

Oregon Wildfire Recovery Toolkit

Recommendations for State-Level Actions

Drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater services are largely inoperable for residents after a disaster for as long as planning and construction of new water infrastructure is underway. Without these essential services, no community can rebuild safely or sustainably. An early focus on bringing water infrastructure back after a catastrophic wildfire can anchor and accelerate recovery, but the process must be much faster than the traditional infrastructure planning process to ensure a reasonable recovery timeline for these communities.

The *Oregon State Wildfire Recovery Toolkit* aims to **help fire-affected communities rebuild faster** by recommending actions that can expedite the recovery of water infrastructure systems. This document shares learning and recommendations for our state government partners, including state agencies that are actively involved in recovery work, and those in the executive branch and legislature that can implement needed administrative and policy changes. Those working locally in counties and cities to implement recovery efforts are addressed in this Toolkit's companion document, the *Oregon Community Wildfire Recovery Toolkit*.

By highlighting recommended actions that state and local leaders can take, we hope to help lay the groundwork for more supportive disaster recovery efforts. Details on each recommendation can be found in the full version of this Toolkit.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

FUNDING

- 1. Create a renewable state Natural Disaster Recovery Fund.** This fund could provide bridge funding while communities wait for FEMA financial assistance and streamline access to state recovery funds for recovery work not covered by federal funding, such as infrastructure projects and long-term recovery planning.
- 2. Create and share a comprehensive funding list.** Streamline disbursement of funds and reduce confusion of funding availability.
- 3. Advocate for activation of all applicable federal funding.** Activation of the Recovery Support Functions (RSFs) would have helped continue the flow of federal resources once FEMA's emergency response period ended, lines of communication, coordination, and funding would still be available.
- 4. Release grant funds immediately on award.** Create more equitable paths to recovery and reduce delays in recovery planning and implementation by leveling the playing field between larger, higher-capacity jurisdictions and those with limited reserves and access to financing.



2020 Wildfire Impacts

CAPACITY

- 5. Authorize agencies to contract with TA providers for surge capacity.** Help build state capacity to support community-centered recovery and alleviate the workloads of local government staff to reduce burnout.
- 6. Stand-up a comprehensive state wildfire response and recovery training program.** Train agency staff for recovery, create a support network for recovery professionals, and reduce recovery process and terminology confusion.
- 7. Update SRF 6 Infrastructure Systems timeline and agency support.** Appropriately resource infrastructure recovery through a longer, more realistic timeline defined for recovery, resources could be more appropriately allocated past the current 18-month mark and reduce the need to patchwork funding and capacity from other sources.
- 8. Create a state repository of recovery resources.** Streamline knowledge of recovery funding and technical resources, expedite recovery, and make efficient use of limited staff capacity and funding.

COORDINATION

- 9. Assign DOJ staff directly to specific wildfire-affected areas.** Mitigate delays related to legal review and act as the agency's point of contact with local communities and any applicable agencies.
- 10. Designate senior agency staff to participate in SRFs.** Interviewees reported that SRFs composed of staff with decision-making authority were higher functioning and able to move recovery initiatives forward more quickly.
- 11. Include county Emergency Recovery Managers in SRF meetings.** Promote collaboration between the state and impacted counties.
- 12. Develop programmatic state guidance on alternative wastewater options for wildfire-recovering communities.** Identify permitting "glidepaths" for counties to implement and facilitate faster rebuilding by displaced residents.
- 13. Align SRFs to directly support water infrastructure recovery.** Rebuilding critical water infrastructure - both community and individual systems - is key to community rebuilding, including housing. Water infrastructure goals are currently spread across multiple SRFs.
- 14. Plan for staff and role transitions.** Help replace FEMA staff roles and smooth assignment transitions at the Governor's Office to prevent loss of institutional knowledge and relationships.
- 15. Match recovery tasks with state agency skill sets.** By using state agencies with existing skills and systems, funding and assistance can be distributed much more quickly than asking an agency to stand up a grant program for the first time.

CONCLUSION

Today, many Oregon communities are still struggling to fully recover. While we can't go back and change our recovery trajectory, we can learn from it and implement what we know now as we plan for the future.

By implementing changes and incorporating our recommendations from this Toolkit, the state can work now to improve coordination, build timely and sustained capacity, create paths for expediting funding and other resources, and prepare for recovery ahead of the next major disaster. [As the cost of natural disaster recovery rises](#), this proactive approach will save taxpayer dollars, reduce displacement of rural and low-income people, and potentially save historic places and cultural treasures.

Visit willamettepartnership.org/wildfire-toolkits to read more on the Oregon Wildfire Recovery Toolkits

