



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION



WSU WILDFIRE RESPONSE

BY THE NUMBERS

- 1,541 fires burned across 1.1 million acres in Washington.
- 25 fires required state fire mobilization.
- The Washington Emergency Operations Center was activated for 43 days.
- 12 fire management assistance grants were approved.
- Washington fires resulted in a Presidential Emergency Declaration and a Presidential Disaster Declaration.
- Extension leadership provided the initial funding to support development of 2 support teams.

2016

ISSUE

During the summer of 2015 more than 1,541 fires burned in excess of 1.1 million acres across Washington. Tribal and county leaders were scrambling to meet the needs of their community members during this crisis and many looked first to our WSU Extension Tribal Office and County Directors for advice and assistance in responding to the many challenges created by the wildfires.

RESPONSE

In August 2015, WSU Extension leadership created an Extension Wildfire Response and Recovery Team. Efforts of the team focused first on supporting Extension County and Tribal Office Directors and their efforts in northeast and north central Washington, as they were in the midst of helping their communities respond to fire-related issues. County and Tribal Extension personnel were called to help their county leaders deal with a myriad of situations from assisting in managing a shelter in a local school, to helping get ahold of the best information available for dealing with fire- and smoke-exposed livestock.

Based on the success of the WSU team developed in 2014 to assist with recovery after the mudslide, Extension leadership relied on Division of Government Studies and Services' Office of Emergency Management to help coordinate WSU expertise in support of response, incident recovery, and long-term recovery. That team not only provided coordination and access to resources, but also set out to enhance WSU Extension's future readiness across Washington once they were able to successfully assist in managing immediate issues caused by the wildfires.

The original team has now been converted to two teams. One team is looking specifically at continued participation in long-term recovery, while the other team is focused on positioning Extension more strategically to support future disaster engagement. The teams continue to work toward enhanced capacity for emergency response and continuity of local Extension operations, and will continue working to bring university resources to bear on what promises to be a recurring problem for the foreseeable future.



QUOTES

“In 2015, the Carpenter Road fire destroyed 63,972 acres in Stevens County and on the Spokane Indian Tribe Reservation. As the confusion grew, Extension relied on our faculty and research colleagues across the WSU system to find answers and solutions as they were coming in the door. For example, as they were dropping retardant on blazing fires, we were scrambling to determine the impact on livestock and drinking water. Working together after the fire has created an additional team spirit to prepare better as we plan for future disasters.” - *Debra Hansen, director, Stevens County Extension*

“During the 2015 wildfire season in Ferry County, WSU’s Office of Emergency Management at DGSS provided support in several needed areas including: advice on donation support, communication liaison support with state and federal agencies, advice and support regarding local schools and Red Cross sheltering, and provision of resource materials on Emergency Support Function and through the Extension Disaster Education Network.” - *Trevor Lane, Director, Ferry County Extension*

IMPACTS

- The 2015 wild fire season was a record for Washington and for WSU. At least five county directors and our Colville Tribal Office personnel were actively engaged.
- The fires provided critical learning opportunities at the county level and for Extension at the central level.
- A [Wildfire Recovery website](#) was created through the work of the teams. The website provided up-to-date information on the fires and provides a wealth of resources to WSU’s Tribal Office and County Extension Offices.