

JAY INSLEE
Governor



STATE OF WASHINGTON
Office of the Governor

October 22, 2015

TO: Executive Cabinet
Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation
Commission on Hispanic Affairs
Governor's Office of Indian Affairs
Recreation and Conservation Office
Office of Regulatory Innovation & Assistance

FROM: Jay Inslee, Governor

SUBJECT: WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS, RESILIENCY, RESPONSE & RECOVERY

The 2015 wildfire season in Washington was the worst in state history. Our firefighters were overwhelmed by destructive blazes tearing through our region, made tinder-dry by increasingly hotter and drier conditions. Increasing levels of dead and dying material in our forest caused by the quick suppression of fires, insect diseases and lack of resources to reduce these fuels combined with new extreme weather conditions to produce high-severity fires that put lives, property, business, infrastructure and the environment at risk. These high-severity fires are increasingly hard to control and recover from.

As of September 2015, wildfires have burned more than 1,000,000 acres in Washington; killed three firefighters; displaced thousands of people, livestock and animals; destroyed untold amounts of property; threatened our citizen's very way of life; and sent a haze of smoke across the entire state.

Longer fire seasons caused by a changing climate and hotter, drier conditions have resulted in multiple super-hot, super-fast fires burning at once. This change in climate has also contributed to dramatic increases in insect damage to forest across the state and which cause the Commissioner of Public Lands to declare a Forest Health Hazard Warning in Okanogan, Ferry, Klickitat and Yakima County. Although the Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service have undertaken efforts to improve forest health and reduce the risk of fire, the current level of resources has not been sufficient to keep up with the increasing risk.

Wildland fire is a statewide, non-partisan issue. There is a long-standing commitment by all involved to protect Washington's citizens, economy and environment. Public interest and engagement in wildland fire preparedness, resilience, response and recovery is growing, and an increasing number of Washington State communities are calling for improved plans and policies. The state must show leadership in working alongside our essential local and federal partner agencies to enhance our collective ability and resources to prepare better for future fire seasons.



Strategies for protecting the life and livelihoods, property, economy and environment for Washington's citizens must be modernized in light of the changing weather conditions and dramatic changes to our forest and rangelands. To respond to these challenges, I have asked the Department of Commerce and the Washington Military Department, in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and in consultation with other appropriate state agencies, federal agencies, tribal governments, local governments and concerned citizens, to form a Wildland Fire Council. I am directing your agency to participate in this effort.

The Council will have two main tasks. First, the Council will coordinate the restoration and recovery of communities impacted by the 2015 fires and future wildfires. This shall include:

- Supporting local efforts in developing recovery plans for impacted communities.
- Coordinating state resources related to recovery of the local economy, citizen health, housing and infrastructure, as well as natural and cultural resources.

Second, the Council is to assess plans, policies and resources related to wildfire preparedness, resiliency, response and recovery in Washington State. This assessment shall address short-, intermediate- and long-term goals and shall include:

- Making recommendations on how to respond to the new phenomenon of megafires.
- Strengthening partnerships, through enhanced relationships and minimized duplication of efforts, with other states and provinces, federal agencies and tribal governments on wildfires and opportunities to increase funding and support for preparedness, resiliency, response and recovery.
- Identifying gaps and recommend strategies to improve the current systems of laws, policies and funding for wildfire preparedness, resiliency, response and recovery.
- Identifying opportunities for the state and federal government to enhance collective ability and resources, maximizing use of existing resources.
- Evaluating potential priorities and costs for state and federal actions that will improve wildfire prevention, resiliency, response and recovery.

The Council will prepare a preliminary report by July 1, 2016, including a strategy for consideration in the Governor's 2017-19 budget to meet policy and funding needs that would increase preparedness, resilience, response and recovery capacity related to wildfires.

The Council will hold its first meeting the week of November 9th, exact date to follow. Please email JT Austin my Policy Advisor on Natural Resources at jt.austin@gov.wa.gov and let her know who will represent your agency at Council meetings.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.