

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the final product of a three year effort known as the City of Portland Wildfire Risk Reduction Project. It identifies and prioritizes 30 action items to improve the ability of officials to cope with wildfire in and around natural areas, especially Forest Park and Powell Butte. This report will help all City managers identify what can be accomplished within their Bureaus to foster better coordination, improve integration of wildfire management into work plans and training, and facilitate access to resources that accomplish longer term objectives. These actions are expected to improve and sustain the inter-bureau coordination that has been a hallmark of this entire effort to date.

Wildfires are increasing across the western United States. This increase is attributed to a buildup of forest fuels as a result of past fire suppression policies. Climate change increases the susceptibility of vegetation to fire due to longer dry seasons. The risk of loss to homes and businesses built at the margins of city natural areas is significant and growing. The Willamette Bluffs fires in 2000 and 2001 demonstrated this mounting wildfire risk. These fires, although successfully contained, highlighted the need for improved preparation, equipment, training and coordination.

KEY ISSUES

- **Coordination** – City of Portland lacks a standing coordinating group to manage current and past wildfire mitigation and response efforts.
- **Communication** – City First responders (PF&R, PPB, POEM) and City PP&R City Nature Field staff lack the equipment to communicate with each other and external wildfire resources.
- **City Policies** – Policies impede the maintenance of fire-safe yet ecologically functional vegetation on lands adjacent to natural areas. A better balance among ecological function, sustainability and safety within environmental zones is needed.
- **Training & Equipment** – Portland Fire & Rescue needs resources to insure that recent improvements in meeting state and national training & equipment standards in wildland firefighting can be sustained. Parks City Nature field staff needs training in basic wildland firefighting.
- **Community Education** – Expanded outreach to neighbors living in wildfire risk areas can improve the chances of homes and neighborhoods surviving a wildfire while also minimizing the number of firefighters needed for protection.
- **Access** – Some roads and fire lanes are not usable by emergency vehicles due to steepness or lack of maintenance. Roads in surrounding neighborhoods are often narrow or have sharp turns. In an evacuation, emergency vehicles could be blocked by fleeing residents.
- **Funding** – Accomplishing some report recommendations will require funding and staffing above current service levels, reallocation of resources, or temporary grant assistance.

PROPOSED ACTIONS

The following are the 30 recommended actions developed as a result of this project. Each action is assigned a priority level: **Priority 1** **Priority 2** **Priority 3**

#1. Convene a standing City of Portland wildfire technical working group.	#16. Conduct wildfire training for City wildfire response stakeholders.
#2. Identify and map the wildland urban interface area within the City.	#17. Develop a comprehensive, long term vegetation treatment program.
#3. Modify existing regulations to improve the permitting process and allow increase of the defensible space around structures.	#18. Educate landowners within the Wildfire Hazard Zone about wildfire hazards.
#4. Integrate fire prevention goals and provisions into policies, plans, and codes.	#19. Establish a fire information network in Forest Park and Powell Butte.
#5. Secure funding for continued, long term vegetation management projects that maintain safe fuel levels in key locations.	#20. Create incentives to encourage fuel reduction and create defensible space on private properties near natural areas.
#6. Conduct a wildland firefighter training assessment of Portland Fire & Rescue.	#21. Design and install one or more demonstration areas to showcase wildfire resistant plantings.
#7. Enhance wildland firefighting standards for Portland Fire & Rescue	#22. Initiate and Maintain training opportunities with regional and City incident management teams.
#8. Analyze and prioritize emergency vehicle access routes.	#23. Develop a cross-bureau plan for evacuation of citizens in high fire risk areas.
#9. Conduct a periodic tri-county wildfire coordination meeting.	#24. Develop critical GIS map layers for fire response and planning in natural areas.
#10. Revisit mutual aid agreements to ensure they are current and applicable.	#25. Review and update the Forested and Wildland Interface Areas Fire Protection Plan.
#11. Establish an agreed upon fire danger rating system and develop agency protocols.	#26. Re-Invigorate Neighborhood Emergency Teams with concrete projects.
#12. Continue to conduct annual wildland firefighter training for Portland Fire & Rescue personnel.	#27. Improve the system for identifying new construction in areas subject to wildfires.
#13. Improve enforcement of park rules in natural areas and open space tracts on approved land divisions.	#28. Assess and communicate the capacity of the water infrastructure (e.g. pipes, hydrants, water reservoirs).
#14. Improve emergency radio communications between City first responders and PP&R City Nature field staff.	#29. Review the feasibility of adopting portions of state or nationally recognized wildfire interface codes.
#15. Design and conduct an effectiveness study of maintenance agreements that are established when new land divisions are approved to manage vegetation in open space tracts.	#30. Identify conditions of approval and mitigation strategies for new development or redevelopment in high risk areas.

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