

What Happened in 2023?

The bulk of Pacific Northwest Region fires occurred late in the season, with significant increases in fire activity beginning in late July accompanied by an uptick in human-caused fires.

Assistance to Canada

For many firefighters the season started early as crews mobilized 13 times to support wildfire suppression efforts in Canada from May to July.

Natural Ignition Use

As part of our goal to reduce wildfire impacts and create and maintain landscape resilience, several lightning-caused ignitions were successfully managed to achieve resource benefits in eastern Oregon including the Dillon Creek Fire, Corral Fire, and China Cap Fire.

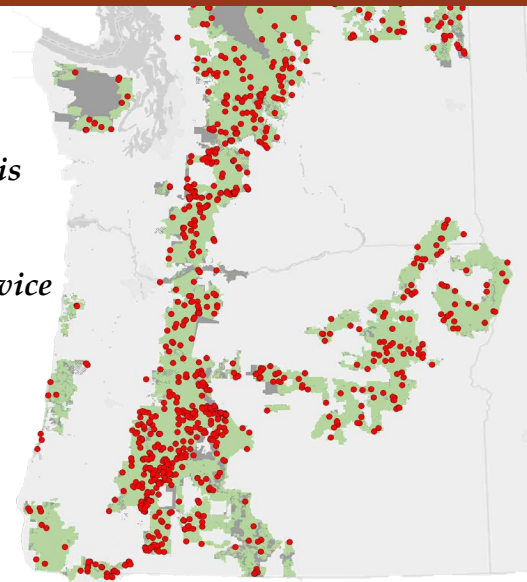
Initial Attack Success

The need for initial attack was demanding and fortunately the success rate was high. Of the 926 total fires, only 25 became large (100 acres or more in size), for a success rate of 97%.

Wildfire Activity

Early small fires ignited on the west side of the region, followed by season-slaking rains in mid-June. The first large fire on Forest Service land was the Boulder Fire (started July 8) in northwest Oregon, illustrating the area’s abnormal dryness.

The red dots on this map show the locations of fires on Forest Service lands.



Overall, western Oregon had the majority of large fire activity. This included the Bedrock, Lookout, Petes Lake, Camp Creek, Flat, Anvil, and Grizzly Fires.

Air Support

The region hosted two Department of Defense C-130 aircraft equipped with Modular Airborne Fire Fighting Systems out of Klamath Falls for almost the entire month of August.

What Was Different?

- Unlike last year when fire season peaked at Preparedness Level 4, the region reached Preparedness Level 5 for 15 days.
- Increased use of Uncrewed Aerial Systems for strategic firing operations.
- The Siuslaw National Forest located along the Oregon coast hosted a Type 3 Incident Management Team for the first time in 20 years.



“After supporting Canada and a few local starts early in the season, the Pacific Northwest fire season ramped up later than usual. However, we had numerous significant fires and fire potential that kept us in Preparedness Level 5 for 15 days. Even with a 97% success rate of initial attack, we saw significant impacts to a few communities with evacuations and large-scale smoke impacts on our long duration fires that were managed strategically to reduce risks to respond.”

Alex Robertson,
Region 6 Director of Fire, Fuels and Aviation



LEFT: Firefighters on the Flat Fire access a work site via the Illinois River while a helicopter flies overhead. RIGHT: Setting up an Uncrewed Aerial System for firing operations on the Lookout Fire.

What Did We Learn?

Using the Incident Strategic Alignment Process the Pacific Northwest Region focused on critical values at risk to develop strategies and strategic actions that minimized risks to responders, while realistically estimating the probability of success. The process played an especially important role on long-duration fires.

What Improvements Are Needed For Next Year?

This year's fires truly demonstrate the urgency and importance of reducing the buildup of vegetation across western forests to protect communities and improve forest resilience. Even as we navigated this challenging fire season, we had teams planning and working to increase fuels and forest health treatments through the agency's Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

Increasing Risks to Firefighters?

Firefighting is inherently risky, making our efforts to mitigate those risks paramount. Fire Year 2023 was long, leading to new lessons for reducing risk. Lessons in mitigating risks also applies to pilots who provide critical monitoring from the air and deliver water and retardant to fires where it can be effective.

We will forever remember Benjamin Sapper, a firefighter for the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest who was killed in an on-duty vehicle accident on August 4 near Powers, Oregon.

Largest Fires in Fire Year 2023

Fire Name	Acres*	National Forest
Flat Fire	34,242	Rogue River-Siskiyou
Bedrock	31,590	Willamette
Lookout	25,751	Willamette
Anvil	22,092	Rogue River-Siskiyou
Smith River Complex North	12,463	Rogue River-Siskiyou
Airplane Lake	6,956	Okanogan-Wenatchee
Chilcoot/Ridge/Brice Creek/Grizzly/Dinner	4,501	Umpqua
Petes Lake	3,254	Willamette
Camp Creek	2,055	Mt. Hood

*Total fire acres as of November 1, 2023 for the region's largest fires.

