

## Babb Road Wildfire – Malden/Pine City, WA



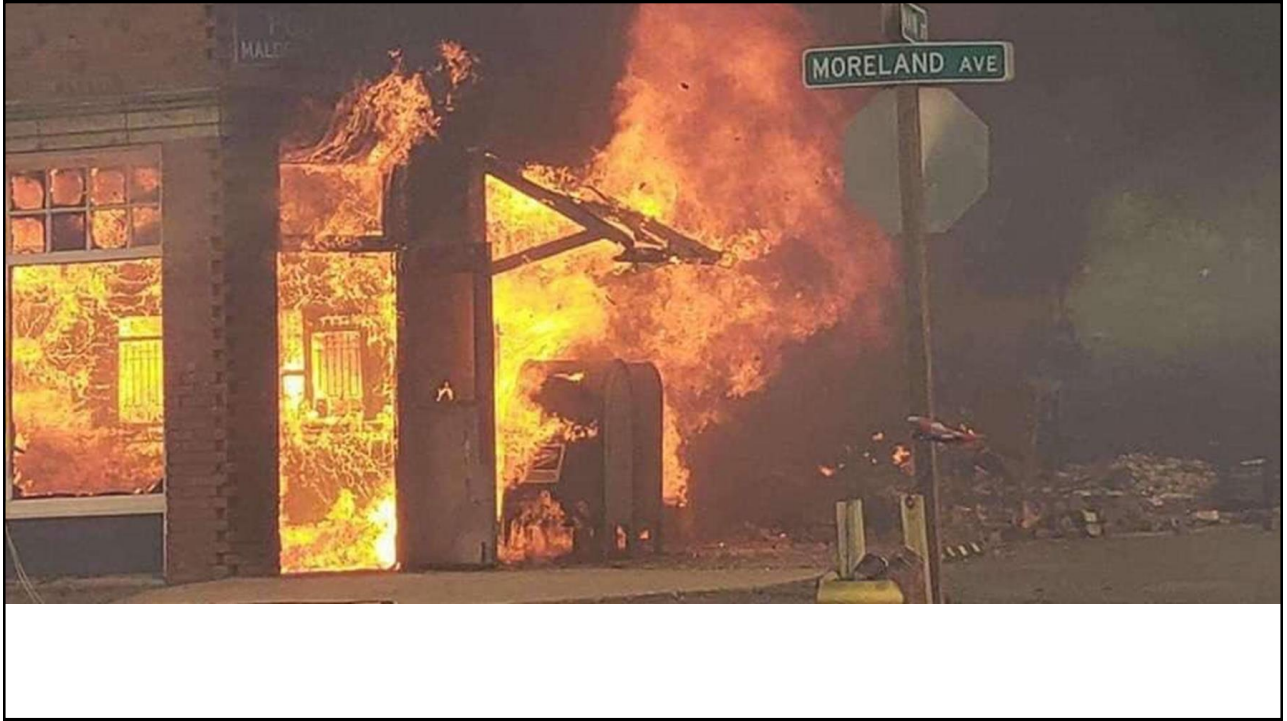
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On September 7, 2020, three wildfires started in Whitman County alone, all within a two-hour period.

Whitman County issued a state of emergency on September 8th due to the destructive and uncontrolled wildfires burning within the county.

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158 homes and buildings pre-fire. 80% homes destroyed, 200 residents impacted.

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70% of property owners had insufficient insurance to cover rebuilding costs.

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350+ junk cars and associated debris – top priority for clean up

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## Malden – Pine City Wildfire Impacts

- **No lives lost!**
- **15,000 acres** consumed in ~ **3 hours**
- **104 homes destroyed** in area (67 in Malden; 17 in Pine City and 20 in Rural Whitman County)
- **30+ outbuildings and public facilities** (Post Office, Town Hall, Library, Foodbank, Community Center and Fire Station)
- **Timber and cropland losses**
- **293 adults and 72 children (45 school age)** impacted by wildfire
- **70% of property owners no insurance or underinsured**
- **COVID regulations also had to be adhered to**

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## Re-establishing local governance and essential services



- **Town Hall operations**
- **Food Bank services**
- **Library w/ internet connectivity**

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Daily communications with residents

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### Road to Recovery – Critical Linkages



Malden Town Council

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## Road to Recovery -

An estimated **70 percent** of Malden residents were **uninsured or underinsured** at the time of the fire. Even for those who had insurance coverage, the aftermath of the devastation left significant obstacles to accessing basic community services.

As an added insult, FEMA disaster designation did not occur until **151 days after** the fire —February 4, 2021. Only **Public Assistance** and not **Individual Assistance**.

Dozens of residents spent the winter of 2021 in **23 recreational vehicles** parked on lots of rubble and ash, a hardship the community wanted to avoid again. However, 3 households remain in RVs as of today.

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Created the Pine Creek Community Long-term Recovery Organization (LTRO) Fall 2020.

**501 c3 non-profit** to help drive recovery efforts.

Comprised of wildfire victims and several outside agencies.

Nearly 8 months to get the LTRO “operational.”

2X weekly calls

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**Address Marking / New Fleet Vehicles  
and Two Donated Fire Trucks**

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## Stages of Rebuilding –

FEMA disaster declaration took **151 days** (February 4, 2021) Only Public Assistance (PA) not Individual Assistance (IA)

Debris Clean-up: Phase 1—43 residents (**\$4.5M**) and 72 lots done; Phase 2—completed Fall 2021 - 41 homes tested and cleaned (**\$6.5M**)

SBA disaster loans (No FEMA IA). To date: **34 applications** received from residents, 12 homes approved, 1 business @ **\$1.4m**

**4 Disaster Case Managers**

Over **\$3M** cash and in-kind donations (not public).

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## Stages of Rebuilding –

**2 new homes** constructed Winter 2021 in Malden by Western Anabaptist Missions (Amish based in St. Ignatius, MT). (**941 sqft** and cost **\$80K to build in 3 weeks**). **6 additional homes** with March 2022 completion. (Red Cross \$750K, Catholic Charities, United Way of Whitman County, Innovia, Avista and other funds).

Ziply Fiber committed to a **fiber rebuild project for 135 addresses** in Malden. Port of Whitman \$1.7M for rural and Pine City residents.

EWU Fire Resiliency and Recovery Plan.

Secured **\$3.7M for water system** reinforcement and additional well. LOSS system wastewater system federal earmark for **\$3.5M** in process.

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WAM-built home. 950 sq ft, 2-bedroom

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## Stages of Rebuilding –

Weekly LTRO calls and monthly calls to federal and state agencies and elected officials.

Leveraging local, state, and federal partners to showcase coast-to-coast Great American Rail Trail /Palouse-to-Cascades Trail which runs through Malden. WA CDBG Park Planning grant.

New Community Center —houses food bank (**pre-fire 25% of population** visited food bank each week), library, commercial kitchen, commercial space

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## Current Stages of Rebuilding –

Mayor Dan's Grants over \$17mil in 4-1/2 years

Temporary fire station-\$239,000 FEMA

Gravel road project-\$1.3mil FEMA

LOSS -\$5,4mil EPA

Water project (well, line extensions)-\$3,6 mil PWB-Commerce

New fire station-\$2,3 mil-FEMA--\$900,000 CBDG

Community Center-\$2.4mil FEMA

Asphalt roads-\$1.9mil FEMA

Payoff USDA loan-\$238,000 (capital budget)

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**GOOD NEWS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

The town has no debt. All grants were used to rebuild

**BAD NEWS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**

We paid over \$650,000 in sales tax

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New Post Office, Town Hall and Fire Station

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New Community Center, Food Bank and Library

MALDEN ACT -

S. 3683

**Making Aid for Local Disasters Equal Now Act**

*Currently the \$4.5mil threshold must be met before receiving  
Individual Assistance (IA)*

1. Declaration for a major disaster or emergency be made in a timely basis
2. Rural areas receive assistance developing recovery team, help prevent disasters after a wildfire and make case workers available.

## Looking Forward

**Setting the proper expectations is paramount!**

While changes must be made so that the “ideal” disaster recovery is shorter than 18 - 36 months, anyone communicating with the public about recovery – from government at all levels to the media – must be accountable for **providing realistic and informed timeframes** about its duration, particularly to disaster victims, who need to make **informed decision about how to order their lives** in the interim.



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## Looking Forward



It is **critical to hire sufficient full-time staff to run a recovery office**, including some with both disaster funding and program expertise, rather than relying solely on existing Federal, state and local agencies and/or outside consultants. Funds of \$150K for recovery staffing – still not adequate. Volunteers are critical!

**Extensive and regular public outreach**, accompanied by ongoing, consistent case management by qualified, place-based experts, is essential to recovery program success.

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## Looking Forward

**Public engagement and public-private partnerships are essential** components of disaster preparedness **and** recovery.

**We should always be seeking partnerships, not partisanship.** (Politics shouldn't matter)  
Recovery work is a team sport!



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## Road to Recovery: Final Thoughts -



To be clear, there are **no villains** in this story. Wildfire behavior and climate conditions are so unpredictable.

Disasters, whose impacts know no limits, must be prepared for by not only paid professionals but every one of us.

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## Road to Recovery: Final Thoughts -

Recovery ~ **“Moving at the Speed of Trust”** - everyone working on disaster recovery **cares deeply about the people and places they are serving**, constantly searching for ways to improve and expedite the process. We’re all learning as we go and we fix things along the way. Admit – we can always do better.



The **biggest** mistake – not giving the community time to grieve before they can ever begin to heal.

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***“The devil never sleeps. But he only wins if we don’t do better next time.”***

- Jane Cage, 2011 tornado survivor, Joplin, Missouri

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Thank YOU!!!  
to everyone who has donated  
to rebuild our community!



For further information:

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# Questions?

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