



State of Oregon
Department of
Environmental
Quality



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES



Joint Statement of Intent to Cooperate on Prescribed Fire and Smoke Management

Over the past decade, wildfires have grown dramatically in size, duration, and intensity. Human populations are increasingly at risk from these wildfires and wildfire smoke, with impacts disproportionately affecting people with low incomes and communities of color, as well as sensitive populations such as children and seniors. These risks are acute in the Pacific Northwest, where many communities are proximate to landscapes where wildfire occurs and threatens public health and safety. While accumulating fuels, a warming climate, and expanding human development exacerbate these risks, historic investments through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) have provided unprecedented resources for federal, state, and local agencies to collaborate at the scale needed to address the risks posed by undesirable wildfire.

In a March 2023 report to Congress *Wildfire Smoke – Opportunities to Strengthen Federal Efforts to Manage Growing Risks*, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) called upon the Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Secretaries of the U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and the Interior to better align air quality and land management goals for wildfire risk mitigation and establish joint strategies for achieving those goals. A subsequent national [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) between the USDA Forest Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. EPA, and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identified the wildfire crisis as a public health crisis and outlines shared strategies to address it.

This joint statement of intent to cooperate builds on goals outlined in the MOU and articulates our commitment to regional collaboration to achieve these goals.

In November 2023, we convened to discuss, develop, and implement joint strategies to address the wildfire crisis in Oregon and Washington. During the November meeting, **we agreed that an increase in the pace of prescribed fire¹ is critical to reduce wildfire risk and increase ecosystem resilience in the Pacific Northwest. We also voiced support for using more prescribed fire and other fuel management**

¹ A prescribed fire is any fire intentionally ignited by management actions in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific land or resource management objectives.

strategies at larger geographic scales, while implementing new strategies at scale to minimize impacts on public health from the smoke created.

Excessive smoke, no matter its source, can pose a serious health risk to people. In supporting the increased use of prescribed fire, we are balancing the known health risks from prescribed fire smoke exposure against the even greater risk to life and health from severe wildfire and wildfire smoke exposure. We recognize preparedness and planning frameworks around prescribed fire are at different stages of development within the region. We will work with partners and local communities to prepare for and seek to reduce risk of smoke from prescribed fire, making every effort to ensure that vulnerable populations and communities disproportionately burdened by smoke from all fires are protected by pursuing increased public health interventions to meet the community need.

The November 2023 meeting was an initial conversation among a subset of state and federal lands that collectively recognized the importance of engaging, importantly, with Tribal Nations, and others critical to addressing the wildfire crisis, including other federal, state, and local leaders. **Our commitment includes reaching out to others with land management and public health roles to engage them in joining us in these efforts.**

To achieve the objective of increasing prescribed fire and minimizing impacts on public health from the resulting smoke, we commit to the following principles:

Act with urgency, using all available authorities, and collaborating with existing and new partners, including entities from the philanthropic community, to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire implementation while minimizing impacts to public health. Our agencies all have expertise and resources to contribute, and we are committed to leveraging those resources in new ways.


Protect public health, safety, and property. Work with partners and local communities to ensure meaningful community engagement, strengthened collaborative planning, support in pursuing resources, and increased and transparent health risk communication commensurate with the increased scale of prescribed fire near their community. This means communication before, during and after prescribed burns, using methods to reach all potentially affected people about prescribed fire events and how to protect themselves from smoke and interventions to reduce exposure to smoke. It also means ensuring all of these preparedness efforts to protect health are addressed in a specific time and place before committing to each decision to go forward with prescribed fire.

Identify and overcome the most limiting factors to achieving implementation of prescribed fire as a management tool at scale. Opportunities include working together to identify and resolve regulatory and operational challenges, encouraging an atmosphere of learning and creativity, shared problem solving, considering new business processes, looking for opportunities to streamline regulatory frameworks, and sharing resources to address planning, implementation, data gathering, reporting, and monitoring needs.

Be innovative and comprehensive in our approach and apply best practices. Develop and implement new strategies to minimize smoke impacts to communities. Be flexible, adaptable, and look for opportunities to coordinate schedules and projects. In planning and preparing for prescribed burns, use the best available information and modeling to predict smoke impacts, identify burn windows consistent with resource objectives, and minimize impacts on public health.

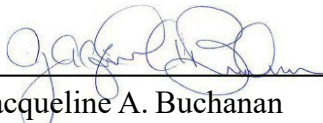
Try new approaches, learn, and adapt based on experience. Not all new strategies will be immediately successful, but we must build on our current knowledge to undertake the challenge before us. Develop appropriate monitoring strategies that track not only the smoke impacts and efficacy of prescribed fire treatments, but also the planning processes developed to increase the pace and scale of this work.

We are all committed to this work. We agree on the importance of partnering so we can better staff, manage, and implement larger prescribed fires and protect public health through improved planning, cross-agency coordination, communication, and community preparedness. Although the resources and support we dedicate may vary by agency, we intend to demonstrate we can successfully and responsibly increase the pace and scale of prescribed burning and protect public health. We are committing that our agencies apply these principles and learn from two pilot projects, one in West Bend, Oregon, and one in North Central Washington and from the experience of these pilots, we will identify additional steps for how to build on the work within and across our agencies. We believe bringing together our wealth of knowledge and experience will allow us to more effectively identify and take action to better protect our forests and communities nearby.



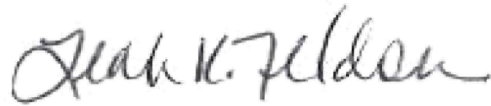
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