



Land Use and Its Impacts in Wildfire Mitigation

House Interim Committee On Natural Resources

Thank you, Chairman Witt and committee members for the opportunity to present on the critical role Oregon's Land Use System can play in reducing the costs, risks and impacts of wildfire to our state and our local communities.

My name is Russ Hoeflich, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Oregon.

The Governor's Wildfire Council established a land use subcommittee of experts from across the state. I am honored to have served as their chair.

2018 in Oregon

Fire suppression costs:

\$533 million

Total associated costs:

\$6 billion



In 2018, state and federal agencies spent \$533 million fighting wildfires in Oregon.

If we use the full potential of our land use system, we can bend the escalating cost curve and:

- save lives
- defend our built environments
- protect our most vulnerable populations



Scientists tell us that for every one-degree Celsius increase in global temperature, lightning strikes will increase by 12 percent.

There are over 8 million lightning strikes that hit the earth per day and 3 billion every year.

Here is how we see this playing out in Oregon:

In 2017, Oregon had 290 lightning-caused fires and 779 human caused fires.

In 2018, Oregon had 683 lightning-caused fires and 1267 human caused fires.

Land Use Planning

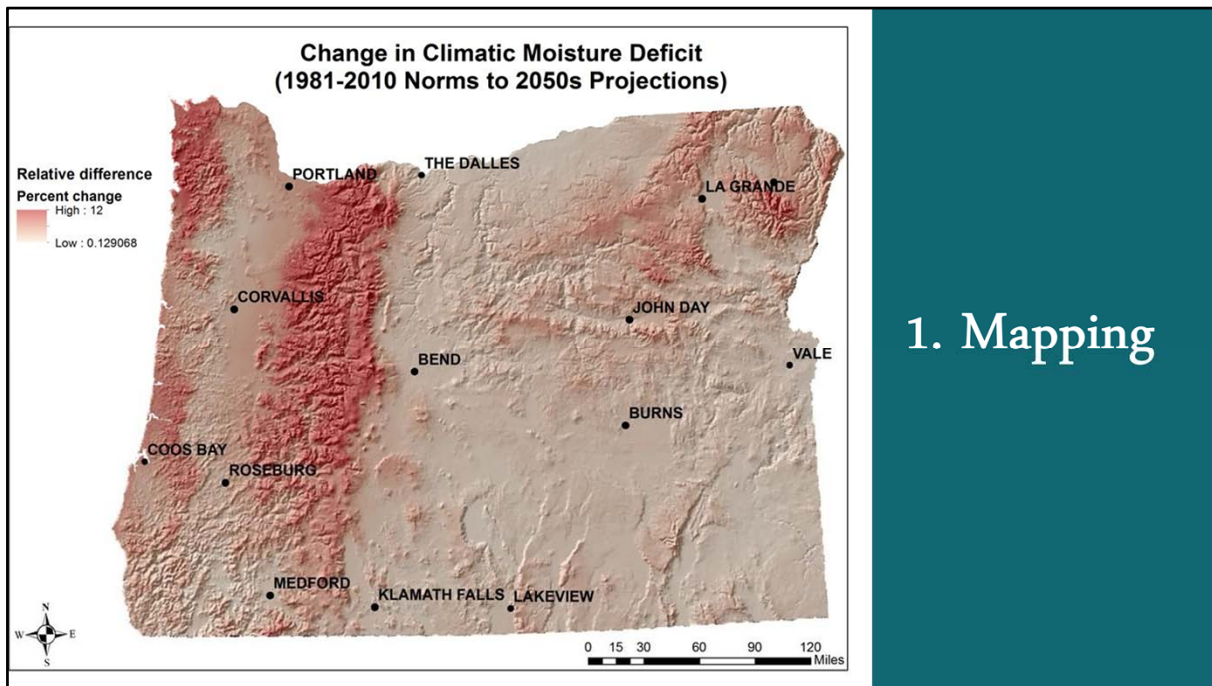
The most powerful tool

Oregon has to protect life
& property, and mitigate the
impacts of climate change.



The most cost-effective tools at our disposal to reduce the risk to life and property are imbedded in Oregon's land use system.

We therefore have three core recommendations to share.



First, the State needs to map wildfire risk across Oregon and use the data in state and local decision-making.

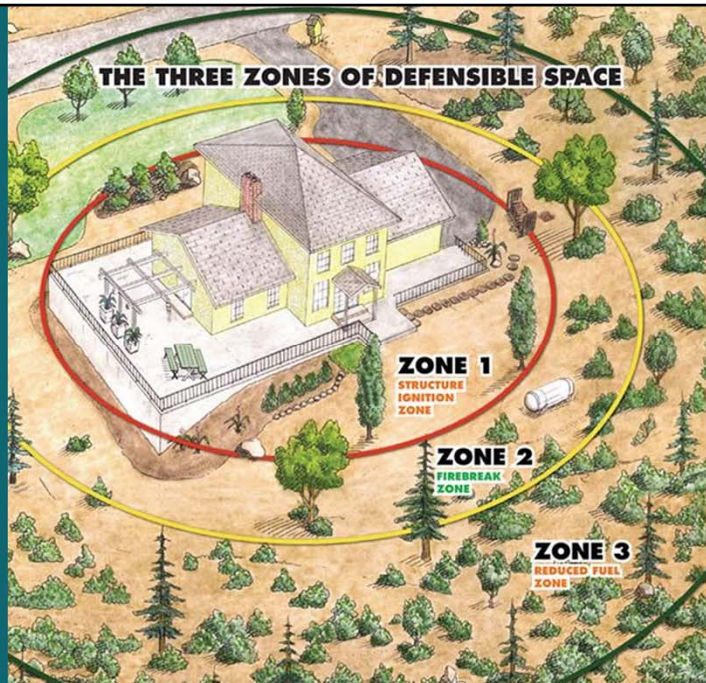
The Institute of Natural Resources, through its existing Oregon Explorer mapping program, must be empowered with the resources needed to provide regularly-updated vital life and cost-saving maps and data to our state and local land use planning agencies. The Wildfire Council identified this as a very high priority.

This vital information includes, for example: the location and vulnerability of cell towers, homes in high risk zones, high-risk water treatment facilities, power substations and distribution lines, senior facilities, hospitals, schools, rail and road networks, gas pipelines, and forests and grasslands prone to extreme fire risk. This information must be accurate down to the tax lot level, where, for example, firefighters must rapidly determine the safety of their crew and equipment, and their ability to enter, safely turn around, and exit during a dangerous wildfire event. Empowered with this life-saving information, state and county planners can work together and guide community development outside of hazard zones.

Statewide Land Use Planning Goal 7, with supportive rule making, provides the process and the pathway for vital data and technical support resources to be distributed to our local governments. This will empower those local governments to implement meaningful planning solutions that reduce wildfire risk and prevent loss of property and life.

In time this will effectively help to reduce our statewide suppression costs.

2. Defensible Space



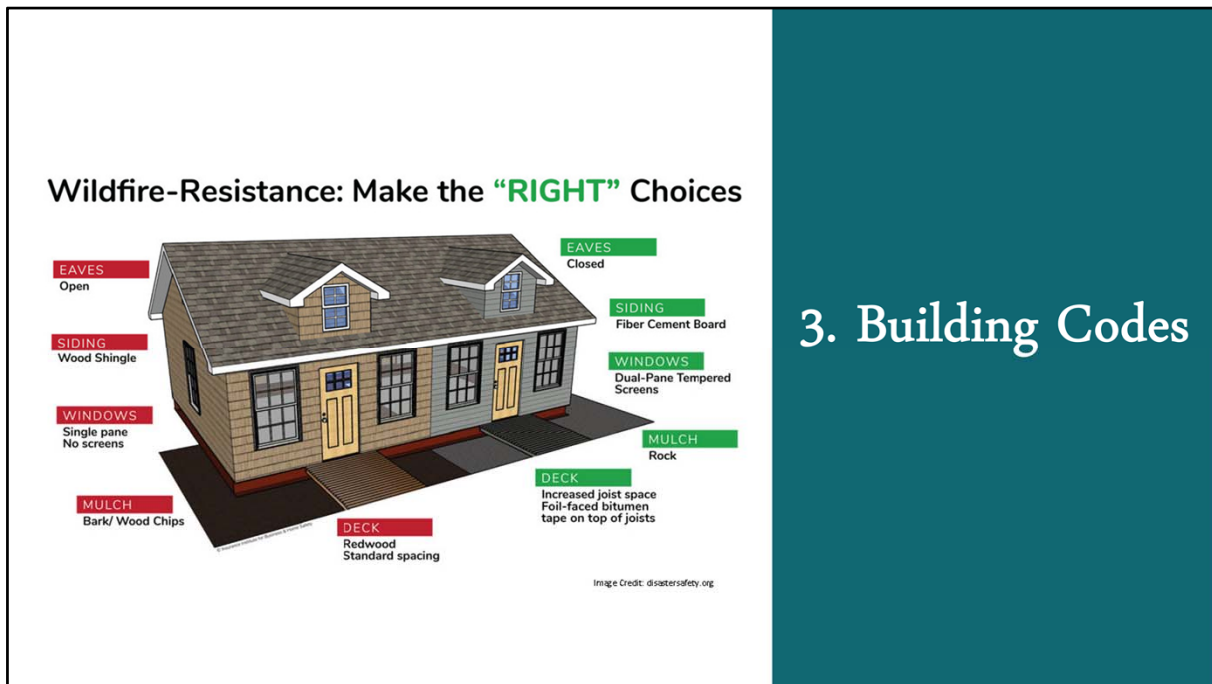
Second, where new development is appropriate, the most protective defensible space standards must be imposed.

The Wildfire Council has had access to the after-action reports from the most tragic fires in the West, we must learn from the fire science and take action now.

We must fully embrace and mandate the new international defensible space standards for all new construction in fire risk regions throughout Oregon.

By requiring the clearing of vegetation near properties, we can lessen the risk of wildfire, and protect structures.

For existing homes, the state must provide incentives to bring homes up to these protective standards.



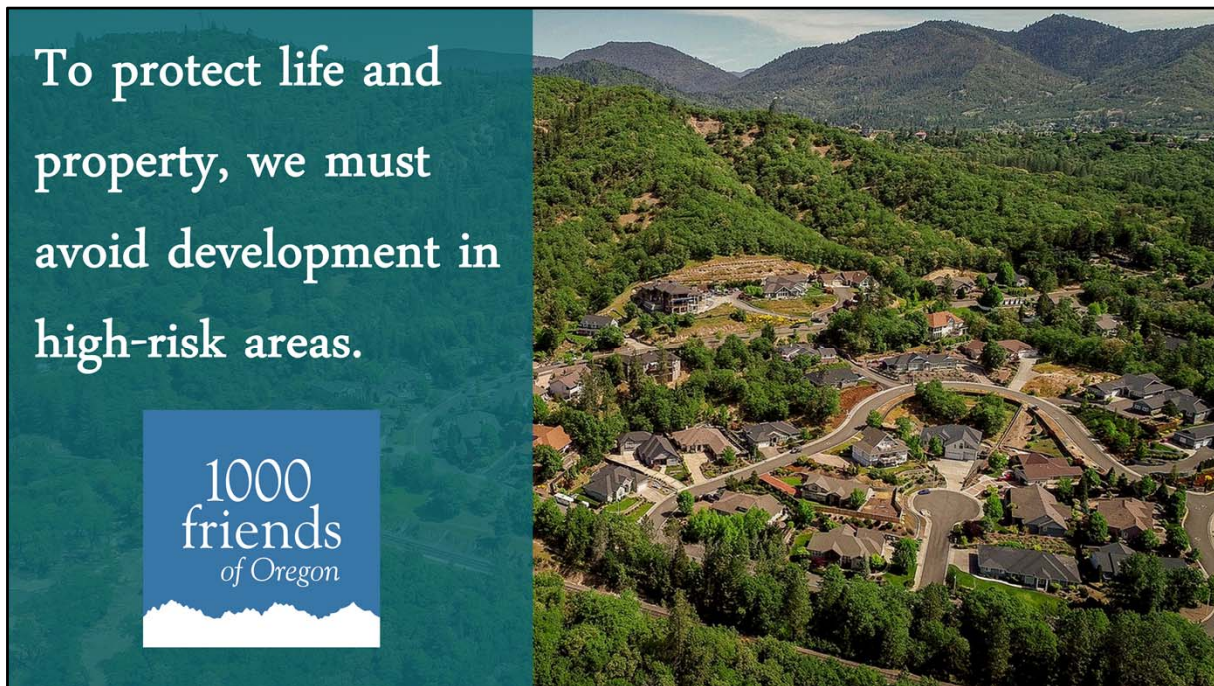
3. Building Codes

Third, the State needs to require new development to follow uniform building codes that protect our construction investments.

Oregon’s building codes division has taken to heart the lessons from the fires across the nation, and we join with them and recommends that Oregon implements the latest national home hardening standards.

We also recommend that all significant remodels meet these new highly-protective building standards.

Some on the council have suggested we implement a low-income building code incentive program for remodels.



In closing, Oregon's Land Use tools are the most cost-effective tool available to reduce risk of wildfire. Oregon must take courageous action now and use the full capacity of the land use system to minimize the risk to life and property.

If we are to reduce the financial exposure to the state (\$533 million in 2018 alone), we need to invest now, our communities and our firefighters are counting on all of us. According to a recent poll by FM3 research, 71% of Oregonians rank Wildfire as a top concern surpassing worries about healthcare and the economy for the first time ever.

So the question back to all of you – in the face of escalating risk of catastrophic fire and loss of life, and mounting annual suppression costs, should new development be kept out of the highest risk areas in the state.

As a forest health, and land use professional, I believe we must do all we can to avoid development in these high risk areas.

We welcome your leadership and guidance.