



ECLIPSE REPORT



Pacific Northwest Fire Prevention Education Teams | August 28, 2017



For the past year, federal and state agencies and land managers in Oregon have been preparing for the 2017 solar eclipse. This event was expected at the peak of Oregon's wildfire season, bringing an estimated one million visitors to the state during August's hot, dry and unstable conditions. Fire managers expressed concerns about conditions that are hard to quantify and hazards that are difficult to calculate. This theme continued through various stages of planning and preparedness, as it's difficult to quantify numbers for such an unprecedented event.

In the weeks and days before the event, indicators suggested that worst-case scenarios were imminent. Oregon was expecting most visitors in the narrow 70-mile strip of the path of totality, in rural towns and counties that lacked the infrastructure to support large scale emergencies, as well as the capacity to host the amount of expected visitors. The state was already experiencing several large lightning-caused wildfires with evacuations with highway and area closures in effect. Emergency services personnel expressed concerns about potential ignitions and fast moving fires in areas with many eclipse visitors. The logistical complexity to evacuate and account for the public, and transport fire responders quickly to fires during times with high traffic congestion added to these concerns.

The Whitewater Fire near Mt. Jefferson closed miles of trails, including 30 miles of Pacific Crest Trail and hundreds of acres of forest and wilderness, potentially pushing more visitors to central and eastern Oregon each time the area and road closures increased. In the southern portion of the state, the Chetco Bar Fire was doubling and tripling in size the days before the eclipse, one day making a five-mile run towards the coastal town of Brookings. On August 12th, the Pacific Northwest Region went into Preparedness Level 5 and campfire restrictions were in place across the state at this time.

Interagency personnel prepared fire prevention messages, and included the "Know Before You Go" and "Leave No Trace" campaigns. Multi-agency efforts focused on preparing as much as possible, yet understanding that the variety of human and environmental factors could not ever be fully taken into account. As the eclipse event drew near, fuel shortages were reported in central and eastern Oregon and traffic was backed up for 50 miles in parts of central Oregon.

Following the event, the Pacific Northwest remains at the top of the National Situation Report. The PNW is now managing the nation's highest priority incident, the Chetco Bar Fire, now categorized as a megafire, with 100,000+ acres consumed. The town of Brookings and adjacent lands have experienced level 1, 2, and 3 evacuations all at once.

As visitors continue to leave the state, indications are that fire prevention and education efforts were a success. No worst-case scenarios played out. Land management agencies report that overall, human impacts were less than expected. Finally, perhaps the best unit of measurement: no known human caused ignitions evolved into any fires of significance. The following report gives a more detailed picture about the planning and preparation that went into addressing the Oregon Eclipse Fire Prevention Education effort.

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One of the most notable successes was in fire prevention with no known human caused incidents evolving into any fires of significance.
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Portland National Incident Management Organization, August 23, 2017



2017 Oregon Fire Prevention: Cooperation and Early Preparedness



Graphics, materials, and translations



The Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group's Communication Investigation Prevention Committee (PNWCG CPIC) began work in 2016 on interagency wildfire prevention campaigns and shared messages focused on the anticipated 1,000,000 visitors to witness Oregon's Total Solar Eclipse. All PNWCG partners shared concern for human-caused wildfires at the peak of wildfire season. The committee agreed to a 2017 summer schedule of PNWCG CPIC press releases with key messages targeting specific fire causes. The group continued work on shared messages and partnerships leading up to Wildfire Preparedness Month in May, the summer recreation season, and various eclipse-related topics, such as coordinated fire restrictions.

In February, public affairs staff from three national forests in eastern Oregon contacted the State Office/Regional Office (SORO) requesting Fire Prevention Education Teams (FPETs) to help prepare prevention materials and conduct eclipse outreach. Soon after, other units began to inquire about hosting an FPET for the eclipse. Based on these initial requests, SORO's Fire Mitigation Education Specialist began to develop a seasonal FPET strategy. The goals included pre-planning for the eclipse event to support and mitigate anticipated issues stemming from high visitor numbers and expected human-caused wildfires, developing materials and distribution/outreach strategies, and providing for oversight and prevention support to field units during the eclipse event.

In June, a five person Fire Prevention Education Team assembled in Bend and worked for two weeks to refine this strategy. The team developed a communication plan with key wildfire concerns, messages, and strategies. It created an eclipse logo with internationally recognized Smokey Bear to unite the wildfire prevention message across all agencies and organizations. Team members engaged various field-going personnel and partners in brainstorming prevention education products and additional messages. It established criteria to filter funding and development priorities, and designed and ordered products through the Government Publishing Office (GPO). This included prevention education products targeting specific human fire causes, user groups and customers. The team also reviewed electronic resources on the SORO fire prevention FTP site, and created additional electronic prevention education resources for local adaptation in 2017, including more Spanish translations. A social media campaign was designed with graphics and seasonal messages and scheduled for the PNWFAC Twitter account. Work was done with field units requesting FPETs to begin draft delegations of authority, and to coordinate on team logistics and focus areas. The June team also worked with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and the Regional Prevention Coordinator for the Bureau of Indian Affairs to support shared prevention graphics and messages and on preparing for a BIA-sponsored FPET at Warm Springs.

In the month before the eclipse, a short team worked with the GPO team in SORO to amend, finalize and submit additional product orders, coordinate delivery and plan for dissemination of products. The short team coordinated logistics: travel, hotels and housing, particularly during the limited availability of accommodations on the days before and after the eclipse. Field FPET preparation also included work to finalize in-briefing dates, submitting resource orders, assembling welcome packets, and coordinating the allocation and transportation of numerous products. The field teams received their first batch of products that included table tents, rack cards, patrol cards, road signs, large and small banners, wooden trading coins, and stickers. As other products trickled in, the teams received 'no fire' campfire pin-flags, trash bags with fire prevention messaging, and bumper stickers. Products were distributed equitably among the teams, and shared with our cooperating Warm Springs team.



Public Service Announcements in Spanish

In addition to the field teams, a Fire Prevention Education Team (FPET) was deployed in Portland to support the three field Fire Prevention Education Teams in NE Oregon, Central Oregon and NW Oregon. The Portland FPET (PDX FPET) coordinated product delivery locally to the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, Mt. Hood National Forest, the State Office/Regional Office (SORO), and the National Incident Management Organization (NIMO) team coordinating Eclipse efforts. The Northwest Coordination Center (NWCC), Multiagency Command (MAC) also received product samples at this time. In addition to the products ordered, supplementary fire prevention materials were available for local customization through the FTP website. These products were used by the Washington Office and sent out through the Regional Prevention Coordinator List.

Additional requests were received from the Washington Office to expand the eclipse fire prevention campaign. The PDX FPET created adaptations based on the original Oregon eclipse logos for 12 states within the path of totality. These products were updated to include the USFS and USDA logos for broader application.

As a final product, the PDX FPET revised and updated a set of 10 sage grouse educational trading cards to incorporate changes recommended by the USFS Regional Wildlife Ecologist. The changes include updated, high-resolution images, secured with permission from the Oregon Flora Project. The team edited the wording on the text to match age appropriate fire prevention messaging.

The team supported the region by providing Spanish translations for daily briefings and press releases for fires in Oregon and Washington. The FPET collaborated with the Region 6 Fire PAO to produce Public Service Announcements (PSAs) explaining evacuation levels in Spanish. These PSAs were distributed via a link on the InciWeb homepage, and to Incident Management Teams (IMTs), through a PAO and PIO mailing list. The full repertoire includes a three-minute video, a condensed 60 second audio file, accompanying scripts, and formatted text documents for print. The full scope of PSA related products can be found here: http://ftp.nifc.gov/incident_specific_data/pacific_nw/!SORO/Prevention/Bilingual_Materials/2017_Spanish_PSA_Soto/

Capacity building in the Pacific Northwest



In 2014, the fire season in the Pacific Northwest was precedent-setting, as established by record weather and persistent fire occurrence in early spring. Fire Prevention Education Teams were deployed almost continuously through September. The demand for teams revealed a clear and persistent shortage of qualified and available Fire Prevention Education Team Leaders, Team Members and Public Information Officers within the Pacific Northwest. A capacity-building strategy was prepared outlining the needs and mitigation measures. As a result, in 2015 and 2016, Fire Prevention Education Team Member (P-310) courses were taught on a virtual course delivery platform, with locations in Tucson and Boise, each including pods in seven western states. The Pacific Northwest and Alaska contributed cadre, pod locations and students. In addition to this formal training, enhanced recruitment efforts were made to bring in talent by referral and interest in the FPET program through networking, at conferences and workshops, and assignments to other regions, such as the extensive deployment of FPETS in the fall of 2016 to the Southern Region. As a result of these efforts, two PNW/AK employees attended Team Leader training in the fall of 2014, and 22 employees completed Team Member Training. The Pacific Northwest has offered significant team training opportunities, deploying seven FPETs each in 2014 and 2015, three FPETs in 2016 and six in 2017, including the team hosted by the Warm Springs Reservation.

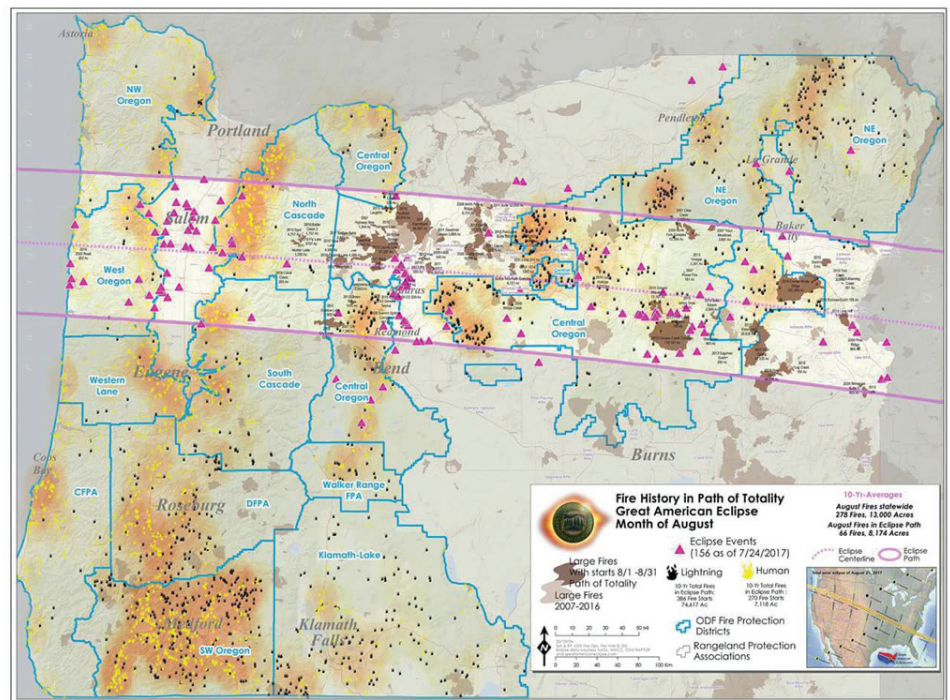
2017 Pacific Northwest Fire Season



Leading up to the August 21 Solar Eclipse, the Pacific Northwest experienced extreme fire danger indices and record temperatures. Lightning storms moved through the area the week prior, igniting several fires in Oregon and Washington. Beginning with one of the earliest fires west of Mt Jefferson, a location expected to see at least one group of 1,000 hikers, agencies began to receive inquiries from potential visitors concerned that the smoke would 'still be there' during the Eclipse. Many of these fires continued to grow into project fires, with residents and visitors heavily impacted by smoke, highway closures and evacuations in the days just prior to August 21.

As fire danger escalated, land managers implemented public use restrictions limiting campfires, smoking, off-road vehicle use, etc. Industrial regulations were advanced as well, closing down most operations without specific waivers limiting use to certain times of day, and with extra precautions. By August 15, campfires were banned in nearly all of Oregon's federally and state-protected wildlands. Because of the media attention related to these wildfires, meteorology predictions about visibility, the resultant smoke, and risk of wildfire, the actual Eclipse visitation was reduced.

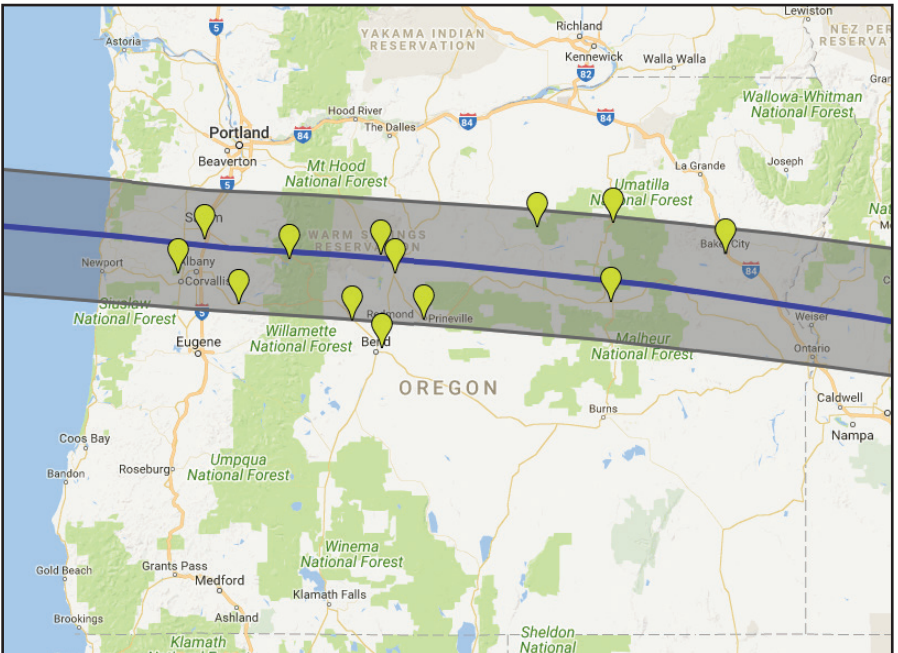
Beginning on August 19th, the crowds began to move to planned events, the largest of which was expecting 30,000 participants. Over 70,000 actually arrived. Other areas such as portions of the Coast and Northeast Oregon received less than expected visitation, with crowds shifting to other areas.



Fire Prevention Education Team Highlights



The three field teams were made up of 16 people total, tasked with implementing fire prevention messaging in and across nine national forests, grasslands, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and state protected lands in and near the path of totality. In the western part of the state, one team worked for the Willamette National Forest, Siuslaw National Forest, and the Northwest Oregon BLM District. In central Oregon, a team worked for the Deschutes National Forest, the Ochoco National Forest, and Prineville BLM District. Finally, in northeast Oregon, a team served the Malheur National Forest, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, and the Umatilla National Forest. The Warm Spring Reservation also hosted an FPET. The field teams focused on providing information along roads and gateways into the path of totality. They targeted messaging along roadsides, information portals and info stations, at events and public gathering places, and in and near campfire pits. By the time the teams demobilized, they had made 14,839 public contacts in 591 distinct locations and covered thousands of miles of Oregon roads.



Fire Prevention Education Team locations



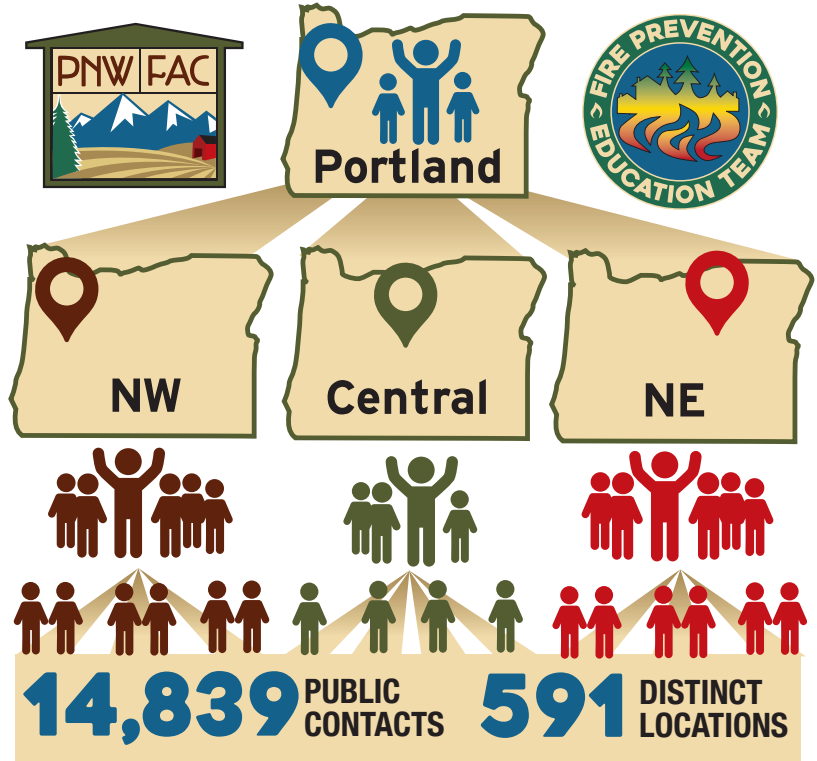
Fire Prevention Education Team Highlights



Photo by Mark Stone/University of Washington

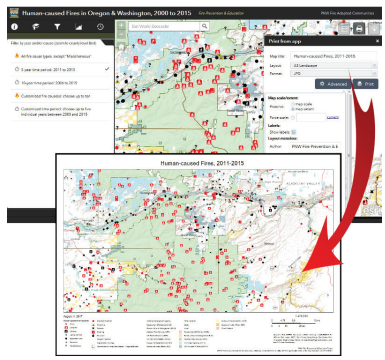


Memorable events included numerous county fairs, and local events. At Warm Springs, the prevention education team, along with Smokey Bear, sponsored a prevention booth at a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Program for Youth from thirteen tribes including a project to launch and track giant weather balloons containing sensors and carrying culturally significant items. This was the largest effort involving Native American tribes during the eclipse. The program’s goal was to bring STEM-related (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) topics to students in culturally relevant ways.



Oregon/Washington human-caused fire website

Following three seasons of informally accessing data provided through the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station to provide incoming FPETs with interagency human fire-cause data, the SORO Fire Mitigation and Education Specialist worked with Forest Service Region 6 Data Resource Management staff to develop an application for Oregon and Washington for prevention personnel and interagency partners to access and work together to address common human wildfire causes. This application is in “beta testing.” Incoming FPETs were asked to provide their feedback on the application. It follows:



The NW Oregon Team conducted beta-testing of the “Human Caused Fire Activity Application for Oregon and Washington, 2000-2015.” Initial observations include a strong correlation between the priority coverage areas and human-caused fire history. Their findings re-assured the team their efforts were concentrated in the appropriate area. The team continued to work with the application during their assignment. The Portland Team experienced difficulties opening the web addresses on an Apple Ipad. After numerous tries with the web address provided, it would not open on the device. The NE Oregon Team tested the website and was unable to get in when the long link was typed into the browser. The tester backed the web address up to the webappviewer ending and was able to open the site and look at the options. The zoom in/out feature worked well, the view could be changed and the site located the team. Other features were not available. Testing and modification on this application will continue.