



# MEMORANDUM

EUGENE WATER & ELECTRIC BOARD

*Rely on us.*

TO: Commissioners Brown, Carlson, Barofsky, McRae and Schlossberg  
FROM: Tyler Nice, Electric Division Manager; Jeannine Parisi, Resiliency Program Manager  
DATE: April 20, 2022 (May 3, 2022, Board Meeting)  
SUBJECT: 2022 Wildfire Season Preparedness  
OBJECTIVE: Information

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## **Issue**

This is an informational update describing a number of activities to support operational readiness for the upcoming wildfire season.

## **Background**

Ongoing drought and more erratic weather patterns are some of the variables creating a more complex and dangerous landscape for wildfire in Oregon. EWEB is responding to these shifts by changing our operations, maintenance, and training practices, while developing a comprehensive approach that consolidates dispersed risk reduction and resiliency investments into a formal wildfire mitigation plan. EWEB contracted with a third-party consultant specializing in emergency planning, ICF, for technical support with key facets of the plan (e.g., high risk circuit analysis, Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) program readiness). Phase 1 of this planning effort is wrapping up. The latest draft of EWEB's wildfire mitigation plan will be presented to the Board on June 16.

## **Discussion**

Highlights of this year's wildfire season preparedness activities are described below.

### Operations and Maintenance

Annual right-of-way inspection and tree-trimming to maintain clearance between vegetation and electric equipment remains a priority activity, particularly in the more forested areas of our service territory. Vegetation management upriver and in the South Hills of Eugene is complete, and crews are focusing on in-town areas and cycle-buster routes.

As of last year, EWEB also began conducting visual patrols of the electric system in our higher fire risk areas for proactive maintenance. The 2021 inspections generated dozens of equipment repairs to improve safety and reliability. This year's patrols are now complete, resulting in a shorter list of proactive maintenance needs. For example, there were two-thirds fewer 'emergency' repairs and about twenty cross-arms (vs nearly 100) identified for replacement compared to last year.

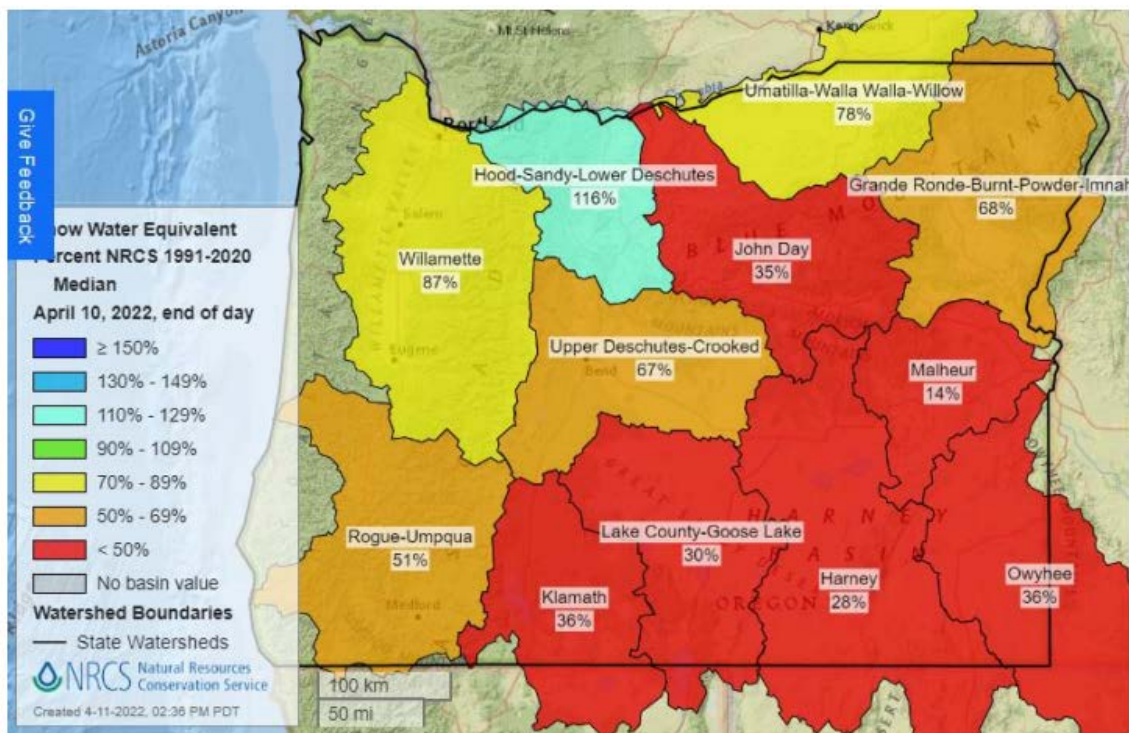
## Operational Response

Large, in-person safety trainings have been on pause due to COVID precautions. With restrictions lifting, a wildfire prevention and response refresher for field crews, with support from USFS staff, is in early planning stages for later this spring. Training topics may include fire weather forecasting, suppression tools and tactics, and notification/response protocols.

EWEB has established procedures to place parts of the electric system in 'protective settings' when weather conditions heighten fire danger, such as a Red Flag Warning. Refinements to these procedures to utilize the ICS-structure to improve operational readiness and front-end notifications, and to establish clear lines of responsibility should a related outage or fire occur, are under development. During these events, EWEB notifies the community through various communications channels to raise awareness of fire danger and the potential for increased outages.

## Public Engagement and Interagency Coordination

While April rain and mountain snow has come as some relief, the EWEB service territory is still in 'moderate drought'. According to the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) seasonal climate forecast, warmer than average conditions are expected in May and June with no significant changes to average precipitation, meaning little change in drought status is expected. The map below shows snowpack levels as of early April.



Courtesy of National Weather Service, Portland

As we move into warmer weather, community outreach to raise public awareness of wildfire potential and encourage customer participation in fire risk reduction activities will be ramping up. Following our inaugural campaign last year, this year's efforts include refreshing the 2021 wildfire communications plan and continuing to leverage social media to amplify partners' messaging as well as to share information about EWEB mitigation activities.

Lastly, coordination with interagency stakeholders, including local fire agencies, ODF and other utilities, is underway. Lane County Emergency Management hosted an event in early April for pre-season information sharing and staff are scheduling follow-up meetings to discuss our wildfire mitigation plan in more detail with key emergency response officials.

**Recommendation/Requested Board Action**

None at this time.