



Jackson Soil & Water Conservation District
89 Alder Street Central Point OR 97502
Telephone: 541-423-6159 Fax: 541-727-7471
www.jswcd.org

Almeda & Obenchain Wildfire Response Summary

Fire Summary

The Almeda and South Obenchain fires were fed by high winds, excessively dry conditions, and high seasonal temperatures. Emergency response resources were pushed to their limits and thousands of residents were forced to evacuate with short notice and little choice with where to go to with multiple road closures and active fires in the region.

Almeda, 9/8-9/14: The Almeda Fire started in the late morning of Tuesday, September 8 as a rapidly-moving grass fire in south Ashland, OR. The fire ignited in an empty field adjacent to residential neighborhoods and the Bear Creek Greenway, a 20+ mile long paved walking and bike path that runs from Ashland to Central Point, OR. With Armenian blackberry as the primary dry fuel along this corridor, the fire burned hot and fast. In under three hours, the fire had traveled approximately five miles from its ignition source to the next downstream town of Talent. By the end of the day, the fire ripped through roughly half of the area of Talent, three-quarters of neighboring town, Phoenix, and was pushing into south Medford. Thousands of residents lost their homes, with over 80% of the Phoenix-Talent School Districts' students losing their homes to the flames.

South Obenchain, 9/8-10/3: The South Obenchain fire ignited mid-afternoon on Tuesday, September 8, five miles east of Eagle Point, OR. The fire was carried rapidly with high winds through various fuel sources, including timber (conifer & oak), logging slash, brush, and dryland pastures. For nearly a month, the fire smoldered and flared in the hilly, ridgeline-laced terrain between Eagle Point, Butte Falls, and Shady Cove, OR. Minimal damage, as compared to the Almeda fire, occurred to residences and structures, however thousands of dollars' worth of loss and damage occurred to agriculture infrastructure including fences, irrigation pipe and hose, and dryland pastures.

By the Numbers

Almeda Damages

- **3,000+ structures lost**
- **3,200 acres burned**

South Obenchain Damages

- **Almost 90 structures lost**
- **32,671 acres burned**

How We're Helping

- **\$79,601.64** in District Funds earmarked for Wildfire Recovery efforts
- As of December 7, 2020, **43 properties assessed**, equivalent to **3,165 acres**
- **80 tax-lots (5,000 acres)** requesting site visits
- **516 straw bales** purchased for distributing to landowners who have initiated a cooperators' agreement for erosion control & prevention
- **7,500 pounds of seed** purchased for dryland pasture recovery, erosion control, & wildlife habitat improvement

Technical Assistance

Site Assessments: Field staff have been working overtime to meet the needs of landowners impacted by both fires. Primary concerns are erosion risk & control, vegetation & forestry impacts/assessment & re-seeding, and water quality impacts (see APPENDIX A for a site visit summary, identifying information has been removed).

Field staff worked closely with partners, primarily Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife, other SWCDs, and seed company, Ioka, to select appropriate species for our region and conditions. A custom dryland pasture mix was developed for our efforts (Table 1 & 2).

Table 1. Species and percent present in wildfire recovery seed mix., This seed mix is designed to stabilize soils to reduce erosion and provide wildlife forage.

Wildfire Recovery Seed Mix

Species	% of Mix
<i>Forage Tall Fescue</i>	43
<i>Crimson Clover</i>	22
<i>Choice Chicory</i>	7
<i>Tonic Plantain</i>	7
<i>Hunter-Leaf Turnip</i>	7
<i>Winfred Brassica</i>	7
<i>Ethiopian Cabbage</i>	7

Table 2. Species and percent present in our custom dryland pasture recovery seed mix. These species will stabilize soil and maintain productivity in dry conditions typical to our summers.

Dryland Pasture Seed Mix

Species	% of Mix
<i>Forage Tall Fescue</i>	25
<i>Tetraploid Annual Ryegrass</i>	18
<i>Hallmark Orchardgrass</i>	14
<i>Carlton Smooth Brome</i>	14
<i>Dalkeith Sub Clover</i>	8
<i>Intermediate Wheatgrass</i>	6
<i>Persian Clover</i>	5
<i>Crimson Clover</i>	5
<i>Vavilov II Wheatgrass</i>	3
<i>Alkar Tall Wheatgrass</i>	2

Moving Forward

The effects of the Alameda and Obenchain fires will be felt for years to come in our communities. Our District intends to be there to support our residents and partners in natural resource conservation and restoration through the process of recovery.

Much of our county lies within fire-dependent ecosystems, comprised of remnant oak savanna, Douglas-fir woodlands, and ponderosa pine parklands. Much of the historic fire regime of these systems are drastically altered, so much so, that there is debate as to which is the appropriate fire return interval—every 5 or 20 years?

Through experience our partners and communities are seeing the value of better understanding the role of fire on the landscape. Future projects are already unfolding which will encompass whole forest management, landscape-scale studies—some including prescribed burns, and better preparedness for fire throughout our communities. These projects will bring together large landowners, state agencies, and local non-profits to do great, important work.

"...And like beavers, fire is bit of an unknown—it doesn't always behave as we'd like it to; it requires a certain level of humility, flexibility."-Lenya Quinn-Davidson *If fire were an animal, it would be a beaver. FAC Blog.*