



KLAMATH BASIN

WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE

Protecting forests, water quality & habitat in northern basin, Fremont-Winema NF

Updated: Aug. 8, 2023

The Klamath Basin Wildfire Crisis Strategy Investment Landscape was designated for targeted investment in wildfire risk reduction in 2023.

The landscape spans 10 million acres – the entire Klamath Basin watershed – including areas of southern Oregon located on and around the Fremont-Winema National Forest.

The landscape also includes a significant area in northern California on and outside the Modoc, Shasta-Trinity, Six Rivers and Klamath National Forests.

Collectively, these lands generate 80 percent of the mean annual surface water supply to the Klamath River.

Catastrophic wildfires in the past few years have seriously damaged or degraded ecosystems and communities across five national forests in the Klamath Basin, a trend that is likely to continue as the climate becomes hotter and drier.

The effects of a changing climate on hydrology and increased wildfire severity are reducing habitat for threatened and endangered aquatic and wildlife species across the Klamath Basin. The basin was once historically renowned for its fisheries resource, including Salmon and Steelhead. It now struggles to support these fisheries, a resource vital to the culture and well-being to the Tribes and communities of the Klamath Basin.



Dry pine forests like the Fremont-Winema National Forest rely on frequent fire to remove deadwood, reduce brush, and return nutrients to the soil. While mature Ponderosa pine trees have thick bark, protecting lower portions of the tree from wildfires, shrubs like bitter brush and manzanita burn more readily. If fire returns infrequently, heavy brush can fuel intense fires that reach the upper canopy, destroying even mature trees. USDA Forest Service photo.

The upper Klamath Basin plays a critical role as the headwaters of a large dynamic system. Klamath Lake is an integral part of the ecosystem and the economy of the entire Klamath Basin where agriculture and natural resources provide economic benefits to small communities. For decades, Federal, State, and other partners have identified that the Klamath Basin is in critical need of restoration.

Many communities affected by conditions in the watershed and on forests are in rural counties. These rural counties have a reliance on the local National Forests for recreational and occupational opportunities.

EARLY PROGRESS

The Fremont-Winema National Forest made a strong start on its program of work implementing planned wildfire risk reduction projects and future project planning in fiscal year 2023, starting with a project to thinning of a three-decades-old plantation of Ponderosa and Lodgepole pine trees on the forest's Chiloquin Ranger District.

The trees were initially planted to stabilize the area after a severe disruption by a stand-replacement fire blaze, the Lone Pine Fire. In the ensuing years, the trees have thrived – but have grown too closely-spaced.

The plantation now requires thinning to make room for more understory complexity, and to ensure the remaining trees can continue to develop and remain resilient to drought, disease, insects, and future fires.

More successes:

- *In June, the Klamath Tribes hosted a Forest Service fire management specialist to perform a Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment (QWRA) workshop for the former reservation lands now located on the forest. Tribal natural resource specialists discussed high-value resources and tribal assets within the landscape area, a step towards a future QWRA.*
- *In July, the Dillon Creek prescribed fire project was interrupted by a lightning-sparked fire. Due to earlier work clearing brush, thinning branches and trees, and establishment of containment lines in preparation for a planned fire, firefighters were able to manage the naturally-ignited blaze to safely and complete more than 3100 acres of fuels reduction treatments.*
- *Forest-wide, the Fremont-Winema National Forest has also completed an additional 322 acres of prescribed fire in fiscal year 2023, and 23818 acres of mechanical thinning and other fuels reduction treatments. This brings the total forest acreage treated to 27,289 in 2023 – or 136 percent of the 20,000 acres initially planned for the season.*

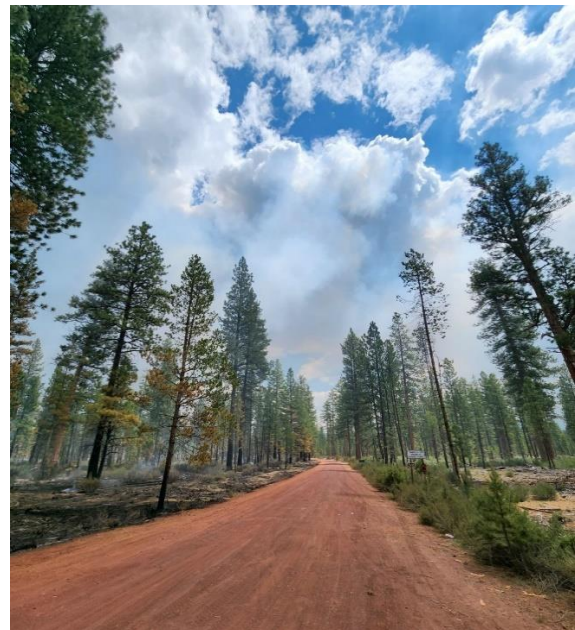
THE ROAD AHEAD

The Forest Service and its partners are using the best available science and data to identify the highest risk areas where fire ignition can spread and expose communities to wildfire.

Emergency authority is available to help the Forest Service move more quickly in applying treatments in high-risk landscapes.

As land-managers for more than half of the Klamath Basin Wildfire Investment Landscape's northern third, Fremont-Winema National Forest staff are leading work both on the forest and heavily engaged with local communities, state agencies, other federal partners and Tribes on wildfire resiliency and fuels reduction projects throughout the landscape's Oregon portion.

Forest leadership place a strong emphasis on collaboration and partnerships with these groups, as well as private landowners and non-profit organizations, to protect natural resources and improve the communities' resilience to wildfires. Public participation and collaboration are very important to the process of identifying out-year projects.



Thanks to earlier thinning and other fuels reduction work in preparation for use of prescribed fire, Dillon Creek fire presented a unique opportunity to treat 3100 acres in the project area using a natural fire, which was ignited by lightning. USDA Forest Service photo.