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Rising Wildfire Costs Are Straining State Finances.

Lawmakers are scrambling to rethink funding as firefighting expenses surge beyond budgeted levels.

Oregonians buying nicotine pouches like Zyn and Rogue were met with a surprise at the cash register starting this year. Each tin had new 65-cent tax on it, meant to bolster funding for the state's wildfire reduction efforts.

Wildfires burned more than 1.9 million acres in Oregon in 2024. By the time they finally died down at the end of October, the state had spent more than $350 million fighting them, greatly exceeding the $10 million it had allocated. "By July 21, I had already completely blown through my cash on hand," said Kyle Williams, Oregon Department of Forestry's deputy director for fire operations.

Contractors weren't promptly paid for services they'd already provided, from digging fuel breaks to supplying meals, and the state had to hold an emergency legislative session to allocate the money. That summer highlighted the flaws in how the state funds both firefighting and the preventive work that reduces the chances of large, destructive blazes in the first place.

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