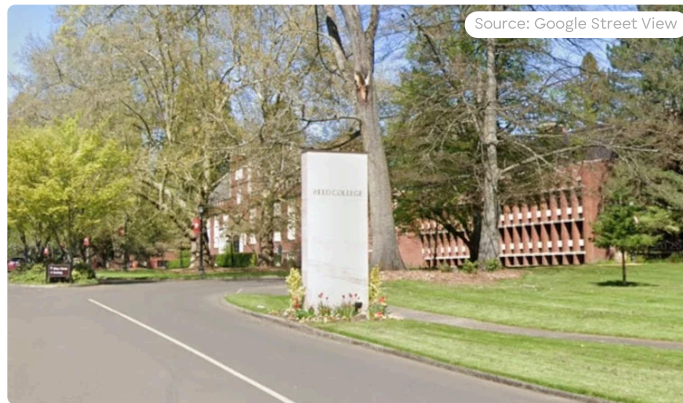


Portland

## OAKS BOTTOM FIRE FEARS PUT SOUTHEAST PORTLAND ON EDGE

By Samuel Hansen

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A Reed College researcher is warning that the wooded wetlands at Oaks Bottom and the Southeast Portland neighborhoods wrapped around it could give a fast-moving urban fire a straight shot to nearby homes. Portland Fire & Rescue has already flagged Oaks Bottom after several small blazes in the past year, and utility and city officials say new detection technology is not on the drawing board for the refuge. For now, that leaves preparedness largely in the hands of neighbors and emergency services and is raising fresh questions about how closely the city and utilities watch for flare-ups in tree-lined pockets of Southeast Portland.

### Reed College Talk Lays Out Big-Fire Scenario

Robert McCullough sketched out those concerns in a public talk hosted by [Reed College](#), arguing that the dense streets around Oaks Bottom, including

Sellwood-Moreland, Brooklyn, Reed, and Eastmoreland, could leave residents with even less time to react than foothill communities hit by recent Los Angeles fires. McCullough suggested that faster fire detection could buy precious minutes and urged city and utility planners to consider more aggressive monitoring and fuel-reduction work in and around the refuge. His comments have fed into local planning conversations about whether to expand detection systems and thinning programs near urban natural areas.

### **What Fire Officials And PGE Are Saying**

Portland Fire & Rescue confirmed to [KATU](#) that Oaks Bottom saw three fires in the last year and that the refuge is now the bureau's top concern outside Forest Park. At the same time, the bureau noted that homes sit so close to the area that residents are likely to spot and report a blaze quickly. McCullough has told reporters that AI enabled cameras can speed detection and give fire crews extra minutes to get moving, while PF&R cautioned that "communication during complex incident response ... is always an area identified for continuous improvement," according to a bureau spokesperson.

Portland General Electric told the station it does not plan to install AI fire-detection cameras in Oaks Bottom and pointed instead to its broader Wildfire Mitigation Plan, which outlines other steps the utility is taking to reduce risk across its service area.

### **How Oaks Bottom Fits Into Official Risk Maps**

On paper, Oaks Bottom already shows up as part of Portland's urban interface fire risk. Portland Parks & Recreation lists the refuge among its managed natural areas and has carried out targeted vegetation work there as part of a wildfire risk-reduction effort.

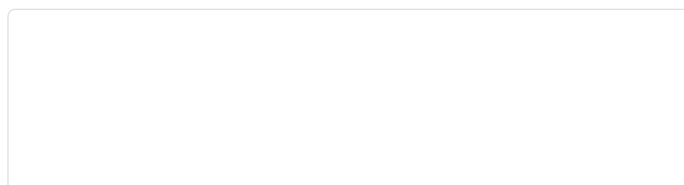
Multnomah County and regional planning documents also include Oaks Bottom on maps of locations that could affect surrounding neighborhoods if a wildfire started in those woodlands.

## What Neighbors Are Urged To Do Now

Utilities and emergency managers are steering residents toward basic preparedness as the most immediate step. Portland General Electric recommends that households have an emergency plan and an outage kit that can sustain them for at least three days, and it asks customers to keep contact information up to date so they can receive proactive outage notifications. PGE says its preparedness guidance and outage tools are available on its website. Neighborhood emergency teams and Portland Bureau of Emergency Management materials also offer local checklists and evacuation-planning templates for residents who want to coordinate before fire season ramps up.

McCullough's broader argument is that multiple agencies and utilities need clearer and faster lines of communication when smoke appears. Officials say they are working on those systems even as they keep urging residents to review their own plans. For now, the message from the city and utilities is consistent: trim back fuel where you can, update your emergency contacts, and make an outage and evacuation plan before the next round of hot, dry weather arrives.

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