curry Watersheds Partnership Staff & Contractors

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Annika Bratton Youth Education Coordinator
Liesl Coleman Curry Soil and Water Conservation District Manager
Barbara Grant NRCS Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Technician
Miranda Gray South Coast Watershed Council Coordinator
Matthew Hubbard Field Technician
Drew Harper Riparian Management Coordinator
Erin Minster Technical Coordinator
Robbie Lascheck Monitoring Coordinator
Statia Ryder Seasonal Plover Monitor
Mary Spini Seasonal Plover Monitor
Matt Swanson Contracted Restoration Project Manager
Kelly Timchak Lower Rogue Watershed Council Coordinator
Dustin Williams Vegetation Management Program Project Implementation Manager

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Curry Watersheds Partnership includes the Curry County Soil and Water Conservation District, the South Coast and Lower Rogue Watershed Councils, and the Curry Watersheds Nonprofit, working together to support our communities to care for our lands and waters, now and into the future. We rely solely on grants and donations and you can make a donation by visiting our website or contacting us at the information listed above.