

“Something wicked this way comes.” That’s what audiences at the Allen Elizabethan Theatre will hear when the players of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival take the stage this summer to bring Macbeth to life. While the actors will be talking about the bard’s famous tale of tragedy and ambition, they could just as easily be referring to the devastating and destructive wildfires looming on the horizon as fire season begins once again.

Everyone at the Shakespeare Festival is all too familiar with the wickedness of fire season. Last year, they were forced to cancel over two dozen shows and lay off 16 employees after losing out on over \$2 million—all because of the fires that ravaged our state, and the smoke that made it unhealthy to even walk outside our doors for weeks at a time.

The 2018 fire season saw over 2,000 fires spread across Oregon, burning nearly 900,000 acres of land and costing our state over \$514 million. And before the official start of this year’s season, Oregonians had to deal with at least five major fires.

But if efforts like the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project and Senator Merkley’s Wildfire Resilient-Communities Act are successful, we might be able to prevent the worst wickedness of this year’s season – and the show will be able to go on.

In partnership with Lomakatsi Restoration Project, Grayback Forestry, Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest and The Nature Conservancy, the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project has been working diligently for months, using prescribed burns to rid thousands of acres of ladder fuels that can give life to and sustain the kinds of catastrophic fires that we saw last year.

We need more of this kind of work to make our forests more resilient to mega-fires. That’s why we are fortunate to have Senator Merkley fighting in Washington, D.C. for the resources our community needs to reduce the risks of these infernos. Last week, Senator Merkley introduced the Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act to reduce the risk and impacts of fires and smoke on our communities. It will create a billion dollar fund so the Forest Service can implement badly needed fuels reduction projects on the ground. It’ll permanently reauthorize the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Project that has been so essential in funding collaborative local work that can contain and stop blazes before they grow out of control. And it will empower federal agencies to work with local communities to plan and prepare for wildfires.

The Wildfire-Resilient Communities Act is essential to ensuring those safer communities and that cleaner air, not just today but, as the Bard himself wrote, “tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow.”