



# WILDFIRE REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

August 2024



# INTRODUCTION

In 2023, a Wildfire Roundtable hosted by Governor Brad Little and Lt. Governor Scott Bedke met with industry leaders to discuss specific issues relating to wildfires in Idaho.

Those issues were:

- Liability Reform For Utilities and Insurers
- Wildfire Mitigation Strategies
- Statewide Communication

Recognizing a need to create actionable items, the Lt. Governor, with support from the Governor, announced the creation of four workgroups to examine these issues areas and provide reports to the Governor's Office. Those groups were:

## Wildfire Workgroup #1: Federal Issues and Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs)

- Mike Guerry, Guerry, Inc., Co-Chair
- Mike Edmondson, Idaho Office of Species Conservation (OSC), Co-Chair
- Shawn Keough, Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho, Co-Chair

## Wildfire Workgroup #2: Insurance, Liability, and Utilities

- Max Beach, Idaho Consumer Owned Utilities Association (ICUA), Co-Chair
- Dean Cameron, Idaho Department of Commerce, Co-Chair

## Wildfire Workgroup #3: Information Sharing

- Dustin Miller, Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), Co-Chair
- Chris Way, Kootenai Fire, Co-Chair
- Brad Richy, Idaho Office of Emergency Management (IOEM), Co-Chair

## Wildfire Workgroup #4: Emergency Response

- Brad Richy, Idaho Office of Emergency Management (IOEM), Co-Chair
- Mark Niemeyer, Boise Fire, Co-Chair

The reports were reviewed by a team of state agency directors who selected the following actions and associated directives to be prioritized for 2024 and 2025. The workgroup reports can be viewed in their entirety as attachments to this report.

Recommendations submitted to the Governor but not listed in this report may be accomplished through other efforts and will be considered for future reports.





# RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIVES

## 1.

Work with Congressional Delegation to encourage US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) to conduct programmatic Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) and Environmental Assessments (EAs) on existing transmission Rights of Way to remove permitting and liability issues associated with fuels treatments, vegetation management, and ignition prevention maintenance in those transmission corridors.

**Direction:** OSC will work with stakeholders to draft a letter to federal agencies and Congress requesting more categorical exclusions (CE) for vegetation management treatment.

## 2.

State-level legislation adopting clear wildfire liability standards for electric utilities based upon utilities implementing wildfire mitigation measures contained in their Wildfire Mitigation Plans.

**Direction:** The Idaho Department of Insurance (DOI) and the Idaho Public Utilities Commission will work with stakeholders such as insurers, utilities, and others to mitigate risk in relation to wildfires. IOEM and the Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources (OEMR) will support efforts for any evaluations that are necessary in relation to Wildfire Mitigation Plans and will continue to review best practices and legislative proposals and laws, in other states.

**Direction:** Develop state-level legislation implementing clear wildfire liability standards for electric utilities based upon utilities implementing wildfire mitigation measures that may be contained in their Wildfire Mitigation Plans, including allowing electric utilities to manage vegetation and remove at-risk trees within the designated right-of-way or easement area where the utility does not have that right under existing permits or recorded easements. These efforts will be led by OEMR but include other stakeholders (including the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), local highway districts, and emergency responders) and will identify priority corridors for mitigation.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIVES

## 3.

The State of Idaho should begin to work with stakeholders, specifically local community officials, to develop and adopt a Statewide notification and evacuation plan. The notification tool should be mobile and be capable to receive notifications in areas with cellular coverage and in areas without. Evacuation plan should be developed and housed at each county's emergency management office, and should address supporting individuals with access and functional needs. GIS solutions should be identified to quickly map evacuation areas and to identify values at risk within evacuation areas and to assist with communication of risk and recommended actions.

**Direction:** IOEM will work with relevant state and local agencies (including county sheriffs, city police departments, county emergency management offices, the Idaho Department of Health & Welfare, the Idaho Division of Veterans Services, and health districts) to implement this.

## 4.

Continued collaboration between electric utilities and federal, state, and local agencies to prevent wildfire and prepare for emergency response when wildfires do occur.

IDL work with National Alliance of Forest Owners (NAFO) to improve communication equipment, and ensure they provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for crew members, if they are willing to respond to wildfire starts within their operating areas.

**Direction:** IDL will work with NAFO to accomplish this goal.

The State of Idaho should create an Interoperability Committee with the intention of coordinating wildland fire detection cameras. Focused efforts to build an Idaho-based fire detection camera interoperability program.

**Direction:** IDL, IOEM, OEMR, and ITD will lead this effort to establish the interoperability system. This will include engaging with federal agencies like the Forest Service to utilize lookout stations that could be prime locations to install and monitor additional cameras.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIVES

## 5.

Expand the capability and access to a new interagency Idaho fire information webpage: create [www.firewatch.idaho.gov](http://www.firewatch.idaho.gov) / Idaho Fire Watch, and brand as a one-stop place for fire-related information in Idaho. Idaho Fire Watch could likely interact with fire detection cameras as well.

Direction: IDL, Idaho Department of Fish & Game (IDFG), and the Idaho Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) will collaborate to develop a one-stop shop website.

## 6.

The State of Idaho should consider Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) Code Implementation and Adoption to identify gaps in building code, develop support with community and elected officials through outreach and education activities, and support amending or adopting of code with county and municipality officials.

Direction: IDL should work with IOEM to apply for a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Grant. This WUI Code Implementation and Adoption grant project will also provide community educational engagement efforts for the purpose of establishing support for code development and adoption transparency, increasing public education for code implementation.

## 7.

Develop a library of potential grant sources through non state funding sources to:

Direction: OSC, IDL, and IOEM will support local fire departments/districts that fight wildland fire, Timber Protection Associations (TPAs), RFPAs, etc. to acquire fire suppression assets, communication equipment (digital radios & repeaters) and PPE that fight wildland fire. Have broader definition of eligible entities, beyond fire departments, to allow access by RFPAs, protective associations, etc. to funding.

Direction: OEMR, DOI, and IOEM will support counties, cities, utilities, homeowners, and other stakeholder in efforts to fund wildfire risk mitigation projects that reduce liability and hazards. IDL currently supports counties in these efforts through federal grant funded efforts but could expand these efforts with additional state funding.



# RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTIVES

## 8.

Develop a statewide MOU between firefighting entities at local, state, and federal level to ensure capacity, coordination, and mutual aid response during wildfire events.

**Direction:** IDL, IOEM, and DOI will work with fire chiefs, and other firefighting entities to draft and MOU on roles and responsibilities.

**Direction:** IDL and IOEM work with Idaho Fire Chiefs Association to engage their membership in enhanced Type 3 Incident Management Team (IMT) capabilities. Type 3 IMTs are an extended attack coordination module for managing wildfire events. IDL and IOEM should consider whether the Type 3 IMTs authorized under Title 46 Chapter 1027 (c) would provide the appropriate mechanism for creation of the teams and the ability to engage local government.

## 9.

Continued funding for OEMR to offer grants for wildfire resiliency, mitigation, and backup generation.

**Direction:** OEMR will identify state and federal opportunities to offer these grants for hardening the grid to ensure Idaho's energy assets are protected from threats such as wildfire events.

## 10.

The State of Idaho should improve state-wide access to aviation assets for enhanced initial wildfire response.

**Direction:** IDL, in response to recent changes in federal aviation management, will expand agency aviation program expertise. IDL will analyze if staffing is needed to improve programs/processes to manage contracted fixed and rotor-wing aircraft and expand the State of Idaho wildfire aviation program.

