

Rural Housing Service • Multi-Family Housing Programs

A Heap of Hope When All was Lost

Susan Smith has lived through a lot over the years: hurricanes, a serious medical condition, a global pandemic. She had heard about the fire burning in Ashland, just south of her subsidized apartment in the small town of Phoenix, but wildfires had never gotten close enough to threaten her before. Then a police officer knocked on her door and told her to evacuate. “Now!” he ordered when she hesitated.

Susan had no time to pack. She doesn’t own a car, so the police officer paired her with another tenant who had room for both her and her service dog. They were the last to leave Rose Court Apartments, which was originally built with financing from USDA Rural Development and receives rental assistance for low-income tenants that cannot otherwise afford rent.



Rose Court Apartments in Phoenix, Ore., burned down during the 2020 Oregon wildfires.

They spent the night at the Jackson County Expo Center evacuation site. The next day, they received the devastating news: their apartment complex had burned down.

For the next two weeks, Susan lived at the expo center. The evacuees who did not have a home to return to were then moved to hotels, where Susan spent another two weeks.

Through its [Multi-Family Housing programs](#), USDA Rural Development issued a Letter of Priority Entitlement (LOPE), giving those displaced by the wildfires priority for placement at other USDA-financed rental properties. A unit soon became available nearby at the Big Valley Jacksonville Apartments. Susan was offered the space.

The family of the outgoing tenant, who was moving to an assisted living facility, learned from the apartment manager that the unit would be given to a wildfire survivor who had lost everything she owned.

When Susan moved into her new home, she was shocked to find it fully furnished. The family of the outgoing tenant had not only left behind all his furniture, they had also thoroughly cleaned the unit and stocked it with newly purchased supplies, from bath soap to grocery staples.

“I am truly blessed to have someone think of me at the time of my greatest need,” said Susan, who is determined to pay forward this generous gift.

Assistance Type:	Letter of Priority Entitlement (LOPE)
Date of Assistance:	October 2020
Congressional District:	Representative Bentz, District 02; Senators Wyden and Merkley
Partners:	Viridian Management
Impact:	Rural residents who survived the 2020 Oregon wildfires but lost their homes received priority placement at USDA-financed apartment complexes, ensuring they received a new home they could afford within months of the fires.
