2013: An epic fire season in Oregon

Hot, dry weather fueled Oregon's fire season from the start. Then, an extraordinary lightning storm set the stage for the most severe season in more than half a century.

The state's largest fire department, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) protects 16 million acres—a $60 billion asset—and strives to put out fires before they grow large, costly and damaging. Although 94 percent of fires, more than 1,000, were extinguished at under 10 acres in 2013, a few grew large and prolonged. Costs set a record, and more than 100,000 state-protected acres burned, the most since 1951, at the close of the Tillamook Burn era. The 2013 fire season will be long remembered—for loss and damage, but also for the value of Oregon's preparations for just such a year.

An early start

With a backdrop of drought, a small snowpack and high temperatures, a predicted tough season started early, with several fires of 200-plus acres in May and June.

But a **severe, unpredicted dry lightning storm in Southwestern Oregon on July 26**, amid hot weather and record-low vegetation moisture, was the defining event. More than 80 fires started on lands protected by ODF and the Douglas Forest Protective Association.

Most were stopped while still small. But five became major incidents, all involving rough terrain and areas of heavy fuels, and some threatening homes.

About 6,000 agency staff and contractors were dispatched to SW Oregon at the peak of operations there.

When more lightning struck Eastern Oregon in following days, even with many staff away in Southwestern Oregon, crews caught hundreds of small fires. However, two fires grew large, initially threatening John Day and The Dalles.

Collaboration: Landowners play key role

Forest landowners, partners for more than a century, were essential, bringing expertise and resources. Federal agencies such as the **Forest Service** and **BLM** were vital partners. Facilitated by the **Governor's Office** and the state **Office of Emergency Management**, the **Fire Marshal** mobilized teams, including crews from **cities and rural districts**, to protect homes. The **National Guard** provided helicopters and soldiers. **Inmate crews** and **other state agencies** made key contributions, as did **local governments, community organizations and contractors.**



A towering fire whirl - an extreme phenomenon driven by severe weather and fuel conditions - on the Douglas Complex.

Standing agreements brought help from **some 35 other states** and **Canada**. Oregon law recognizes the need for such a **complete and coordinated system**, integrated in the state, nationally and beyond. The 2013 season highlighted the value of these relationships.

One incident, the Douglas Complex, was the top-priority fire in the U.S. for 11 days.

2013 fire season

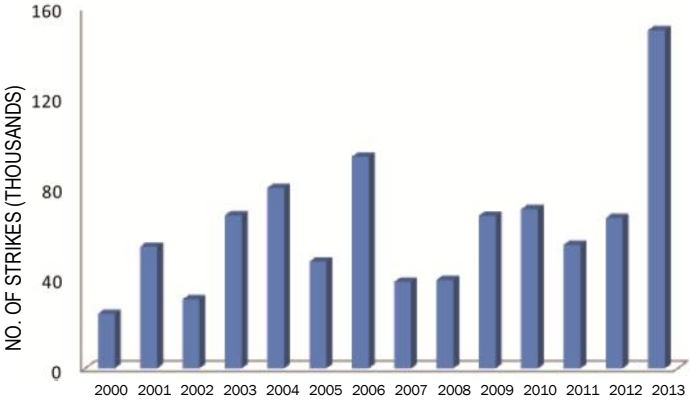
"Severity" investment pays off

Aircraft that can be moved wherever fire danger is most severe were indispensable. The legislature's 2013 Wildfire Protection Act, supported by the Governor's office, paired public investment with new landowner funds to increase this "severity" capacity. This helped keep many fires small, saving millions in costs and damage.



A single-engine air tanker, with an earlier drop on a spot fire visible at right. Aircraft and other mobile resources, bolstered by the 2013 Oregon Wildfire Protection Act, helped keep many fires small.

A main factor in 2013: Lightning



Oregon experienced about 150,000 lightning strikes, well above average.

Aftermath

A tragic human toll. The deaths of three firefighters on all jurisdictions reminded us why fire managers hold safety as the utmost priority in firefighting, a complex activity with many risks.

Timber losses are roughly estimated at triple suppression costs, about $370 million. **Other impacts** include effects on air quality and health, lost commerce and recreation opportunities, infrastructure damage, and damage to wildlife habitat and other natural resources.

ODF's estimated suppression cost
Gross large-fire cost: $122 million
Net cost: $75 million (reflects estimated federal reimbursements and other adjustments).

Oregon has a unique system to prepare for large costs: Landowners and the General Fund will each pay $10 million of net costs, and Oregon's one-of-a-kind wildfire insurance policy $25 million. The remaining $30 million will be addressed through the legislative process.



The Douglas Complex. Taking full stock of 2013 wildfire losses may take months or years.

2013 season by the numbers

	2013		10-year average	
Cause	**Fires**	**Acres**	**Fires**	**Acres**
Lightning	513	100,858	263	9,458
Human	621	2,920	662	3,561
TOTAL	1,134	103,778	925	13,019

All acreage and cost figures subject to adjustment. 10/15/2013

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