

# Portland lacks resources for urban wildfire response, expert warns

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PORTLAND, Ore. ([KOIN](#)) — What if Portland had an urban wildfire on the same level as the Eaton Fire that devastated Los Angeles last year? One wildfire expert is warning that the Rose City may be ill-equipped to handle such a disaster.

Robert McCullough is an energy consulting expert and principal of McCollough Research. He specializes in examining how laws, economics and institutions shape outcomes for wildfires.

Recently, McCullough created an analysis of what it would be like if Portland had an urban wildfire on the same level as the Eaton Fire, which **destroyed 9,000 structures and killed at least 17 people** in the Altadena community of California in January of 2025.

Comparing Los Angeles' level of preparedness to Portland, McCullough said residents have reason to worry.



Robert McCullough is a wildfire expert who warns Portland may be ill-equipped for an urban wildfire similar to the one in Los Angeles in 2025. April 19, 2026 (KOIN).

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Though Forest Park, Portland's most critical high-risk fire zone, has two Pano AI cameras set up by Portland General Electric to help spot wildfires 24/7, those are the only two in the entirety of the city.

"They are real time cameras — 60 times a minute rotating. They use AI to identify smoke or ignition, 24 hours a day," said McCullough, who advocates that Portland adopt more of the cameras to prevent urban wildfires or help with response times when they may happen. "One of these cameras is only \$50,000 a year, which is trivial compared to the price of your house."

The second-largest high-risk fire zone in Portland is Oaks Bottom, located a mere 8/10ths of a mile from Reed College, McCullough's alma mater and where he recently held a lecture on the topic on urban wildfire dangers in Portland. The Eaton Fire, meanwhile, only needed to cross a one-mile distance from its ignition point to reach Altadena, and it happened much more rapidly than experts could predict.

Oaks Bottom is adjacent to the Sellwood/Brooklyn Neighborhoods, with over 12,000 homes, as well as another 2,000 homes in the Eastmoreland Neighborhood, making an urban wildfire in the region potentially devastating. With its forest line coming right up to residential areas, Oaks Bottom has similar terrain to the fire that sparked in LA. And yet, there are no Pano AI cameras monitoring the area.

There are also electrical towers that put the residential areas surrounding Oaks Bottom at substantial risk, since high winds could knock them down, starting a fire.

"If you've ever been taken hunting by your dad, they'll say, 'Don't shoot at the bird. Shoot ahead of the bird,'" McCullough said. "We have to plan to what it's going to look like this summer, not what it looked like for the last hundred years."

McCullough said Portland has fewer resources and is even less prepared than LA was if a similar wildfire were to happen, with out-of-date emergency plans to boot.

KOIN 6 News spoke with neighbors who live near Oaks Bottom. Many said they were surprised to learn about the potential wildfire risk.

"I knew about Forest Park, but I hadn't really thought about this happening here," said Teetle Clawson, a resident of Southeast Portland. "I am surprised, I am. I was not prepared for that

information.”

Celeste Henshaw, another neighbor who lives in the Oaks Bottom area, agrees that more should be done to stop a potential wildfire next to an urban area before it occurs.

“And we need to really be aware of that and try to do some prevention, I think,” Henshaw said.

KOIN 6 reached out to PGE to ask whether they have any plans to install Pano AI cameras near Oaks Bottom. We will update this story if we hear back.

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