

# Council Business Meeting

July 6, 2021

<b>Agenda Item</b>	Fire Season and Ashland Post Almeda Work	
<b>From</b>	Ralph Sartain	Interim Fire Chief
<b>Contact</b>	<a href="mailto:ralph.sartain@ashland.or.us">ralph.sartain@ashland.or.us</a> ; (541) 552-2229	

## SUMMARY

On September 8, 2020, the Almeda Fire occurred, bringing with it an increased reality in the community of how close we are to the Wildland Urban Interface and that a fire in the wrong location and at the wrong time could lead to similar events occurring in the City of Ashland. Attached are some highlights of the work done post the Almeda fire to protect the City. While staff, surrounding fire, police, dispatch and private partners can do their parts in community protection, it needs to be continually reminded, fire prevention, emergency preparation and evacuation procedures must be always on the minds of the residents of Ashland during fire season.

## POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

Council Goal: Emergency Management, Wildfire Reduction, Community Risk Reduction

## PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

N/A

## INFORMATION

Below are the highlights of work completed leading into this fire season.

In our surrounding Forest and Watershed:

- On City and Ashland Parks forestland, we thinned and piled 201 acres and burned piles on 9 acres near homes.
- On private land as part of the AFR project, Lomakatsi completed burning piles on 804 acres surrounding Ashland plus 318 acres of under burning next to town, significantly lowering fire risk.
- On US Forest Service land in the AFR project area, 631 acres of piles were burned plus 109 acres of under burning in the City's watershed.
- Through a grant to the City from the State of Oregon, 290 acres of fuels thinning work was completed on USFS and City lands in the watershed along with 12.25 acres of thinning and burning to reduce fire danger on three private properties and one city property on upper Terrace Street.
- Through a multi-department City effort, blackberry removal was completed next to neighborhoods on City, Parks, and adjacent private lands totaling 9.6 acres over seven properties.

Evacuation Outreach:

- With the completion of the evacuation study, multiple parts of the city completed the following:
  - 8,500 postcards sent specific to zone numbers
  - 6,000 evacuation flyers being distributed through local businesses and at doors by CERT volunteers and Wildfire Safety Commissioners
- The City's evacuation map was completely redesigned and added interactive features and can be found at: [ashland.or.us/evacuate](http://ashland.or.us/evacuate).
- Nixle alerts have been sent to nearly 16,000 people directing users to new evacuation site.
- Media outreach completed and social media posted directing users to new evacuation site.

- Updated the 1700 AM radio station technology to allow for staff to update information from our cell phones.

Direct homeowner and neighborhood support programs:

- 20 Green debris bins were distributed to neighborhoods and filled with flammable green debris which removed 500 cubic yards of flammable material from Ashland.
- 160 cubic yards of flammable green debris was removed at the 10<sup>th</sup> annual green debris drop off day (190 car loads).
- Wildfire webinar series offered May, June and July.
- Through a grant from State of Oregon defensible space improved around at least 20 homes.
- Trained 8 Ashland residents to conduct wildfire risk assessments for property owners in town to support fire department outreach efforts.
- 13 Firewise Communities used \$500 grants from State Farm to reduce wildfire fuels in neighborhoods.
- 15 home inspectors were trained on defensible space through a two-day training, hosted by Rogue Valley Association of Realtors, in partnership with AF&R.

In the area of Wildfire Planning:

- The Adoption of R327 by City Council to begin fire hardening homes in the City of Ashland and the increased application of the ordinance to all new residential construction.
- Developed strategic fire management plan with partners from ODF, Forest Service, Oregon State University and The Nature Conservancy.
- Hosted a community stakeholder workshop on fire planning and response.
- A video explaining proactive fire planning to citizens is currently being developed.
- Extended drone patrol for two years in the Ashland watershed.
- Executed FEMA Pre Disaster Mitigation Grant for \$3 Million.

Weed Abatement

- Continued Weed Abatement compliance through the end of fire season on highest priority properties, including the issuance of citations and court appearances.
- Completed an ArcGIS Fuels Reduction Mapping Project which compiled new and previously gathered GIS layer data during routine Weed Abatement Coordinator inspections regarding hazardous vegetation ‘Areas of Interest’ on City owned land. Transferred and updated this data to the Wildfire Fuels Reduction GIS Map to inform and target fuels reduction work on City property in the Spring of 2021, (organized and performed in collaboration between Public Works, Parks and AF&R).
- Conducted a bulk mailing of early Warning letters/Order to Abate notices in early December 2020 for preparation of 2021 fire season. This was compiled inspection data from 2017-2020 to a targeted list of property owners with a current record, or history, of violating AMC9.04, the Weeds & Noxious Vegetation ordinance.
- Performed 30+ requested Home Risk Assessments/Re-assessments.
- Conducted Wildfire Safety Ordinance permit reviews and compliance inspections for new construction.
- 850+ calls and emails regarding Weed Abatement or Wildfire mitigation questions and issues since September 9, 2020.

Fire Department Administration and Operations:

- Working with RVFC we will be staffing up resources on specific days for the added weight of a strike team should a fire erupt.
- Regular meetings between Fire District 5 and Ashland Fire Chiefs have begun to work more closely and strengthen mutual and automatic aide agreements.
- Using our Battalion Chiefs as supervisors further into Fire District 5 has brought an aerial truck to our first alarm assignments starting shortly as well as additional engine companies assigned to assist AFR Paramedics on critical events in volunteer and unincorporated areas.
- A recent meeting was held between Fire District 5, AFR, Colstein and Cal-Fire to discuss radio notification to ECSO from Cal-Fire dispatch in the event of a fire in the Colstein.
- This has been an incredibly productive time by the community of Ashland, and the staff of the City of Ashland to further the protection of this community from wildfire events. Even with the above work the fire forecast for Southern Oregon is bleak.
- The forecast pocket card obtained from ODF on 6-28 revealed our available fire fuels are ahead of where they were on July 15, 2018 when the 52,936 acre Taylor Creek fire occurred. We are currently set to break our Energy Release Component of 65 percent two weeks early. This component gives season trends calculated from temperatures at 2pm. Wind is not part of this component. Fire environment characterized by high Energy Release Components, and local threshold values, combined with a Haines Index of 5 or 6 is associated with Large Fire Growth.
- While we will continue to complete fuels reduction and do everything in our power to reduce the threat of wildfire, it is incumbent of every citizen of Ashland, to prepare and prevent wildfire around them, to know their primary and secondary evacuation routes, de-fuel their properties and prepare for the inevitable that fire will revisit Ashland.

**FISCAL IMPACTS**

Monies have been used from General Fund, Water Fees, Local, State and Federal Grants.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Report was written for information only.

**ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS**

No action required at this time.

**REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS**

None