



2026 Wildfire Preparedness Updates

Being wildfire ready in wildland-urban interface areas like ours is a year-round obligation, and the updates below are intended to raise awareness about efforts underway and actions that can be taken by all residents.

Summer 2026 Outlook

Forecasts from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration indicate Klickitat County is likely to experience above-average wildfire risk this summer, driven by lower snowpack, earlier melt, and warmer, drier conditions that will dry fuels sooner and extend the fire season. As a high-risk area (particularly with Gorge wind conditions that can accelerate fire spread) residents should be prepared for an earlier start to fire season, more frequent Red Flag conditions, and the potential for evacuation notices.

Local partners, including the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and emergency services, are actively preparing through fuel reduction and evacuation planning. Individual preparedness remains critical. Taking simple steps—such as creating defensible space, signing up for emergency alerts, and having an evacuation plan—can significantly improve safety and help protect homes and the community.

New Local Resource

The Klickitat Wildfire Resource Hub launched this spring and aims to bring together locally relevant information in one place: assistance programs, contractors, checklists, contacts, tools, and more all organized by topic to help residents take action. Explore the site: www.wildfirereadyklickitat.org

This website is a collaborative project among organizations and agencies working on wildfire risk mitigation in Klickitat County, supported by [Resources Legacy Fund](#) and [Mt. Adams Resource Stewards](#).

County Emergency Management Oversight

Klickitat County has transitioned its emergency management program to operate within the Public Works Department. While the structure is changing, the core mission remains the same: coordinating preparedness, response, and communication across the county.

The cities of Bingen, Goldendale, and White Salmon are working with the County to review an updated interlocal agreement to ensure roles, responsibilities, and resources remain clear and effective. As this work continues, the focus remains on maintaining strong coordination, reliable communication, and readiness across jurisdictions.

Water Infrastructure

Modernization of the city's water system continues through Mainline Phases I and II, with Phase IIA now underway. This phase extends improvements from the Forester/Wallace intersection (where water sources combine) to Bald Mountain Corners.

A new pressure zone, the North Main Pressure Zone, will come online later this year, improving flow, reliability, and capacity in the northwest part of town, including nearby neighborhoods, commercial areas, and school facilities. These upgrades strengthen both daily service and emergency fire flow capabilities



and are supported through a combination of grants and ratepayer funding. Improvements to reservoir storage are also being prioritized.

City Fire Rating

A city's fire rating, also known as a Public Protection Classification (PPC) score, is a number on a scale of 1 (excellent) to 10 that measures a community's ability to respond to fires: White Salmon currently holds a Class 7 Public Protection Classification (PPC) rating. This rating reflects the city's ability to respond to structure fires and is based on three primary factors: emergency communications (911), fire department capabilities, and water system performance, including hydrants. Fire hydrant maintenance and testing now occur on an annual schedule across the system. City policy has also been updated to require automatic replacement of any damaged hydrant to ensure system reliability

Firefighter Response

The West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority is now in its second full year of operation, with voter-approved funding supporting the department. Two full-time positions were added this past year, enabling consistent staffing at the White Salmon Fire Hall. The governing commissioners of the authority meet on the third Thursday of each month at the White Salmon Fire Hall; those meetings are open to the public.

Evacuation and Access

Klickitat County is advancing a county-wide evacuation plan in partnership with Incident Response Labs, a firm with extensive experience in wildfire response and planning. This work includes community workshops, surveys, and site visits, focusing on evacuation zones, routes, notification systems, and shelter-in-place or temporary refuge options. As the plan develops, residents can expect clearer evacuation guidance, improved communication protocols, and more coordinated response strategies during wildfire events.

Community Preparedness: Neighborhood Captains

Establishing neighborhood wildfire captains is a proven approach used in programs like Firewise and Fire Adapted Communities, where local leaders help organize preparedness efforts, share information, and support evacuation readiness at the neighborhood level.

Building on this model, the City's Wildfire & Emergency Preparedness Committee is working to identify volunteer captains across neighborhoods to strengthen coordination and ensure residents have a trusted, nearby point of contact before and during wildfire events. Community members interested in serving in this role will have an opportunity to learn more and sign up at the wildfire open house.

Wildfire Propagation & Monitoring

The City, in partnership with the West Klickitat Regional Fire Authority and supported by the Resource Legacy Fund, is working with Vanderbilt University to develop a structure vulnerability and wildfire propagation model. This tool analyzes how fire may spread through vegetation and structures, helping identify areas of higher risk and improving evacuation and response planning.

City Fuel Break

Ongoing fuel break work to help protect White Salmon is set to begin this month, with crews focusing on targeted vegetation thinning to slow fire spread and support firefighting efforts. This project is part of a



broader regional effort led by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and supported by state and federal funding. Recent expansions include additional protection around Skyline Hospital and the Brislawn Loop area, extending coverage toward the alternate highway corridor.

Fire Recovery Response

The city has established a dedicated reserve fund to ensure immediate funding is available during a wildfire emergency while state and federal assistance is being activated. Work is ongoing to identify additional funding sources to grow this reserve. As the Burdoin Fire made clear, a community's recovery from a fire is yearslong, with many partners and locally led efforts being essential to that work.

Regional and local partners including Red Cross, Klickitat County Health and Washington Gorge Action Programs aid in the immediate support and access to programs that is also essential.

State & Federal Advocacy

During the 2026 legislative session, the City monitored proposed cuts to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources and supported efforts to restore wildfire funding. The Legislature ultimately restored approximately \$60 million for preparedness. At the federal level, the City continues to engage with congressional offices to improve wildfire response and recovery programs, informed by local experience during the Burdoin Fire.

Insurance

Klickitat County is widely recognized as a high to very high wildfire risk area, and this is increasingly reflected in insurance availability and cost. Residents can access state-supported programs, including Wildfire Ready Neighbors and DNR assistance, to reduce wildfire risk and improve insurability. The IBHS Wildfire Prepared Home program provides a science-based certification pathway for homeowners to demonstrate reduced risk to insurers. Visit wildfireprepared.org to learn more.

Reminders and Actions You Can Take:

- Sign up for alerts from the City (App: [Voyent Alert](#)) and the County ([Smart911](#))
- Create defensible space around your home
- Prepare an evacuation plan and home inventory (to aid in insurance claims)
- Connect with neighbors and share contact info, especially with those who may need assistance
- Consider volunteering with local fire services