



MEDIA RELEASE

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Gary will be available for interviews and questions on Monday, 8/24.

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Skeleton Fire Anniversary Reminds Residents That Preparedness Reduces Wildfire Risk

Thirty years after the Skeleton Fire burned over 17,000 acres southeast of Bend, Bend Fire & Rescue and the Deschutes Rural Fire Protection District #2 are urging residents to use the anniversary as a reminder that wildfire remains an ongoing risk in Central Oregon and preparedness plays a critical role in protecting lives and property.

The Skeleton Fire started after a dry lightning strike in late August 1996. Fueled by strong winds, the fire prompted the evacuation of approximately 500 homes and destroyed 19 residences, becoming one of the most significant wildfire events in Bend's history just six years after the devastating 1990 Awbrey Hall Fire which destroyed 22 homes on the west side of Bend.

While the anniversary marks an important milestone, the most important lesson from the fire is that preparedness matters.

"The Skeleton Fire showed our community how quickly wildfire can threaten homes, neighborhoods and lives," said Rural District Executive Director Gary Marshall who was the fire marshal during the historical fire. "Many of the conditions that led to the Skeleton Fire still exist today. That's why it is critical that residents prepare their homes and property, make evacuation plans and understand their wildfire risk before an emergency occurs."

Firefighters who responded to the Skeleton Fire reported fire behavior so extreme that crews were unable to defend some homes and had to focus on protecting lives of responders and community members alike. Favorable wind changes ultimately slowed the fire's advance and helped firefighters gain control of the incident.

In the years that followed, community leaders, fire agencies and residents worked together to strengthen wildfire preparedness efforts throughout Central Oregon. Three of the region's most recognizable wildfire prevention and education programs, **FireFree**, **Project Wildfire** and **Firewise Communities**, were developed in part because of the lessons learned from fires like



the Skeleton Fire and the growing recognition that wildfire preparedness is a shared responsibility.

Today, those programs continue to help residents reduce wildfire risk through community engagement, defensible space education, fuels reduction and home hardening efforts.

As Central Oregon continues to experience longer fire seasons and increasing wildfire risk, officials encourage residents to act now by:

- Creating and maintaining defensible space around homes and other structures.
- Replacing flammable roofs, siding, fences and decks with fire resistive materials. A practice called home hardening.
- Preparing emergency go-kits and family evacuation plans.
- Signing up for emergency alerts at deschutesalerts.org.
- Knowing multiple evacuation routes and being prepared to leave immediately when ordered.

"The best way to honor the lessons of the Skeleton Fire is to be prepared," said Marshall.

"Wildfires have happened here before, and they will happen again. The actions residents and businesses take today can help protect lives, homes and neighborhoods tomorrow."

Learn more about how you can prepare your home for wildfire today at

bendoregon.gov/own-your-zone and projectwildfire.org.



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