



5.2.7 Operational Coordination and Capacity

Multnomah County’s eight operational fire districts along with state and federal partners coordinate operational response for wildfire across the county.

Coordination for messaging and evacuation involves additional partners from law enforcement, emergency management, parks departments, human services and others.

Mutual aid between fire response agencies is used frequently, and support coordination has been considered to be effective and durable by plan stakeholders. Coordination with state and federal wildland firefighting support has also been effective, with continuing efforts for identifying gaps and improvements.

Objectives of this section are to identify where improved countywide coordination can benefit wildfire response among local, state, and federal partners, and how opportunities for improving wildland firefighting capacity can be shared and scaled across districts.



Figure 48 - Scappoose Rural Fire Protection District performing wildland firefighting training in 2023.

Communications Interoperability

Ensuring fire response communications systems can work together across jurisdictions is a need requiring continuous attention. As new communications systems are integrated by

response agencies, reassessment is required for their translatability with mutual aid partners and the resolution of any barriers caused by encryption.

Fire Detection

Early detection of new fires can make the difference between a controlled event and a disaster. A key development in local detection has been the growing use of panoramic high-definition cameras that can detect smoke from miles away and throughout the year. Portland General Electric is piloting the use of these cameras in Multnomah County, and can coordinate with local agencies to share detection information and plan for additional camera sites.

Fire spotting by parks staff and users is also essential, and operating procedures and ongoing education can be tools for assuring that reports of new fires are reported to response personnel as soon as possible.

Alerting and Evacuation

Available alerting systems are effective at reaching large numbers of people through both opt-in and automatic systems. However, there are limitations for reaching everyone at risk.

Parts of the county with steep terrain have areas without cellular service, which is particularly problematic for unhoused communities and recreational users that do not have access to other phone or computer communication methods. Some rural residents may be less likely to receive alerts on cell phones or through social media.

People in parks may not be able to identify their location within the park, preventing them from navigating evacuation paths, reporting injuries and special evacuation needs, or reporting locations of spotted fires. When preventative or unplanned power shutoffs occur, cell towers may run out of backup power and prevent people from getting phone alerts in those areas during the highest risk conditions.

Analog alerting systems such as sirens or warnings broadcast from arriving fire trucks may be needed, especially when extreme fire risk requires immediate evacuation before law enforcement resources can be deployed to perform house-to-house notifications.

More localized evacuation planning and mapping is a need, and could assist in identifying neighborhood scale gaps, including capacity for evacuating residents with mobility limitations and those with livestock. Pre-identifying evacuation zones through interagency coordination may streamline decision-making. Alerting should also be coordinated across jurisdictions, including with neighboring counties, so overlapping alerts do not create confusion or messaging fatigue.

Wildland Fire Training

County fire districts are structural fire districts and respond most frequently to medical emergencies and structural fires. Maintaining wildland firefighting capability is needed, through training and specialized equipment. Building capacity of personnel can be achieved through integrated training programs, sharing of staff resources to support wildland responses in other locations, and pursuing new funding for seasonal wildland crews.

Structurally Unprotected Areas

Areas that are vulnerable to wildfire but have no publicly funded structural fire protection have been a concern in Oregon for some time. Risks to homes in these areas are heightened because state firefighting resources have a scope limited to forest protection, not structural protection and home or building fires could be a source of a wildfire. In the largest remaining structurally unprotected area in Multnomah County, over 90,000 acres in the eastern Columbia River Gorge, it is expected that it would take over twenty minutes for state resources to arrive to a new fire. Other smaller locations also exist in other parts of the county, and should be assessed for future fire protection planning.

Access

Firefighter access to new wildfire ignitions can make the difference between quick control of a new fire or a large event. Some ways in which access can be limited are by:

- Overgrown or otherwise impassable fire roads
- Bridges, rural roads and driveways too small or narrow for engines
- Locked gates in areas owned by large public or private land managers
- Access paths being blocked by encampments

Equity Considerations

- Evacuation planning must be prioritized for those with access and mobility limitations, including those with disabilities, those living in multi-generational households, unhoused communities, those living in group homes or care facilities, those with a lack of personal transportation, and those needing support to evacuate pets and livestock.
- Rural residents in structurally unprotected areas may face higher risk of loss from wildfire.

Mitigation Strategies	Lead Agency/Jurisdiction
Seek a funding partner to support wildland fire training for Gresham Fire personnel, recognizing that city and county locations outside of ODF service boundaries may have more limited subsidized training options.	Gresham Fire
Increase Gresham Fire staffing to meet suppression and training goals.	Gresham Fire
Coordinate on any logging road or trail decommissioning to ensure emergency access or secondary egress is not reduced for one-in, one-out access neighborhoods.	Gresham Fire
Initiate an awareness campaign on the safety benefits of existing private properties upgrading their addressing signage to meet new development standards	Gresham Fire
Have information available through dispatch to first responders to assist unhoused residents, including assuring these residents receive emergency response information. Develop interagency partnerships to	Gresham Fire

Mitigation Strategies	Lead Agency/Jurisdiction
develop a communication plan and identify other coordinated risk reduction efforts.	
Use controlled burns in Portland Parks and Recreation properties and Metro locations serviced by Portland Fire as a training tool for potential wildland response.	Portland Fire & Rescue Ops/Special Ops
Conduct a wildland firefighter training assessment of Portland Fire & Rescue and make recommendations for enhancing wildfire training standards.	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Develop operational procedures for the potential loss of cell towers in wildfire emergencies in Skyline Ridge area, specified Tualatin Mountains locations, Rocky Butte, and Powell Butte	Portland Fire & Rescue
Inventory existing water resources and identify alternative water sources to support potential wildfire fighting efforts. Provide signage for these sources and update computer-aided dispatch.	Portland Fire & Rescue
Implement rural road addressing (including length of driveways) and other signage for emergency response.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Enhance programs supporting citizens located in areas with limited cellphone access to ensure emergency notifications reach everyone located in wildfire hazard zones.	Portland Fire & Rescue Public Education
Coordinate with power companies to identify potential additional placements of fire detection cameras in rural forested areas.	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Identify the standard to which basic wildland firefighters will be trained. Work with partners to train all incident personnel for basic wildland firefighting and the Incident Command System (e.g. firefighters).	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Create a program to hire and train a local hand crew and utilize them for off-season vegetation management of ladder fuel mitigation, and defensible space projects.	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Identify and address any shortages in wildland training and qualifications in line leadership positions such as Operations Section Chief, Division Group Supervisor (DIVS) and Task Force Leader (TFLD)	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Revisit mutual aid agreements to ensure they are current and applicable.	Portland Fire & Rescue Emergency Ops
Review and update the Forested and Wildland Interface Areas Fire Protection Plan	Portland Fire & Rescue Special Ops
Improve emergency radio communication between City first responders and Portland Parks & Recreation City Nature staff.	Portland Fire & Rescue
Develop a Communications Plan for new wildfire ignitions that coordinates communications between Portland Parks & Recreation staff who work in natural areas and first responders.	Portland Parks & Recreation
Train Portland Parks staff who work in natural areas on policies and safety procedures when discovering a fire.	Portland Parks & Recreation
Install Pano AI Camera at Powell Butte in SE Portland for early fire detection, seeking potential funding support from Pano or other partners.	Portland Water Bureau
Create wildfire evacuation route signage within the Bull Run Watershed Closure Area.	Portland Water Bureau

Mitigation Strategies	Lead Agency/Jurisdiction
Develop an evacuation plan that identifies specific routes to move people off the island, considering limited access routes and summer visitor's unfamiliarity with local roads.	Sauvie Island Fire
Assess alerting procedures, especially for periods with high-volumes of visitors during periods of high wildfire risk.	Sauvie Island Fire
Build out Holbrook Fire Station to be able to be staffed with sleepers.	Scappoose Fire
Identify training opportunities for Incident Command System positions that coordinate resources – liaison, public information, command and general staff, aviation support.	Scappoose Fire
Enhance coordination with local and regional partners to plan for and resource share unmanned aviation planning and equipment.	Scappoose Fire
Shore up mutual aid agreements and communication with neighboring districts to clarify response planning in areas where Scappoose Fire would be the first on-scene for a wildfire.	Scappoose Fire
Improve access to wildland areas by partnering with local park organizations to deploy fire locks at park gates.	Scappoose Fire
Assess where district boundaries or response communication protocols can be re-evaluated to lower response times by area districts.	Scappoose Fire
Convene forums for residents in the structurally unprotected areas in eastern and western Multnomah County to explore alternatives for establishing structural fire district protection.	Multnomah County Emergency Management
Create an Alert and Warning Annex to the Multnomah County Emergency Operations Plan that prioritizes communicating wildfire risk to underserved communities.	Multnomah County Emergency Management
Continue to organize annual exercises to test operational wildfire coordination, alternating scenarios between the east and west sides of the county.	Multnomah County Emergency Management
Support fire districts in the development of fire response best practices for rural addressing.	Multnomah County Land Use
Determine evacuation zones in unincorporated areas that can streamline determination and communication of evacuation levels.	Multnomah County Sheriff's Office