
Big burn, big money

2024 sets records for acres burned and cost on the Boise Forest

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THE STAR-NEWS

Fires in the West Mountain Complex surrounding Cascade contributed to new records for the most acres burned and highest firefighting costs in a single year on the Boise National Forest.

In total, about 374,000

acres were burned on the Boise National Forest this summer, including state and private land near to the forest where fires burned across ownership boundaries. Some of the largest fires on the forest were within the West Mountain Complex, which included the Lava, Boulder, Dollar, Snag and Goat Fires.

Firefighting costs on the Boise Forest totaled about \$149 million, which will continue to rise as teams assess and repair damage from the fires to roads, bridges and other infrastructure, said Boise National Forest Public Information Officer Angela Hawkins.

More acres burned on

the Boise Forest this summer than the 2007 Cascade Complex, which burned about 342,000 acres.

On the Payette National Forest, 77,629 acres burned outside the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, including 22,397 acres from the Lava Fire, which started in the Boise Forest and moved north into the Payette. Within the

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wilderness, 21,866 acres burned this year.

"The fire season this year was very complex," said Paul Wagner, Chief Fire Warden for the Southern Idaho Timber Protective Association. (SITPA). "It was a very unusual fire weather year and we're all happy to see the snow."

SITPA was the lead agency on 22 fires this season, with the largest growing to 12 acres in size. The agency also assisted on the Wolf Creek, Snag and Goat fires, providing management and fire-fighting support.

Reflecting on the season, Wagner identified one key success: No serious firefighter injuries.

"It is remarkable considering the sheer number of personnel and the challenging terrain," he said.

"Many of the fires in the area started in remote locations with little to no access. That makes it difficult to get boots on the ground and because of that remoteness, it also creates a challenging situation to fight those fires safely," Wagner said.

The large fires were managed by teams of specialists from around the country that were assigned to the post for two-week stints throughout the summer.

Local officials were part

of the response as well, with Valley County Emergency Manager and Donnelly Fire Chief Juan Bonilla meeting almost daily with Valley County Sheriff Kevin Copperi and Cascade Fire Chief Steve Hull.

"The interagency cooperation and coordination went well this year, that is the constant that doesn't change locally," Wagner said. "The relationships between the Boise and Payette forests, the fire departments here in long valley, and SITPA is the best I've encountered in my career."

"This was a long fire season, and we were in constant communication 24/7 for over two and a half months," Copperi said.

Among the team's most important tools was the Code RED evacuation notice system, which was used to alert residents to threats from several fires. Alerts were sent to specific evacuation zones.

Copperi noted that the system should be expanded by designating evacuation zones across the county ahead of the next fire season and making sure every resident already knows what zone they are in, so evacuation orders are clearer.

Hull would have been tapped to lead firefighters in extinguishing any homes that were ignited by a wildfire in the Cascade Rural Fire Protection District.

"Thankfully we did not have to enact our main role,"

Hull said.

Local officials acknowledged that there was also room for improvement ahead of next year's fire season.

"We plan to work with Forest Service administrators to understand how fires are being managed in the future and improve upon the work that was done this year,"

Bonilla told The Star-News.

Firewise prevention work like tree thinning contributed to stemming the destruction of several fires, particularly in the Logan Fire near Edwardsburg and the Limepoint Fire near Cuprum.

Fire officials credited that preemptive work with saving homes in both instances.

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Here is a rundown on each major fire on the Payette and Cascade Ranger District this summer:

Lava Fire (including the Boulder Fire as the fires combined into one footprint): 97,585 acres

Snag Fire: 33,437 acres

Dollar Fire: 4,360 acres

Goat Fire: 35,648 acres

Limepoint Fire: 33,084 acres

Wolf Creek Fire: 1,154 acres

Logan Fire: 15,638 acres

The Payette responded to 88 fires in total this summer, 22 of which were in the wilderness.

There were 11 fires on the Cascade Ranger District in total this summer.

MCCALL SNOW REMOVAL

The City of McCall Public Works and Parks Team is small but mighty and works together to provide you with safe passage on streets, pathways and sidewalks. Here are a few important facts about snow removal and your responsibilities as citizens or property owners in McCall.

- In most cases, crews begin plowing snow when the depth reaches around 3" and is accumulating.
- Snow gates may be used to minimize, but not eliminate, snow berms. The gates are most effective when there is eight inches or less of dry snow and cannot be used when snow is wet and/or heavy.
- The City proactively attempts to mitigate snow berms. Driveways and berms across driveway entrances, are the responsibility of the property owner.
- Businesses and residents have a responsibility to dispose of snow on their own property or arrange for removal. *Blowing, pushing, ramping, shoving or other wise depositing snow on any city street or public right of way is against the law.*
- Streets will be sanded when conditions warrant and snow has stopped.
- Streets should be clear of cars during snow storms and parking on downtown streets is prohibited between 3 a.m. and 7 a.m. during the