



## THIN OREGON'S FORESTS AT SCALE TO AVERT CATASTROPHIC WILDFIRES

### The Opportunity and Why It's Important

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Oregon must modernize its approach to wildfire in the face of climate change. Across the globe, we have reached an inflection point; climate change is no longer a future threat, but a clear and present danger. Heat, drought, and changing weather patterns are causing wildfire to escalate with devastating impacts. Our most vulnerable populations face the greatest threats.

In the U.S. West, global trends are exacerbated by excess fuel loads stemming from a history of fire suppression and management practices. Together, climate change impacts and fuel loads are creating a perfect storm for unnaturally hot wildfires that destroys communities, ecosystems, and economies. The U.S. Forest Service states that, each year, wildfires now cost the nation hundreds of billions of dollars, implying several *trillion* dollars are at risk over the coming decade. Oregon sits at the center of this crisis.

To mitigate this risk, we must thin forests to reduce fuel loads. In doing so, we also create extraordinary public values including rural jobs, building materials to address our affordable housing crisis, and biomass for renewable energy. Every Oregonian will feel the effects of our success or failure.

### Current Status

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In 2019, the Governor's Wildfire Council developed the state's first-ever comprehensive wildfire strategy, which was translated into historic legislation in 2021. The strategy serves three goals:

1. Modernize Oregon's communities to better adapt to the climate-wildfire threat.
2. Modernize firefighting and emergency response.
3. Modernize land management to build fire-resilient landscapes.

Oregon has made significant progress on the first two goals – modernizing communities and response – which must be sustained. However, the third goal – land management to reduce fuel loads – only established targets without funding or implementation plans. The Council identified a staggering 13.2 million acres in Oregon at high fire risk and concluded that treating a portion of these 5.6 million acres at a cost of \$4.2 billion would mitigate wildfire's worst effects. However, without funding or implementation plans, this backlog will continue to grow and threaten our way of life in Oregon.

### Recommendations

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- Oregon should set a 10-year goal to complete its backlog of untreated forests and rangelands. This would necessitate a several-fold increase over current pace and scale of treatment.
- Oregon should designate a team tasked with modernizing our funding and delivery systems to meet this goal. Given the significant federal ownership in Oregon, (60 percent of all forests, 25 percent of the entire state) modernization efforts must include federal, state, local, and private stakeholders.
- Oregon must step up with meaningful investment to reduce our \$4.2 billion backlog, seek far greater federal investment, and unlock the potential of the private sector through timber monetization. Such investment in effective land management will mitigate the downstream costs of wildfire from its impacts on infrastructure, watersheds, public health, atmospheric carbon, and vulnerable communities.