



# ANNUAL REPORT

*Southwest Oregon District*

2025



# DISTRICT FORESTER'S REPORT



The 2025 season met us with exactly what we expected— a heavy fire load with lightning day after day—and our folks rose to meet every bit of it. From June through September, storms rolled across the district with a familiarity we hadn't seen since 2017, yet crews held 281 fires to just over 3,500 acres during the declared season. A wet spring bought us a slow start, but once temperatures climbed in mid-May, the pace quickened. Thanks to early hiring and getting our Forest Officers on a week ahead of schedule, we stepped into the season sharper and better positioned than ever before.

That readiness showed itself early. On June 18, while leadership was hosting the RFPA Summer Board Tour, a new start in the Applegate pulled everyone straight into a fierce fight. Engines were already patrolling, Forest Officers were trained and available, and the difference was immediate. What took days to corral in 2024 was nearly wrapped by the next morning in 2025. That same vigilance helped stop a string of arson fires near Prospect, reinforcing the professionalism and quick action of our folks that carried us through the summer.

By early July, thunderstorms gifted us the Eastside and Grizzly Lightning Complexes—53 reports of fire in the first 15 hours alone. Through it all, nimble resource allocation and steady communication kept us moving, and the arrival of ODF CIMT 3 brought much-needed capacity during the heaviest stretch of the season.

As summer tapered into fall, lightning returned once more, and the Kelsey Peak Fire became September's standout. Its overnight growth in rugged terrain prompted the arrival of ODF CIMT 1, whose work—combined with our early, aggressive response—kept the fire in check while neighboring agencies faced similar challenges. By mid-month, containment climbed to 90%, and local resources stepped back in to close out the incident. Cooler weather and a season-ending rain finally arrived in October, bringing a hard-earned close to a demanding season.

Through every storm, every long night, and every tough call, our people showed what commitment looks like. Their grit and adaptability carried us through a year defined by lightning and uncertainty, and that same spirit will guide us into the seasons ahead.

*Dan Quinones*  
District Forester

# VISION, MISSION & VALUES



## VISION

Complex and resilient forest ecosystems that endure and adapt.

## MISSION

To protect and promote resilient forests that benefit all Oregonians.

## VALUES

**Healthy Ecosystems:** Healthy, functioning ecosystems provide many benefits to people, including timber, food, clean air and water, recreation, habitat, regional biodiversity, carbon storage, and so much more.

**Ecosystems Support:** People's actions are critically important to the continued resilience and adaptive capacity of forest ecosystems, including habitat protection, wildfire management, seedling selection, cultural and natural resources stewardship, restoration activities, and water and soil protection.

**Forestry Infrastructure:** The forest products sector—including its workforce and infrastructure—plays a vital role in supporting healthy ecosystems and resilient forests and communities.

**Climate-Smart Forestry:** Addressing the management needs related to climate change requires a holistic approach that considers adaptation, mitigation and the social dimension of forestry, which includes community and economic aspects.

**Relationships:** Strong, respectful relationships are the backbone of our organization. Those relationships are built and maintained through transparent, honest, effective communication.

**Workforce:** Our workforce is our greatest asset. We provide them with a safe, diverse and inclusive workplace that encourages continuous learning and improvement.

**Safety:** Much of the work we do—including firefighting—is both inherently dangerous and necessary to accomplishing our mission. Therefore, safety of our workforce and the public must be a top priority.

**Public Service:** Through efficient and effective stewardship of natural and public resources, we strive for excellence in our service to the public.

**Sound Decision Making:** We empower our workforce to make decisions in the best interest of Oregonians based on science, best practices and lessons learned.

**Accountability:** We are transparent about our actions and take ownership of the outcomes. We do what we say we're going to do.



# MEET OUR TEAM



## Medford Unit



## Grants Pass Unit



## Personnel

Changes in personnel were limited on the district in 2025, with the majority of movement involving familiar faces:

### Grants Pass:

- Kevin Studley was hired as a permanent Forest Officer in April

### Medford:

- Alex Gehrig joined the district as a Small Forestland Owner Stewardship Forester at the beginning of the year
- Mitch Fuller was hired as a Protection Supervisor in March
- Andrew Grossman was hired as a permanent Forest Officer in May



# FIRE SEASON

# 2025

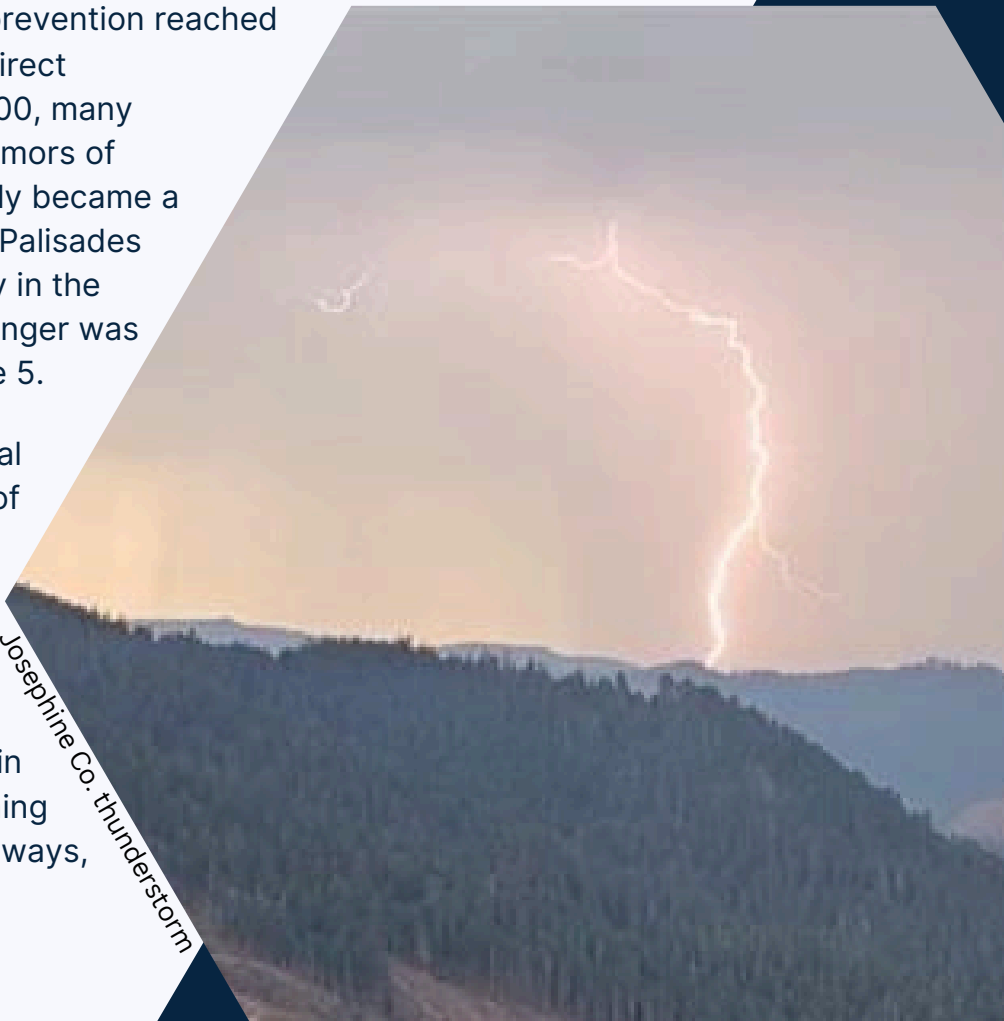
The 2025 season brought exactly what was predicted: an abundance of lightning throughout the summer. With similar snowpack leading up to the 2017 season, frequent thunderstorms were anticipated and then realized from June through September, often on a daily basis. Despite the endless potential, the district was able to stop 281 fires at 3,557 acres over the course of a 135-day fire season.

2025 began with rain and snow totals that the district hadn't seen in recent years; by mid-March, precipitation amounts had reached normal levels for the water year in both Grants Pass and Medford. Due to the wet spring, early fires were kept to a minimum until mid-May, when temperatures began to climb into the 70s and low 80s.

Fire season was announced publicly on May 22, with a start date of June 1. The first week of the declared season brought fire after fire, all caught at under a half-acre. Despite the normalcy of this pattern to our staff, a post on Facebook meant to call attention to fire prevention reached 129,000 people and incurred direct engagement by more than 6,000, many with a theme of distrust and rumors of arson. These sentiments quickly became a theme online, likely tied to the Palisades Fire in southern California early in the year. Due to conditions, fire danger was increased to moderate on June 5.

Despite the challenges on social media, our district was ahead of schedule, particularly in hiring. With some budget work, we were able to bring our Forest Officers on a week early, allowing for the completion of their fireline refresher training in the first week of June. This timing proved beneficial in numerous ways,

Josephine Co. thunderstorm



# FIRE SEASON

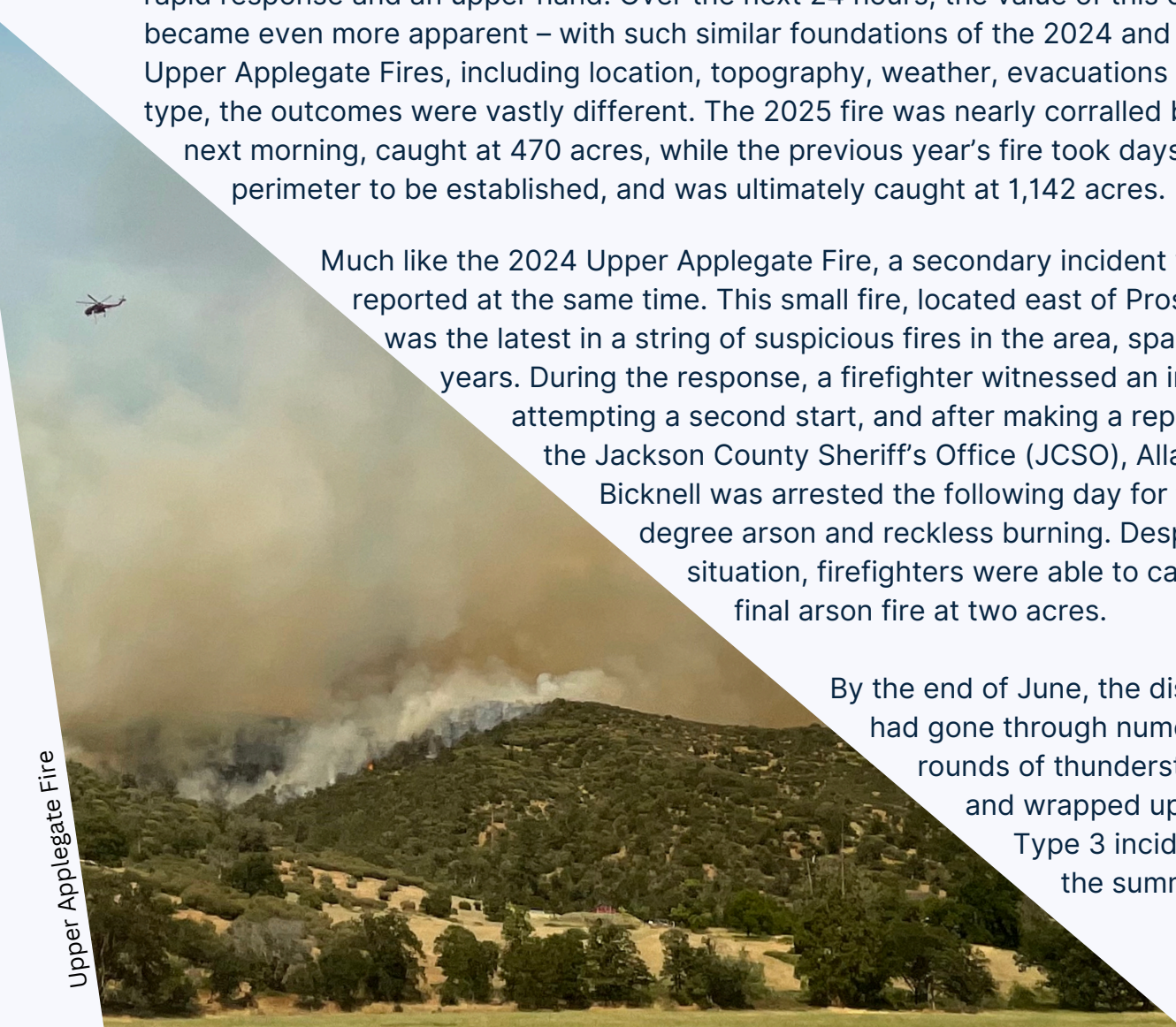
# 2025 cont.

but most notably on June 18, when a fire broke out in the Applegate around noon. At the time, district leadership was hosting the Rogue Forest Protective Association's (RFPA) Summer Board Tour, viewing an area impacted by the 2024 Salt Creek Fire and discussing the previous season. It became apparent very quickly that this new fire was going to take precedence over the rest of the tour, and the group dropped off board members back at the district headquarters and headed out to the field.

On scene, the value of the Forest Officers' early availability was playing out in real time; the firefight was fierce, organized and relentless. Rather than responding from classes as they had the year prior, engines patrolling in their blocks provided for a rapid response and an upper hand. Over the next 24 hours, the value of this change became even more apparent – with such similar foundations of the 2024 and 2025 Upper Applegate Fires, including location, topography, weather, evacuations and fuel type, the outcomes were vastly different. The 2025 fire was nearly corralled by the next morning, caught at 470 acres, while the previous year's fire took days for a perimeter to be established, and was ultimately caught at 1,142 acres.

Much like the 2024 Upper Applegate Fire, a secondary incident was reported at the same time. This small fire, located east of Prospect, was the latest in a string of suspicious fires in the area, spanning years. During the response, a firefighter witnessed an individual attempting a second start, and after making a report to the Jackson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO), Allan Bicknell was arrested the following day for first degree arson and reckless burning. Despite the situation, firefighters were able to catch that final arson fire at two acres.

By the end of June, the district had gone through numerous rounds of thunderstorms and wrapped up its first Type 3 incident of the summer. On





# FIRE SEASON

# 2025 cont.

Table Rock Road Fires

June 23, the day kicked off with three small fire starts along Table Rock Road, minutes north of the Medford office. Firefighters quickly extinguished them at small sizes and determined they were likely vehicle related. That evening, another eight small fires were discovered in the same location. Working once again with the JCSO, the responsible vehicle was located in the area and seized from its owner.

July began with an increase to high fire danger and industrial fire precaution level (IFPL) 2, the welcoming of our district aircraft, and ten small fires started by late June thunderstorms. The largest was caught at 12 acres, and no substantial fires were reported on the Fourth of July.

On July 7, a fire on the Oregon-California border was called in just after 5 p.m. As resources were responding and working to stop the spread, an incoming thunderstorm aided with a deluge of rain. Thunder heard directly overhead signaled the start of what would become a sleepless night for most on the district – the start of what would become the Eastside and Grizzly Lightning Complexes.

Immediately, call after call came into Medford's dispatch center of new fire starts spanning from the California border, up past Ashland, into the Applegate Valley and settling



Pompadour Fire

# FIRE SEASON

# 2025 cont.

into northeastern Jackson County. In total, 53 reports of fire were taken in the first 15 hours. The largest fire initially was the Pompadour Fire, located directly east of Ashland above a subdivision. Overnight, firefighters were able to line this incident at 38 acres, while remaining resources triaged incoming reports. The Heppsie Mountain Fire, located off of Highway 140, was the next biggest concern due to its steep topography and snag-filled terrain.

The fight across all fires continued straight into the following day for most; by morning, resources had responded to 22 fires and extinguished seven of them. Numerous fires remained unconfirmed or unstaffed as resources continued a triaged response. Multiple reconnaissance missions from district aircraft helped to identify priority incidents and find new reports of smoke, and staff in the ODF Southwest Oregon Detection Center continuously scanned the cameras for any sign of fire.

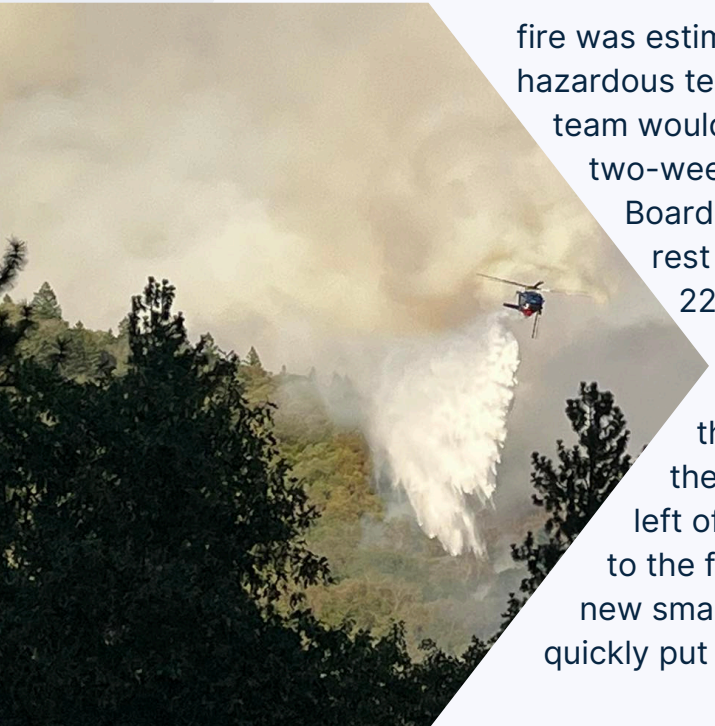
Midday, the Neil Creek Road Fire, located on the shoulder above southbound Interstate 5, began to grow in both size and attention. Windy conditions prompted spot fires along the freeway and retardant drops were requested and made. It quieted for a few hours, but picked up in intensity later that night, pushing to an estimated 250 acres by 9 p.m.

That evening, the decision was made to order ODF Complex Incident Management Team (CIMT) 3 for a next-day in-briefing. The team would ultimately take on the Grizzly Complex, a grouping of 22 fires south of I5 ranging from Ashland into the Applegate Valley; the remaining fires to the north became the Eastside Lightning Complex, which the district continued to staff. For the next week and a half, district firefighters and team resources put out one fire after the next, with a focus on the largest ones: the Neil Creek Road Fire, the Heppsie Mountain Fire, the Deming Gulch Fire, the Jim Me Peak Fire and the Palmer Peak Fire.

As the team was wrapping up their share of the incidents, a new start emerged on the evening of July 17 in the hills just south of Grants Pass. The Board Shanty Fire was rapidly growing despite fast arriving firefighters and crews from the neighboring incidents, as well as multiple airtankers and helicopters. Three hours into the fight, the

# FIRE SEASON

# 2025 cont.



Board Shanty Fire

fire was estimated to be 150 acres, burning in steep, hazardous terrain in full view of town. It became evident the team would be needed for a few more days, meaning a full two-week assignment on the district. CIMT 3 got the Board Shanty Fire to 30% contained and closed out the rest of the Grizzly Complex before departing on July 22.

In all, 43 fires were extinguished as a result of the Eastside and Grizzly Lightning Complexes. As the Grants Pass Unit completed the work that was left of the Board Shanty Fire, thunderstorms returned to the forecast in late July and early August, with a few new small starts in Josephine County that firefighters quickly put to bed.

Red flag warnings for hot temperatures topping 107 degrees, low relative humidity and windy conditions brought about a shift into extreme fire danger on August 12. Mid-month, temperatures dove down into the 80s and sporadic thunderstorms delivered mostly rain, bringing a reprieve across the district, but an increase in calls for illegal debris burns. In late August, daily thunderstorms sparked a few new fires in Jackson County; all were caught at small sizes during initial attack.

These storms lingered into early September, when on the third, numerous small fires were located along the Lower Rogue River Corridor, spanning from Josephine County into Curry toward the coast. On the district, eight fires were confirmed, initially estimated to be between 1/100<sup>th</sup> of an acre to two acres in size. Steep terrain, limited to no access and nightfall worked against firefighters as they tried to locate each fire before the evening hours. By morning, the Kelsey Peak Fire was the clear frontrunner of the group, having grown to an estimated 30 acres overnight; by dusk, it was closer to 80. As resources wrapped up the majority of the other incidents, the Kelsey Peak Fire remained a challenge, and the district spent the next several days holding onto it with minimal growth until September 6. With more accurate mapping and firing



# FIRE SEASON

# 2025 cont.

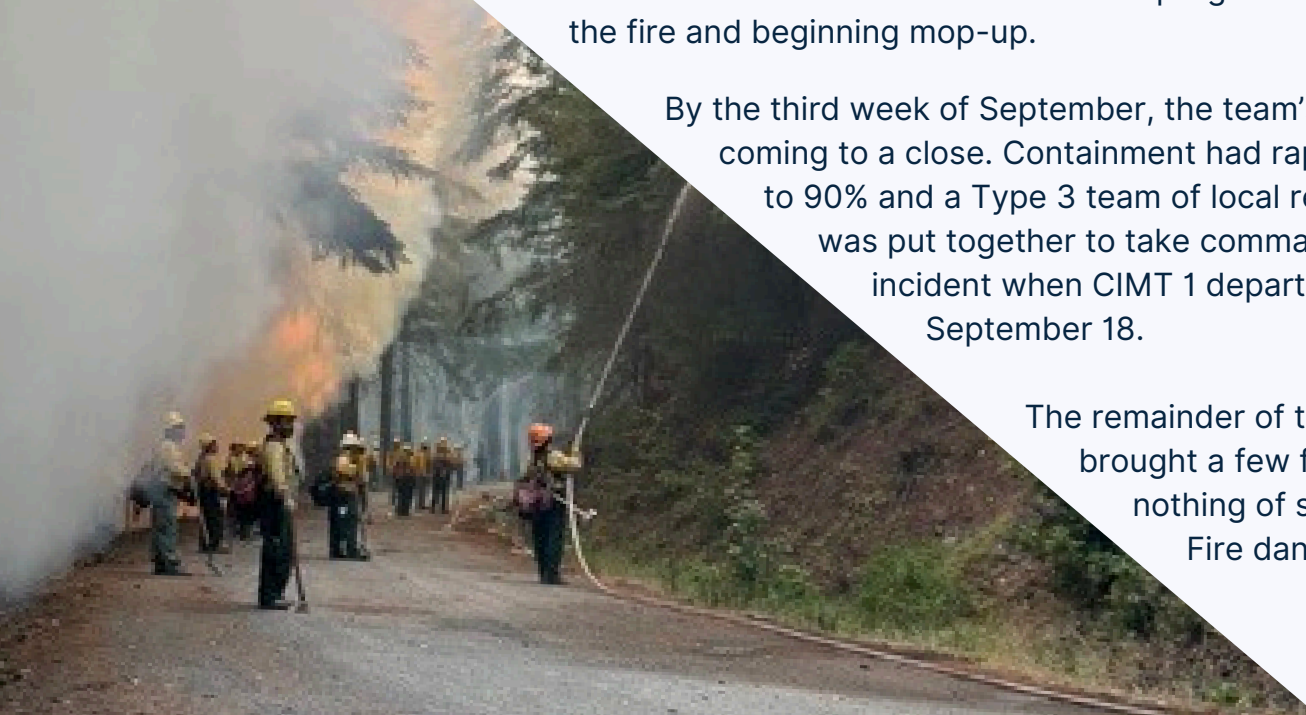
operations conducted to hold the fire at a BLM road, the Kelsey Peak Fire was determined to be just over 500 acres.

As the fight continued, so did thunderstorms across the district. Another two fires in Jackson County were located and extinguished. At this point, ODF wasn't the only agency dealing with numerous fires; our partners on the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest (RSF), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Coos Forest Protective Association (CFPA) were engaged on several fires further downriver from Kelsey Peak, which were also growing in size and complexity. Due to these incidents threatening district ground, as well as the projected growth and difficulty of the Kelsey Peak Fire and the potential for new starts with lingering lightning, the decision was made to order ODF CIMT 1 on September 6. The team in-briefed the following day in Grants Pass and worked out of the local unit office until camp could be established in Glendale. As the team took command of the fire, the district returned to a more normal rhythm, dropping to high fire danger on September 10. In the following days, the team made steady progress on the Kelsey Peak Fire, minimizing growth and offering resources to our neighbors to the west on the Moon Complex, the grouping of fires on RSF land that started from the same storm. Despite similar conditions, terrain and vegetation, a 24-shift on Kelsey Peak from its inception, as well as consistent local resources engaged on the fire helped to put the district at an advantage over the Moon Complex, and methodical but direct tactics boosted progress in lining the fire and beginning mop-up.

By the third week of September, the team's tour was coming to a close. Containment had rapidly risen to 90% and a Type 3 team of local resources was put together to take command of the incident when CIMT 1 departed on September 18.

The remainder of the month brought a few fires, but nothing of significance. Fire danger was

Kelsey Peak Fire



# FIRE SEASON

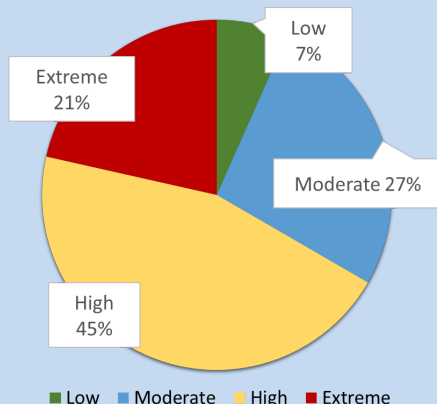
# 2025 cont.

decreased to moderate and IFPL lowered to 1 on September 30, followed by a drop to low on October 11 after a few quiet weeks. Cooler conditions and a season ending rain came a few days later and the 2025 fire season was officially declared over on October 14 at 12:01 am.

**135 DAYS  
IN FIRE  
SEASON**

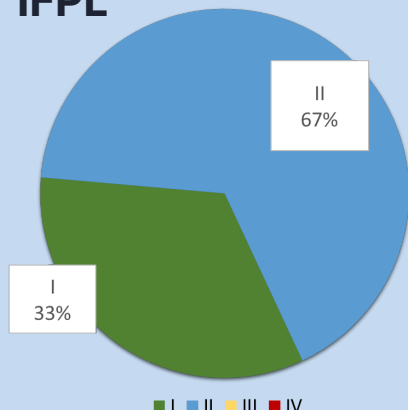
## FIRE SEASON STATS

### FIRE DANGER LEVEL



| Fire Danger Level | Days |
|-------------------|------|
| Low (green)       | 9    |
| Moderate (blue)   | 36   |
| High (yellow)     | 61   |
| Extreme (red)     | 29   |
| TOTAL             | 135  |

### IFPL



| IFPL        | Days |
|-------------|------|
| I (one)     | 45   |
| II (two)    | 90   |
| III (three) | 0    |
| IV (four)   | 0    |
| TOTAL       | 135  |

**281  
FIRES**

**3,557  
ACRES**

**29% ACRES  
OF 10-YEAR  
AVERAGE**

**40% LIGHTNING  
60% HUMAN**

# AIRCRAFT ON THE DISTRICT



The 2025 season pushed our aviation program harder and earlier than any in recent memory, with aircraft engaged daily from mid-June through early October and some of the region's first airtankers helping us get the upper hand on a near-repeat of last year's Upper Applegate Fire. Across the district, we responded to 110 lightning-caused fires—more than double our 10-year average—and aviation coordination became the backbone of our success on the Grizzly and Eastside Complexes, the September 3 lightning starts near Grants Pass, and the many human-caused fires woven throughout those peak periods.

Our aviation team continues to grow in both strength and capability, with new qualifications earned across key positions and exceptional performance from our Exclusive Use (EU) and Severity aircraft: platforms that delivered hundreds of thousands of gallons of water, flew hundreds of missions, and provided seven-day coverage when it mattered most. The Statewide Severity Program's investment in SWO—prepositioned helicopters, helitack detailers, recon flights, and the new ATGS platform—proved invaluable, and the results speak for themselves: increased requests, increased accomplishments, and a district aviation program that continues to rise to every challenge placed in front of it.

## **Upper Applegate 2025**

Aviation assets were engaged on the 2025 Upper Applegate Fire during both the initial and extended attack in late June. The district utilized some of the earliest used air tankers in the region for support on this incident.

## **Lightning Fire Response and Coordination**

The district responded to 110 lightning fires throughout fire season, more than twice the 10-year average. District EU, ODF severity, ODF agency owned, manned and unmanned ODF Call When Needed (CWN), and cooperator aircraft response and coordination were a huge part of the success on the Grizzly Complex, Eastside Complex, and the September 3 thunderstorm in Grants Pass, which produced the Kelsey Peak Fire, along with 11 additional lightning-caused fires.





# AIRCRAFT CONT.



## **Interagency Cooperation**

Many interagency cooperators, mutual aid partners, neighboring ODF/association districts, local and regional IMT helibases, and everyone in the district worked tirelessly throughout the entirety of the season to aggressively engage aviation resources at the point of friction. UAS, helicopters, air attack, helitack, rappellers, and smoke jumpers all worked closely together benefiting the SWO aviation program in some fashion and we routinely reciprocated aviation support with ODF's Statewide Severity Program, IMT's deployed on the district, and our partners at the U.S. Forest Service Rogue River-Siskiyou and Umpqua National Forests, the BLM, CALFIRE, the Coos Forest Protective Association, the Douglas Forest Protective Association, the ODF Klamath Lake District, local helicopter and fixed wing operators, the Oregon State Fire Marshal (OSFM) and the municipal fire departments they support, as well as the Interagency Tanker Base in Medford.

## **Our District's aviation team is strong and growing**

Dispatch Centers & Aircraft Dispatchers, IC's, Ground Contacts and Fire Managers/Supervisors, Air Attacks and Reconnaissance Personnel, Helitack, Helicopter Managers and Helibase Personnel, Contract Administrators and Fire Finance Support, Unmanned Aerial System/Part 107 Pilots, Exclusive Use and Call When Needed Aircraft Operators and Support Personnel.

The list of individuals functioning in the duties above is far too numerous to mention by name, but we owe a great deal of appreciation to them; our professional personnel making great decisions are the heart of the program. We are extremely grateful for their contributions and leadership. With a growing team, we saw several employees reach new benchmarks for qualifications in key aviation positions: Tyler Womack as ATGS-T & HELCO-T, Ayva Burkhardt as HMGB, Theo Lount and Ivan Carrier as HMLR and multiple others achieving HECM.



# AIRCRAFT CONT.

## SWO is a great severity investment

ODF's Statewide Severity Program was another big support to the district in 2025. Significant contributions include prepositioning the Severity Type 2 helicopter and manager in Grants Pass, prepositioning a Type 1 helitanker and

manager in Ashland, and continued severity funding for our helitack detailer program in Medford, with 12 detailers from around the state throughout the season. We utilized the new SOA area ATGS Platform, a Cessna Caravan, as relief ATGS on several extended attack scenarios. We also received multiple night vision goggle (NVG) reconnaissance flights from ODF Salem's detection platform after a couple key lightning events came through.

| Aircraft                                    | Missions/Flight Hours                                                           | Additional Information                                                                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SWO EU Air Attack (08Q)                     | 65 air attack and recon missions, 148.4 flight hours                            | 2 ATGS's allowed for 7-day effective coverage, based at the Medford Airport                                                                                                                          |
| SWO EU Type 3 Helitack Platform (6LB)       | 72 missions, 21 cargo missions, and 268 passenger transports, 81.8 flight hours | Delivered 40,420 gallons of water, and spent 57 of 88 total days assigned to incidents locally. Hosted 14 Severity-funded helitack detailers from around the state. Completed 15 aviation task books |
| SWO EU Type 2 Restricted Helicopter (468)   | 55 missions and 4 cargo missions, 50.9 flight hours                             | Based at Medford ODF. Delivered 187,340 gallons and spent 50 of 88 total days assigned to incidents                                                                                                  |
| SWO UAS (Unmanned CYK)                      | 9 missions 4.4 flight hours and 6 hours training and proficiency flights        | Our district owned Mavic 2 Enterprise, was piloted by Bill Smith for the missions. Tobias Beavers, our district's only other UAS pilot, completed his flight hours for training and proficiency      |
| Severity Type 2 Restricted Helicopter (4MM) | 66.6 flight hours                                                               | Based out of Grants Pass, supported initial and extended attack missions in SWO, SOA, DFPA, and RRSNF                                                                                                |
| Severity Type 1 Helitanker (4WL)            | 23 missions, 57.8 flight hours                                                  | Based in Ashland on a 75-day contract, supported SWO, SOA, CFPA, DFPA, the Klamath Lake District and RRSNF                                                                                           |

# SOUTHWEST OREGON DETECTION CENTER

**58%** **56** fires  
*of fires found or confirmed by center* **found by detection before any other source**  
**125** secondary confirmations

The 2025 fire season marked another year of effective wildfire detection at the ODF Southwest Oregon Detection Center. This season introduced a new detection site at Flounce, expanding our coverage and strengthening early detection capabilities.

The detection center operated with a team of five dedicated staff members, three of whom maintained continuous scanning to identify smoke and fires at the earliest possible stage. Detection dispatch operators demonstrated exceptional proficiency, achieving operational readiness within weeks of onboarding. Their heightened situational awareness significantly contributed to strong performance metrics during what appeared to be a comparatively slower fire season than 2024.

Despite the delayed activation of detection sites, the season demonstrated remarkable adaptability and resilience. Through dedicated efforts, every detection site was brought online, ensuring comprehensive coverage. This achievement underscores the team's commitment and contributes significantly to the overall success of the season.

Since its inception in 2009, the SWO Detection Center has proven to be an invaluable asset to the district. The integration of advanced camera systems continues to enhance early fire detection, optimize resource allocation, and provide real-time monitoring of active incidents within the valley.

Dispatch operations across the district realized several notable successes this season. Both units benefited from the return of experienced seasonal dispatchers, which enhanced institutional knowledge at the outset of the season and supported increased training and operational readiness. The state approved a wage reallocation that aligned dispatcher compensation more closely with comparable positions across state and partner agencies. In addition, lead dispatchers in both units were reclassified to Wildland Fire Dispatcher II positions, more accurately reflecting their responsibilities and ensuring appropriate compensation for the critical work they perform.

## DISPATCH





# DISPATCH, CONT.

The 2025 fire season began with significant organizational and operational changes impacting both dispatch centers. Despite these challenges, dispatch personnel demonstrated

professionalism, adaptability, and resilience while implementing new processes and maintaining effective operations throughout the season. The successful performance of the district's dispatch centers during the 2025 fire season reflects the staff's ability to adapt to change, manage increased complexity, and sustain a high level of service in support of fire and aviation operations.

The district responded to 281 fires during the 2025 fire season, and every incident was investigated. Of these, 170 were determined to be human-caused. Investigators worked closely with a wide range of partners, cooperators, and neighboring agencies to identify responsible parties and pursue cost recovery when appropriate and closing out investigation from previous years.

## INVESTIGATIONS

The 2024 Manzanita Fire was brought to a meaningful conclusion with an Arson I conviction for the responsible party. In addition, fires from 2023, including the Lower Rogue Fire, concluded with an Arson II conviction in Curry County.

These cases and their outcomes demonstrate the ongoing commitment and dedication of ODF personnel and cooperating agencies. Achieving these results required hundreds of investigative hours. Currently, the district is supported by two qualified investigators and six investigator trainees.

The district and Salem are actively working on an intergovernmental agreement with local law enforcement to assist with complex and ongoing investigations. This agreement will further strengthen our ability to protect both our communities and forest resources.

The district continues to build interagency partnerships with neighboring agencies through joint training opportunities and cooperative fire investigations. Fire investigators across agencies recognize that fire does not respect borders or jurisdictions, and that sharing resources and information is critical to successful origin and cause determination.

Over 100 hours of training were completed in 2025, improving investigative processes and the quality of reports produced. As a result, the number of cost-recoverable fires has increased, and the investigative products we deliver continue to improve. The district also continues to make meaningful efforts to achieve appropriate and timely outcomes with remaining open investigations.



# FIRE CAUSES ON THE DISTRICT

Investigations during the 2025 fire season found the following activities caused the tallied amount of fires and were stopped at the recorded amount of acres per category. These stats are specific to the declared fire season, June 1 - October 14. The 10-year averages are for the same date range.

| Cause               | Number of Fires | Acres    | 10-Year Average (Fires) | 10-Year Average (Acres) |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Lightning           | 111             | 2,542    | 52                      | 6,935                   |
| Railroad            | 0               | 0        | 0                       | 0                       |
| Equipment Use       | 83              | 48       | 76                      | 4,360                   |
| Recreation          | 24              | 1        | 23                      | 440                     |
| Smoking             | 5               | 1        | 18                      | 16                      |
| Debris Burning      | 37              | 11       | 20                      | 226                     |
| Arson               | 2               | 0.05     | 10                      | 16                      |
| Juveniles           | 2               | 13       | 3                       | 64                      |
| Miscellaneous       | 13              | 3        | 27                      | 35                      |
| Under Investigation | 4               | 938      | 1                       | 5                       |
| Total               | 281             | 3,557.05 | 230                     | 12,097                  |

# DEPLOYMENTS & TRAINING



Across the state, it was a slower year for large fires, but we still had 54 deployments across Oregon and the country:

- The Medford Unit sent 26 people on 29 assignments
- The Grants Pass Unit sent 15 people on 25 assignments, as well as Crew 1

Assignments ranged from team deployments across Oregon to stints in California, Alaska, North Carolina, and Canada.

With a busy season comes ongoing training opportunities, which we took advantage of throughout the year.

As a district, we initiated **148** task books in 2025 and completed **67**.

## **Medford:**

- Initiated: 95
- Completed: 32
- Other: 0

## **Grants Pass:**

- Initiated: 53
- Completed: 35
- Other: 3 awaiting signatures, 3 reissued



Kelsey Peak Fire



# FOREST RESOURCES

The Stewardship Foresters (SF) and Small Forestland Owner (SFO) Forester had another fulfilling year in 2025. Changes in personnel were significant for the limited group but didn't detract from the overall accomplishments

and success of the program. The district welcomed Alex Gehrig as the new SFO Forester; Alex joined us in January, moving to Oregon from Minnesota. Doug Thackery took a 6-month limited duration assignment based in Salem and Telly Martinez did a great job of backfilling behind Doug. Thackery's assignment ended just in time for Telly to rejoin Crew 1 as the Crew Lead.

The training schedule wasn't quite as heavy as it was in 2024: instead of numerous multi-day training sessions, the program included more single-day trainings based mostly in or near the district. The SF/SFOs also continued to meet monthly for a field day to cover relevant topics at the local level. The foresters spent approximately 90 days total attending training sessions. The landowner submitted Flow Permanence Surveys was a notable new task that grew out of the Private Forest Accord, requiring SFs to process. The district's foresters reviewed and forwarded 74 surveys to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) Private Forest Accord (PFA) Biologist for review and approval.

George Sheppard led the way in one of ODF's largest enforcement actions ever: with the help of SF/SFOs from Medford, Grants Pass and Roseburg, as well as the Josephine County Sheriff's Department, George served an Administrative Search Warrant on property northeast of Grants Pass. The evidence obtained while serving the warrant resulted in 51 citations, ranging from operating without a notification to harvesting within an RMA of fish-bearing streams. The process of obtaining the administrative warrant, serving the warrant, organizing the evidence, and issuing the citations was a huge effort on George's part. In addition to the citations issued for the one case, district foresters issued 15 Written Statements of Unsatisfactory Condition (WSUC). A WSUC is issued when a violation is discovered, but damage has not occurred yet and the recipient fixes the issue within the allotted time.

|                  | Medford |      | Grants Pass |      | District |      |
|------------------|---------|------|-------------|------|----------|------|
| Year             | 2024    | 2025 | 2024        | 2025 | 2024     | 2025 |
| FPA Inspections  | 106     | 288  | 231         | 275  | 337      | 563  |
| Fire Inspections | 32      | 29   | 26          | 32   | 58       | 61   |
| New NOAP's       | 465     | 320  | 249         | 260  | 714      | 580  |

The other significant annual obligation of personnel in the program is to the Protection Division and our commitment to the Fire Protection Militia. The Stewardship Foresters and Small Forestland Owner Forester spent approximately 208 days in 2025 in a variety of firefighting roles.

# NRCS

The federal shutdown of 2025 affected the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) program, which as a result, closed its doors for a few months. The ten-year agreement between the program and ODF went unrenewed for 2025. With no agreement, budget was a hot topic and NRCS dollars have been on pause since.

To support the NRCS statewide agreement, a total of 608 deliverables were produced for the year, achieved by three individuals: Kelly Foster, Levi Caster, and Griffen Sollinger. 14 new landowners received Basic Forest Management Plans in the form of job sheets to fund their projects. More than 4,700 acres were inventoried in Jackson and Josephine counties, 2,752 acres were laid out and designed for funding, and 2,064 acres were certified for landowner payment. The team spent 22 days in outreach or planning meetings.

Personnel changes left the program stretched this year, with our 2.5 FTE positions reduced to just 1.0 FTE by fall. Even so, FSP funding kept the gears turning and ensured continuity in one of the busiest initial-attack districts in the state. The individuals in these roles carried a tremendous load, contributing directly to both rapid IA success and extended attack support across the district. Kelly alone filled 50 days of helibase manager and helicopter manager assignments during the peak of summer—an enormous lift that helped keep aircraft moving, missions flowing, and operations safe and effective.

---

In 2025, the agency signed a vision document with the U.S. Forest Service Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest that clarifies the goals of Federal Forest Restoration (FFR)/Good neighbor Authority (GNA) to accomplish restoration on Federal lands and ensure workloads that can be accomplished. Harvesting approximately 5-10 million board feet a year in two or three thinning sales of 1,000-1,500 acres each can be used to fund 1,000-2,000 acres of fuels work, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) planning, and aquatic restoration and fish habitat on the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest; similar goals are now set for the Umpqua National Forest.

## GNA & THE FEDERAL FOREST RESTORATION

In 2025, eight employees (four permanent and four seasonal) worked in Medford and

# GNA, CONT.

Grants Pass to accomplish projects in silviculture, stocking surveys, stand exams, fuels work implementation, timber sale preparation, cruising, sale preparation and sale administration.

By the end of the year, the FFR program moved over from the Forest Resources Division home of grants and Stewardship of Private lands into the State Forests Division. The FFR program is very similar in how it manages Federal lands as a partner of Forest Service compared to the State Forests Division as the manager of State Forest Lands. This move more closely fits the personnel and support needs of the FFR program.

## **2025 Timber sale activity**

Sale Preparation Activities on Future Timber Sales- Kraken (328 acres), Two Deep (316 acres both near Prospect) and Stair Bear (500 acres off Bear Camp Road at the summit). Coyote (368 acres) and Outback sales were started on the South Umpqua.

Seasonal Service Work in Grants Pass- Reforestation, stocking surveys in the Rum Creek fire area, planting inspections, fuels work. Eli Bond and Adrien Martinez completed fuels projects for the BLM Grants Pass area. Cameron Rasmussen and Ismael Maldonado worked in silviculture doing stocking surveys.

Seasonal Service Work in Medford - Jacob Adams and Ray Briggs worked on the Forest Service grounds in the Winter of 2025 setting up some timber sales marking timber and doing stand exams.

Planning Areas – Work on four different future planning areas, South Tiller, Grayback, Woodby Eden and Thunder Cat is in various stages of planning and completion. Two heritage survey areas were completed and started.





# FUEL MITIGATION & PRESCRIBED FIRE



Across all project areas, fuels reduction work progressed steadily in 2025, with several projects either completed or on track for close-out:

- **Griffin Kubli Apple:** 225 acres completed through landowner rebates and vendor awards (90% complete).
- **Red Dollar Buckhorn:** 155 acres of defensible space and access completed by ODF crews (100% complete).
- **Amaya:** 84 acres treated by ODF crews (42% complete).
- **Milo:** 60 acres treated by ODF crews and 225 acres of pile burning completed on Butte Falls Community Forest units; additional burning planned for fall 2026 due to limited winter/spring precipitation (38% complete).
- **Jackson County Community Assistance:** 416 acres treated through rebates (83% complete); project is on track for closeout.
- **Agate Lake:** 90 acres completed using ODF crews and partner vendors (33% complete).
- **Butte Falls:** 230 acres completed by ODF crews (100% complete); project ready for closeout.

The project experienced a few challenges during the reporting period. Limited precipitation significantly delayed pile-burning work for the Milo project, preventing completion of planned fuel-reduction activities. In addition, staffing constraints created operational hurdles. Recent ODF crew layoffs and changes in personnel classifications reduced available workforce capacity, and inaccuracies in Workday's tracking of leave hours against project codes added unexpected administrative complications.

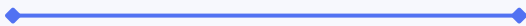
No project areas have been impacted by wildfire to date. However, one Butte Falls Community Forest unit did burn under prescribed conditions, and the fire successfully met the desired treatment objectives.

# SMOKE MANAGEMENT

ODF's smoke management program continues to play a critical role in supporting safe, responsible use of prescribed fire while minimizing smoke impacts to communities. In 2025, the Southwest Oregon District saw

strong implementation across both the Medford and Grants Pass units, with a combined total of 9,255 acres treated and 53,448 tons of material burned through regulated burning activities. Industrial burning opened on November 10, 2025, allowing operators to begin reducing accumulated fuels under conditions that met statewide smoke limitations and air quality protections. These efforts reflect ongoing coordination between landowners, ODF staff, and industry partners to ensure that burning is conducted efficiently and within the boundaries of the Smoke Management Plan.

Registrations for the 2025 season highlight the district's continued commitment to proactive fuels treatment. Across the Medford and Grants Pass units, landowners and operators registered 11,960 acres and 68,908 tons for planned burning, demonstrating both the scale of fuels reduction needs and the level of engagement in the smoke management process. This registration volume underscores the importance of ODF's oversight—verifying burn conditions, monitoring smoke dispersion, and coordinating with local air agencies to reduce public health impacts. Together, the completed burns and registered workloads show steady progress toward reducing hazardous fuel loads while maintaining a focus on community protection and air quality.



The Firewise program continues to expand in the district, with the majority of 2025 work focused in Jackson County. ODF crew completed 10 acres of defensible space thinning, funded by a Title III grant, across fourteen properties in five different Firewise communities. The crew also assisted with 10 acres of work in one community using Small Forestland Grant Program funds.

## FIREWISE COMMUNITIES

The ODF Firewise coordinator for Jackson County supported Firewise Communities by presenting at several neighborhood meetings in established Firewise Communities and communities interested in receiving Firewise recognition. The coordinator performed over 100 property assessments across the county. ODF provided support and technical assistance at Crater High School for classes teaching natural resource management, career paths, Firewise principles, and wildfire suppression.

# FIREWISE COMMUNITIES, CONT.

On the Grants Pass Unit, activity within Firewise communities was minimal. Work was completed on two five-acre properties funded through the Red Dollar Buckhorn grant, consisting of standard cut, pile, and burn operations with no chipping work. Although the project was not specifically designed for Firewise

communities, the properties happened to fall within the grant's targeted area.

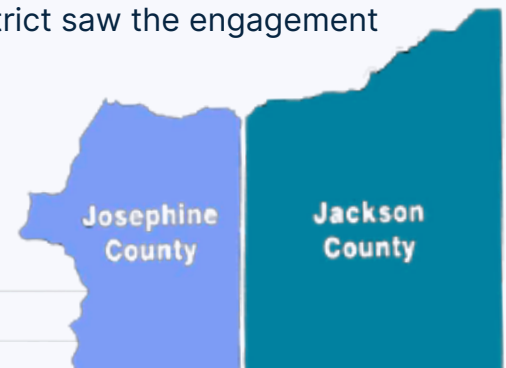
Additionally, two homes on Pinnon Road received treatment under a previous Firewise-specific grant that had exhausted its funding before the full community could be completed; these properties were finished using remaining defensible space grant funds.

Community engagement continues to grow across the district in a variety of mediums, from job fairs and events to an ever-climbing social media following. The district's presence online continues to solidify mainly on Facebook, with 5,000 new followers, bringing our total count to 58K, up 8.9% from 2024's numbers. Content views in 2025 surpassed 8.5 million, significantly up from 2024, and the district saw the engagement of 442K people across 2025, also up from 2024 by 27.6%.

Custom: Jun 1 - Oct 14 ▼

**8,067,554 Views** ⓘ

+2,409.5% from previous 136 days



**Combined population:  
Approx. 301,000**

In-person events also remain a focus, with the district averaging one event, job fair or parade per month. Recruitment campaigns in the early spring contributed to an easier hiring season, and prevention messaging remains a focal point in all messaging and public interactions.

The district's partnership with Keep Oregon Green remained a constant again in 2025, with public service announcements continuing in the Medford television market and streaming platforms.







Darin McMichael

Brian Bradac

Mike Meredith

Mike Backen

Ed Fallon

Mikaela Gosney

Todd Marthoski

Darin McMichael

Sam Wheeler

Justin Kostick

Whitney Henneman

Mike Meredith

Brian Bradac

Tom Young

Jeremy Kennedy

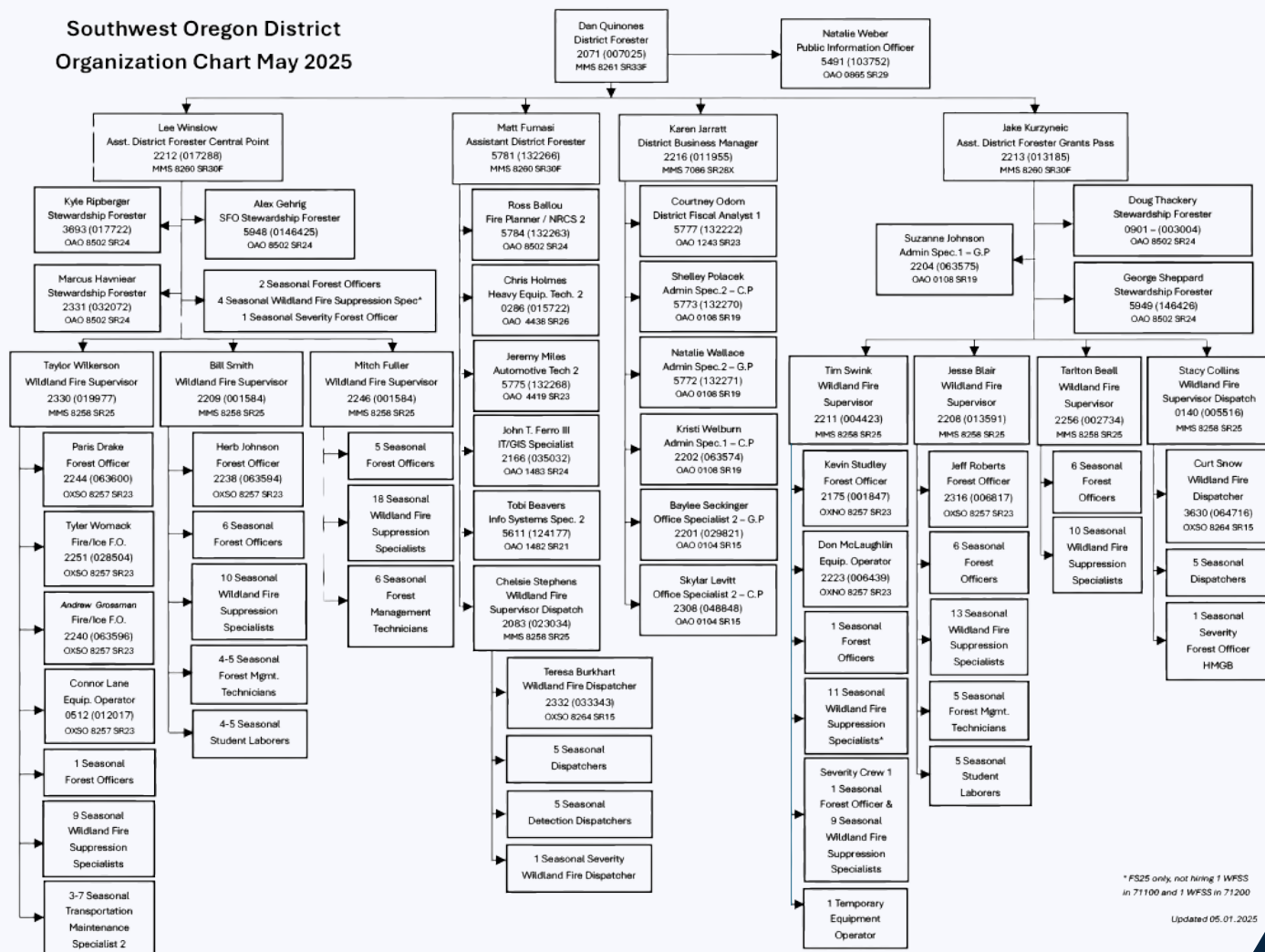
Kristin Babbs

Jeremy Delack

Dave Larson

Mike McCann

### Southwest Oregon District Organization Chart May 2025



# SWO FIRE SEASON HISTORY



| YEAR | START    | END      | DAYS IN SEASON |
|------|----------|----------|----------------|
| 1972 | June 1   | Oct. 11  | 133            |
| 1973 | May 16   | Oct. 21  | 159            |
| 1974 | June 1   | Oct. 28  | 150            |
| 1975 | June 2   | Oct. 10  | 131            |
| 1976 | May 17   | Oct. 26  | 163            |
| 1977 | April 20 | Sept. 30 | 164            |
| 1978 | May 24   | Sept. 19 | 119            |
| 1979 | June 1   | Oct. 19  | 141            |
| 1980 | May 19   | Oct. 15  | 149            |
| 1981 | June 1   | Oct. 8   | 130            |
| 1982 | May 24   | Oct. 7   | 137            |
| 1983 | June 1   | Oct. 11  | 133            |
| 1984 | June 4   | Oct. 13  | 132            |
| 1985 | May 17   | Oct. 21  | 158            |
| 1986 | June 2   | Sept. 26 | 119            |
| 1987 | May 11   | Nov. 12  | 185            |
| 1988 | April 18 | Nov. 2   | 199            |
| 1989 | June 5   | Sept. 29 | 117            |
| 1990 | May 8    | Oct. 22  | 168            |
| 1991 | June 14  | Oct. 25  | 134            |
| 1992 | May 11   | Oct. 21  | 164            |
| 1993 | June 21  | Oct. 13  | 115            |
| 1994 | June 1   | Oct. 27  | 148            |
| 1995 | June 24  | Oct. 11  | 110            |
| 1996 | June 15  | Oct. 18  | 130            |
| 1997 | June 24  | Oct. 1   | 100            |
| 1998 | July 1   | Oct. 12  | 104            |

| YEAR | START   | END      | DAYS IN SEASON |
|------|---------|----------|----------------|
| 1999 | June 12 | Oct. 27  | 138            |
| 2000 | June 10 | Oct. 20  | 134            |
| 2001 | May 15  | Oct. 29  | 168            |
| 2002 | June 11 | Nov. 8   | 151            |
| 2003 | June 6  | Nov. 3   | 151            |
| 2004 | June 4  | Oct. 18  | 137            |
| 2005 | June 27 | Oct. 26  | 122            |
| 2006 | May 24  | Nov. 2   | 163            |
| 2007 | June 11 | Oct. 1   | 113            |
| 2008 | June 16 | Oct. 10  | 117            |
| 2009 | June 19 | Oct. 24  | 118            |
| 2010 | July 1  | Oct. 23  | 115            |
| 2011 | July 1  | Oct. 5   | 97             |
| 2012 | June 20 | Oct. 16  | 119            |
| 2013 | June 3  | Sept. 24 | 110            |
| 2014 | June 2  | Oct. 15  | 136            |
| 2015 | June 5  | Oct. 28  | 145            |
| 2016 | June 3  | Oct. 13  | 133            |
| 2017 | June 4  | Oct. 20  | 138            |
| 2018 | June 1  | Oct. 29  | 151            |
| 2019 | June 1  | Oct. 1   | 122            |
| 2020 | May 1   | Nov. 6   | 190            |
| 2021 | May 12  | Oct. 20  | 161            |
| 2022 | June 1  | Oct. 26  | 147            |
| 2023 | June 1  | Oct. 13  | 134            |
| 2024 | June 1  | Oct. 27  | 148            |
| 2025 | June 1  | Oct. 14  | 135            |



# ANNUAL REPORT

*Southwest Oregon District*

2025