

Wildfire and Grid Reliability Act

Wildfire and natural disasters are harming communities in Oregon and nationwide, increasingly disrupting power supply. In the summer months, the dryer, hotter, and windier conditions caused by the climate crisis have increased wildfire risk—and many fires have been ignited by aging power line infrastructure. In the winter months, snow and ice storms have strained utility infrastructure leading to—collapsed powerlines, blown transformers, broken utility poles— and widespread blackouts.

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden’s *Wildfire and Grid Reliability Act* will ensure that power companies do their part to reduce the risks of blackouts and wildland fires through power system upgrades, fire and disaster safety equipment installation, and proper vegetation management. Through a matching grant program, the legislation will incentivize utilities to do more to reduce natural disaster and wildfire risks while also bearing a substantial responsibility for the costs involved. By partnering with utilities around the country, the federal government can increase disaster and wildfire mitigation efforts and protect ratepayers from skyrocketing energy costs.

The Wildfire and Grid Reliability Act:

- Establishes a \$15 billion-per-year matching grant program for power companies through the Department of Energy to reduce the risk of disaster-caused outages or power lines causing wildfires.
- Gives special priority to smaller, rural electric companies.
- Promotes proven methods for hardening the power grid and reducing wildfire risks, including undergrounding of powerlines, installation of microgrids, and strengthening utility poles.
- Provides for hardening of overhead power lines and clearing of brush and other hazardous vegetation where undergrounding of power lines is not a favorable option.
- Requires power companies to have “skin in the game” by making the program a 1-to-1 matching grant, with an exception for smaller utilities where the matching requirement is one third of the grant.
- Delivers accountability on the part of utilities and the Department of Energy by generating a report every two years on efforts conducted under the grant program.
- Provides funding to support smaller utilities in completing the application for federal funding.