

TO: Governor Kate Brown
CC: Jason Lewis-Berry and Jason Miner
FROM: The Chetco Bar Fire Recovery Council
DATE: November 22, 2017
RE: Initial Findings of Needs & Impacts from Chetco Bar Fire

The Charter of the Chetco Bar Fire Recovery Council directs it to advise Regional Solutions in deploying current state resources and apprise you, Governor, of needs unmet by current resources. The memo below enumerates emerging needs in the areas of natural resource, business and economic recovery. We commend the work of state agencies in deploying current resources, and thank you for both your support in responding to the fire itself and your continued focus on this effort.

The Council respectfully requests that its charter be extended for two years, in order to meet quarterly, monitor progress, and continue to identify emerging needs.

Economic Impact

Data on the immediate economic impact of the fire is somewhat inconsistent. Employment Department analysis suggests as few as 10 jobs (looking at total aggregate employment, based on a sample) were lost due to the fire in Curry County. The impact was more pronounced, according to the data, in Josephine County—about 100 jobs lost. However, based on the anecdotal information collected to date, that estimate for Curry County appears to be far too low. Over twenty businesses have expressed interest in disaster recovery lending from SBA and report much more significant job losses (an average of 2-3 across those companies reporting impacts). Impacted businesses include leisure and hospitality, but also a variety of personal services providers and retail; impacts were primarily lost revenues due to lower visitation and lower economic activity. This very likely translates to hundreds of lost jobs in the relatively small local Brookings economy. The impact varied between several businesses that were essentially shut down for three to four weeks to those losing 40-60% of typical revenues for the peak impact month.

Working capital: The clear and short-term unmet need is for greater working capital for businesses to stabilize their operations headed into a slow season, especially for tourism and travel-related industries. Thanks to your request, the Small Business Administration has activated the Emergency Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program for Curry, Coos, and Josephine counties. However, the EIDL program is of limited usefulness to some businesses.

Recommendation:

- 1) Make economic development funds available as soon as possible to guarantee or **buy down interest rates** for businesses that need to borrow to survive. The council recommends seeking this funding in the most expedient possible fashion. Most of the businesses impacted were fairly small, but important to the economies of their communities. Several are significantly larger, however, and are key drivers of visitation—such as Jerry’s Jet Boats and Hellgate Jet Boat operators, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. **Request: \$250,000.** The Council is interested to provide input and assistance in the selection of recipients.
- 2) The Council supports Business Oregon’s consideration of a **new state emergency disaster relief** program that would include a low-interest loan product for businesses impacted by disasters. However, the greatest need for businesses impacted by the Chetco Bar Fire is immediate.

- 3) The Council supports the effort by **Oregon Shakespeare Festival** to develop a long-range strategy for addressing fire impacts (proposal is attached).

Laying a foundation for long-term recovery: In the long term, the fire has destroyed millions of dollars of both privately and publically owned merchantable timber. This is a significant lost asset. In combination with the challenges the local fishery has been facing, the economic base of south Curry County is threatened. City of Brookings has submitted a grant request for \$60,000 to US Economic Development Administration for funding to complete a comprehensive assessment of economic impact and lay the groundwork for an updated regional economic development strategy. The City has requested funds, also, from the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD) for this work. Staff support is needed to assist with stakeholder involvement and administration of the effort.

Recommendation:

- 1) The **Council requests \$65,000** to contribute to an **economic impact analysis**. (If the City's Technical Assistance grant request to DLCD is successful, this amount could be reduced to \$25,000. In that case, all funds would be devoted to helping fund a staff position, likely with South Coast Development Council, to support this effort.

Natural Resources & Infrastructure Impacts

The Chetco Bar Fire has had major impacts across the landscape. According to the USFS Burned Area Emergency Response, there was a relatively smaller area with high soil burn severity:

- 10,700 acres of high soil burn severity of 170,000 total USFS acres burned
- 1,200 acres of high soil burn severity of 6,700 acres of BLM land burned
- 2,100 acres of 14,000 acres of private lands burned.

This will pose a significantly increased threat of soil erosion, debris flows, landslides and higher sedimentation for years to come. City of Brookings has received \$30,000 grant from IFA to help evaluate what are the potential negative impacts on the City's (and Harbor's) drinking water.

USFS and BLM activities will focus primarily on culvert replacements, invasive treatment, and danger tree removal. Some direct seeding/soil erosion control efforts are only being pursued to protect sensitive cultural resources. USFS has indicated interest in issuing salvage sales in some portion of the burned area. BLM has contracted with South Coast Lumber to conduct road patrols to identify emerging hazards, blocked culverts, etc., in the BLM land area. BLM is planning 370 acres of tree planting in the Bravo Creek drainage. Seedling supply will be a major constraint on replanting efforts.

Recommendations:

- 1) **Salvage sales**, if well-designed, can have positive economic effects (through employment driven by both logging operations and increased timber supply) and contribute funds to resource recovery. The Council encourages USFS (and BLM) to structure such sales to fund restoration projects. The Council requests that the State of Oregon consider use of "Good Neighbor Authority" to provide the USFS staff resources to assist with salvage sale preparations. USFS is considering salvage within 13,000 acres of USFS matrix lands (i.e., outside Late Successional Reserve areas) that were severely burned in addition to danger tree removal along roads. These efforts can provide revenues for additional landscape restoration projects and potentially reduce future fire impacts within the urban/wildland interface so close to the Brookings community. The Council is also in favor of USFS considering expanding the "buffer zone" of road-side danger removal as an additional salvage effort.

- 2) **Riparian restoration.** Please encourage OWEB to prioritize applications for projects to do riparian plantings to reduce future down-cutting and stabilize banks. In addition, mitigation for fish habitat is needed. There are excellent opportunities for water-quality and fish passage improvements outside of burn area; several are already in design. Community organizations lack the needed capacity for project development & design. Funding request: please consider identifying funds that could add capacity for local organizations, such as the Curry Watersheds Partnership, to rapidly advance project design to meet 2018 OWEB applications deadlines. **Request: \$65,000.**
- 3) The State should encourage local landowners to leave wood in place in streams.
- 4) Please encourage Oregon Department of Forestry to assign an **additional ODF stewardship forester** to assist with issue/opportunity identification and technical assistance for local landowners.
- 5) Studying and understanding the effects of the Chetco Bar Fire is a tremendous opportunity to engage students, community members, and visitors to the region in understanding the process of natural regeneration and recovery that takes place in the wake of fire. The Council believes scientific research and more advanced forestry practices represent a viable opportunity for future economic development, and to that end, engaging youth is a critical component of building that future workforce. The Council **requests support of \$75,000** to fund **citizen-science** study of impact of fire and sedimentation on salmonid populations. The Council recognizes that the Oregon Resources Research Education Center (ORREC) as an ideal partner. This effort would include development of “volun-tourism” opportunities.
- 6) Provide ODFW with funds to cooperate with this effort of Chetco Bar Fire impacts by completing **juvenile steelhead surveys** in the Chetco River watershed. **Request \$50,000** to fund a three person crew to conduct the survey (the last one was completed over 15 years ago) and develop a well-developed report.
- 7) Landslide, debris flow, flooding protection/mitigation. The Council requests funding to the Curry County Road Department in the amount of **\$60,000** to help pay for **storm patrol** (monitoring) and necessary cleaning, and minor repair of culverts, drainage swales, bridges and roadways on both public and private lands. It is estimated that the 3 year additional labor and materials for addressing flooding and erosion, resulting from the Chetco Bar Fire, to be more than 850 labor hours and \$35,000 in materials. These figures assume that no major roadway or bridge failures occur as a result of additional erosion. Should Curry County experience any significant failures, substantially greater funding support would be required—see sub-point 8 below.
- 8) Please direct Office of Emergency Management to continue to track the impacts of landslides and debris flows on road, port and other infrastructure and **continue to evaluate potential for federal disaster declaration.** Port of Brookings is very likely to need the use of the state dredge in coming years to deal with expected higher sedimentation.

Tourism & Recreation

Tourism is a major driver of the local and regional economy—and a critical component of future economic development. The industry suffered from immediate impacts in terms of reduced visitation in 2017, but also faces significant uncertainty regarding the natural recreational assets that are a key driver for visitation.

The USFS has opened access to several river bars—key boat launches to allow recreational fisherman and guides access to the river. Members of the community remain very concerned that USFS could be overly cautious in restricting access for recreation.

Siskiyou Mountain Club has mapped the fire in comparison to priority trails. A very high level of effort is going to be required in the middle-term (i.e., years 3-8 after the fire) to maintain trails. The burned areas will have heavy brush growth impinging on trails and there will be significantly higher numbers of trees falling and blocking the trails. These needs will not peak for several years.

Recommendations:

- 1) The Council requests that the State of Oregon remain in close communication with the USFS regarding **recreational access** in the burned areas. Please thank USFS for restoring access to Nook Bar (and Redwood Bar and South Fork Boat Launch) quickly, and request that they continue to open access as soon as feasible. Request USFS provide public up-to-date mapping of what is closed vs. open. The interests of residents and potential visitors should be an important consideration in decisions that must, of course, balance safety concerns with other values.
- 2) The Council appreciates the efforts by **Travel Oregon and Oregon Coast Visitors Association** in their development of a cooperative marketing effort for a winter campaign to bring visitors to the coast.
- 3) The Council encourages all of the jurisdictions of South Curry County to re-convene and recommit to the common use of the **Wild Rivers Coast brand**. The Council **requests \$50,000** to provide micro-grants to local businesses to implement complementary marketing campaigns and to support greater cooperative marketing.
- 4) Siskiyou Mountain Club has been coordinating with the US Forest Service regarding recovery on trails impacted by the 2017 Chetco Bar Fire. BAER funds will pay for immediate safety issues, but will not address the efforts needed to re-open recreational trails to the public. USFS and Siskiyou Mountain Club are in strong agreement that the best remediation would be to hire a small crew of experienced trail professionals to work next year on projects that
 - maintain public access to trails
 - reduce erosion and sedimentation in salmon bearing streams
 - fortify trails against future damage.

The Council **requests \$148,000** to fund a trail crew to work for the season. Funding can also support intern and volunteer work. Funding should be made available to both Siskiyou Mountain Club and Curry Citizens for Public Lands Access for on-the-ground activities.

Ocean Salmon Closures

The Chetco Bar Fire came on the heels of the announcement of the closure of the fall ocean chinook season—and additional bottom fish closures. The fire and any associated degradation of fresh-water salmon habitat, while concerning, is unlikely to have any impact on future ocean closures. (Chinook from the Klamath and Sacramento River systems dominate the overall population.)

Recommendation:

- 1) Oregon Employment Department, Business Oregon, and other social service agencies should form a rapid response team capable of mobilizing additional resources in the case of future closures.

Future Fire Preparedness

The Council, of course, encourages efforts by the State of Oregon (and federal and local partners) to take all appropriate steps to reduce and mitigate future fire danger. Business owners and other community members most commonly responded to questions about mitigation of the impacts of this past fire season by expressing great concern about next fire season, and the next, and into the future. While mitigation and prevention of future fires was not the Council's focus, two items did rise up for consideration.

Recommendation:

- 1) The Council recommends a task force be established—perhaps with Oregon Health Authority and Oregon Emergency Management—to develop recommendations for establishment of **air quality shelters** and/or methods to assist health care facilities with mitigating indoor air pollution from very severe fire impacts.
- 2) The Council recognizes the value of **biomass** utilization as an element of forest management and fire prevention going forward. Elements of this concept include reduction of vegetative fuels on both public and private lands, harvesting and conversion of those fuels for utilization in energy production, and working with power and local lumber production to develop electric generation facilities that would utilize these fuels.

Oregon Shakespeare Festival: Smoke and Wildfire Recovery Effort

Date: Tuesday, November 21, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered for support by the Chetco Bar Fire Recovery Council. Founded by Angus Bowmer in 1935 and winner of numerous national awards for outstanding achievement in American theatre, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival presents an eight-month season of 11 plays that include a mix of classics, musicals, and new works. The Festival draws attendance of more than 400,000 to almost 800 performances every year and provides nearly 600 jobs. Eighty five percent of our audience is made up of non-Rogue Valley residents. By the most conservative estimates, OSF generates more than \$130 million for southern Oregon's economy.

As most of you experienced first-hand, southern Oregon was hit hard by smoke from wildfires in late August and early September, resulting in nine smoke-related show cancellations - the most in the Festival's history. We estimate total financial losses due to the smoke will exceed \$600,000. On top of this, the rising belief that smoke could become southern Oregon's "new normal," threatens to diminish future audiences, especially those who make OSF an annual vacation destination.

In budgeting for the 2018 season, we have been forced to build the risk of smoke and wildfires into our forecast, reducing our ticket sales projection by \$450,000. The impact will spread far beyond OSF's campus to impact numerous other local business sectors including hotels, restaurants, real estate and consumer goods.

It's become evident that the festival must earnestly and proactively employ immediate solutions to improve the situation while also advancing bold long-term strategies including replacing its outdoor Elizabethan theatre with a new theatre with a retractable roof so that we will no longer have to cancel performances.

With these goals in mind, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival is preparing a proposal for \$185,000 from the Chetco Bar Fire Recovery Council to support work in the two areas we think could make a big difference in our ability to plan and adapt to this new smoke reality. First, a planning study that would look both at the economic impact of OSF and the outdoor theatre on Southern Oregon. And, secondly, we would like to invest in ways to protect our indoor environments to ensure we can keep our indoor theaters inviting and healthy for company members and audiences even if we encounter another summer like this past one.

We believe our smoke recovery efforts are consistent with the interests of Chetco Bar Fire Recovery Council and the citizens of Oregon, and hope that you will find it in your hearts and budget to support our request. If I can provide additional information to encourage consideration of our request, please feel free to contact me directly at (541) 482-2111 or torriea@osfashland.org. I would also be happy to schedule a separate time to personally meet with your committee to present our proposal.

Sincerely,
Torrie Allen, Director of Development
Oregon Shakespeare Festival