

## Wildfire Deployment in Klamath County | *Anthony Brande*\*

When an emergency strikes, the call for help requires a deeply coordinated network of volunteers and emergency managers usually invisible to the public. This complex workflow provides a rare, behind-the-scenes look at modern disaster response. The recent SERV-OR deployment to Klamath County serves as a perfect example of this coordinated effort.

On Saturday, August 8, Klamath County Emergency Management put in a request through the Oregon Department of Emergency Management (OEM) Operations Center (OpsCenter) for SERV-OR to help support two Red Cross shelters. This immediately set the SERV-OR deployment process in motion. SERV-OR Volunteer Manager, Abby Morris, quickly reached out to members of the State Managed Volunteer Pool (SMVP) to check availability, while Oregon Health Authority (OHA) Regional Emergency Coordinators, Emily Wegener and Kattaryna Stiles, worked to relay fast-moving information between local public health officials and the State's Health Security Preparedness and Response (HSPR) team.

By August 12th, two volunteers had reached the shelters, and over the course of the deployment, a total of four volunteers—a medical doctor, a nurse practitioner, and two emergency medical technicians—served on the ground in Chiloquin and Bonanza. They stepped right into a fast-paced environment supporting families displaced by the Wrights Spring Fire, which ultimately impacted 53,388 acres. The needs were immediate. On day one at one of the shelters, seven patients were triaged, missing and misplaced medications were managed, and an emergency room transfer was coordinated.

The effort was felt deeply by everyone involved. Reflecting on the experience, one SERV-OR volunteer and Emergency Medical Technician (EMT-B) deployed for this event stated, “Volunteering at a shelter is a meaningful way to give my time, use my skills, and support people during stressful times. During a wildfire, being able to help with shelter efforts and support those affected made me feel like I was contributing in a real and practical way.”

The environment also required quick problem-solving when one of the shelters lost power for a few hours, forcing the volunteers to adapt to the challenging circumstances. Deployed SERV-OR volunteer and EMT-B, Robyn Greenlund, suggests volunteers, “Remember to bring portable power as the shelter may lose power and the Red Cross doesn't supply them.” Seeing this dedication from the state level, Danielle Brown, OHA HSPR Planning Chief, remarked, “I'm so glad our volunteers are there, sounds like they are filling a needed gap.”

The volunteers were supported by a remote medical supervisor and closely monitored by SERV-OR Volunteer Engagement and Communication AmeriCorps VISTA, Stuart C. Vaughters, who communicated regularly with them receiving updates about shelter conditions and also with Klamath County Public Health. The volunteers were able to provide seamless care until the mission was safely demobilized on Friday, August 14. It proved that true emergency readiness relies on strong human connections tying individual volunteers to a larger state network.

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