



Ash tree

Despite the name, ash trees are not great at surviving fires. This tree provides important habitat in the middle of the prairie, so the fire line made a protective loop around it.

Oregon white oaks

The dark green trees on the edge of the prairie are Oregon white oaks. Because of their thick bark, these are the region's ultimate fire survivors. The region's Indigenous people used fire to control oak-tree pests and ease acorn harvesting, which helped oaks expand across the region. When white people arrived in the region, oak woodlands and savannas covered the Willamette and Tualatin valleys. Today, they cover only about 5% of their former range.

Burned field

From a distance, the blackened field looks devastated. But up close, there's still green at the ground level, some plants were just singed, and animals like snakes, caterpillars, grasshoppers and praying mantises are on the move.

Grasses and tarweed

Most of Quamash Prairie is covered in grasses, small shrubs and flowers, including tarweed. Fire burns off the sticky coating on tarweed's seedpods, making it easier to harvest the seeds, which Indigenous community members turn into flour.

Fire starter

A firefighter from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde drops burning liquid fuel onto the prairie using a driptorch.

Douglas spirea

Douglas spirea is a native shrub that thrives in prairies. Sometimes it can take over a prairie, keeping other native plants from growing. Many spirea survived this fire, but now there's more room for other plants.

Fire as a tool

Fire burns away invasive plants. This allows native plants, which are adapted to surviving fires, to reestablish. Fire can also control invasive pests that prey on native plants. This allows restoration experts to use less chemical herbicides and pesticides.

Fire line

A solid fire line is crucial to a safe, controlled burn. Days before the burn, a mower outlines the field, providing a roughly 20-foot break between the field and the surrounding areas. As the burn starts, one fire engine leads the fire starter, spraying water on the edge of the field, creating a clear line between what will burn and what won't. A second truck follows the fire starter, ensuring no flames escape. Additional trucks and firefighters walk alongside to jump into action if anything goes wrong. A good burn, like this one was, is a boring burn.

A land acknowledgment

Since time immemorial, the land where greater Portland now sits has been home to the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla and many other tribes. Quamash Prairie is part of the traditional homelands of the Tualatin Kalapuya. Many other tribes and bands came to the area as part of seasonal hunting, harvesting, trading, and cultural and family ceremonies and celebrations that brought together the Indigenous people of the region.