



# Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023

Meeting Venue: Zoom

- I. Attendance**
  - a. Quorum met, see attached for meeting attendance.
- II. Call to Order**
  - a. Committee chair Allen Lebovitz called meeting to order 1:07 pm December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.
- III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business**
  - a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023, and November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Tony Craven motions to approve both minutes, K.C. Whitehouse seconds. All members vote yeah and there are no abstains.
  - b. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains discussion to move the meeting digital venue to Microsoft Teams. Multiple committee members express concern about changing to Teams. Committee decides to remain on Zoom for the time being.
- IV. WA State Forester Update**
  - a. George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management Division and State Forester – House and Senate passed two continuing resolutions, one being a one-year Farm Bill extension. Have deadlines of January 19<sup>th</sup> and February 2<sup>nd</sup> to pass spending bill to avoid across the board budget cuts. If we do not have a Farm Bill, we won't be able to come to new Good Neighbor Authority agreements. House committee approves Wildfire Retardant Bill. There was an environmental group that filed against the Forest Service stating that the fire retardants violated clean water act. This legislation will address this. State, Private and Tribal board meeting occurred. Discussed implementation of the Urban and Community Forestry Grant program, there were items that were politically based that went outside the intended scope of the program that we wanted addressed going forward. Wildfire defense grants were discussed, the first round was completed, going through the second round now and will see awards probably around February or March. There was discussion around landscape scale restoration grants, these are used heavily in the State of Washington, and we've been successful with them. There was a meeting between EPA, Forest Service, State Foresters of Oregon and Washington, Department of Ecology, discussing a consistent approach to increase the pace and scale of prescribed fire. We're looking to have a meeting next month to go through and put some teams together within the various agencies to look at what the barriers are. We are being given some flexibility to come up with a solution for the region that we can work forward on. In January 2024 the Forest Service will announce the Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction program. Focus on funding wildfire risk reduction in the national forest lands.
  - a. Cody Desautel – Is there a tribal representative on the advisory committee for State, Private now? Are there discussions to change the Clean Air Act to better include prescribed fire, e.g. exceptional events? A: Yes, there is, has been showing up and will



have someone assigned permanently. There are ongoing discussions on using exceptional events but its complicated and going to be ongoing.

#### **V. Wildland Fire Management Division**

- a. Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager – CIMT group has wrapped up its phase one work, the group is starting to look forward on their role as implementation moves forward. Looking at wildland IMT oversight in the State of Washington. The FLA for the Oregon Road and Gray fires is moving along well and looking to have something to publish late spring. Project throughout the year updating our forest land response agreements with fire districts, we will have 20-30% expiring this year. We won't get changes to the template till end of 2024, need to modernize the template. We have a coversheet to extend the agreements that have not expired yet and have added prescribed fire language for districts interested in it. We have ongoing efforts with forest resiliency division to enhance prescribed fire, expect to see the wildfire division to take a more active role. First steps are tick that box on forestland response agreements and then we'll be looking at other mechanisms. Need to achieve a balance that supports prescribed fire without adversely affecting the suppression mission. We have 13 surplus engines going out this year. HB 1168 PPE grants will focus on fire shelters. 1498 and 1578 implementation work ongoing. Going to talk with fire service and fire Marshals on our air attack desired composition. 2024 is the year to update our master cooperative fire protection agreements with federal agencies. We've been asked to lead the effort, will probably take a year to work that out.

#### **VI. WDNR 2024 Legislative Priorities**

- a. Brian Considine, Legislative Director, DNR – 1168 is the main priority. The Governor's budget came out, we got \$98 million, missing \$23 million. The State general fund is overspent in the out years, OFM is cutting this cycle untill new revenue numbers are received. We will be going to the Legislature to ask for full funding. If we don't get the full funding our community programs will suffer, e.g. surplus engines, forest health treatments. We also don't want to let the precedent be set, we are supposed to get the \$125 million in the bill and we will continue to message it. 1578 we did put in a decision package for a \$900 thousand request to fund post debris flow program, this was funded in the Governor's budget. If that stays, we'll have the \$5 million plus the \$900k for 1578. We will come back in the next biennium to fully fund 1578. The Smokey Bear License Plate Bill will be prefiled this week. It's been a while since the state has done a license plate, there seems to be a lot of interest. Wildfire insurance is something that is going to come up in the legislature.
  - i. Sami Schinnell – The Washington Prescribed Fire Council has identified the need for a policy working group within the council. We'll be starting in January and if there are any items that the working group can provide in support of these things, whether it's a letter of support, we have appropriate people to give testimony.



## VII. Tasking – Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan Review

- a. George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management Division and State Forester – Here in WA the 10-year strategy was written in such a way to give clear direction and has been a blueprint for a lot of what has been done. The plan is 5 years old, we have gone through structural changes, changed internal policies, procedural changes, and financial changes. At the State level we have changed policy, guidance documents, new partners and relationships have been developed. The intent here is to dive back into the strategic plan, look at the goals & outcomes and tell us what your recommendations are going forward. Looking for the gaps, the successes, the things that potentially were missed. Make sure DNR is heading in the direction outlined by the plan.
- b. Loren Torgerson, Wildfire Policy Advisor, Executive Management Division, DNR – I was the project lead for developing this strategy in 2019. Annie Schmidt was also one of the contractors who developed the plan and will be a valuable resource on the history and in reviewing it. Some history on the plan; it was precipitated by increasingly hazardous wildfire seasons. We needed to change our practices and increase our knowledge, shifting to a more proactive approach, improving coordination and collaboration, improving community engagement, maintaining a highly capable, well-trained workforce. The plan was anchored in the 2014 National Wildfire Management Cohesive Strategy, there is a recent addendum that we will incorporate into our analysis as well. The plan was created with the WFAC acting as a steering committee over a 2-year period. The Washington Wildland Fire Summit was held in January 2018. Five workshops were held over a year and a half to help refine the vision and goals. What we heard: support for a unified, borderless landscape approach to fire, coordination across agencies, prepared communities & a healthy landscape, local approaches that honor local knowledge, communications before during and after fire, accelerated landscape treatments, greater attention to post fire recovery. The four goals that resulted; Washington's preparedness, response, and recovery, systems, are fully capable, integrated, and sustainable; Landscapes are resilient. In the face of wildland fire, they resist damage and recover quickly; Communities are prepared and adapted for current and future fire regimes; Response is safe and effective. There is zero loss of life of firefighters or the public from wildland fires. These goals lead to outcomes we want to produce; Safety of the public and firefighters is provided for, wildland fire is suppressed when necessary and used where allowable; Unwanted human-related wildland fires are virtually eliminated; Costs to suppress wildland fires are reduced, risks and losses to communities and the economy are minimized; Communities and ecosystems are resilient and healthy, both can withstand and recover from wildland fire. This is one of the items we want to analyze, are we achieving these outcomes?
- c. The tasking will be executed in 3 phases. Phase 1 will be January – February 2024. Phase 2 from March to May 2024, review existing strategies and identify metrics, receive feedback on the strategies that need to be revised, are no longer relevant and any new strategies. Phase 3 from June to August 2024, draft the addendum and submit it to the committee for review, incorporating any feedback.



- d. Chris Martin – It said on the slide on phase one, it said something FR, what does FR stand for? A: Forest Resiliency.
- e. Cody Desautel – What level of detail do you want us to go into? We went into a lot of depth originally. Are we looking at this through just a Washington DNR lense? A: We don't have the same level of time to go into that depth. We are hoping with our review team to do some of the legwork on analyzing data to present to you. We aren't rewriting the strategy. The part that it is critical is to have fresh eyes and look at it based on the current world. It's a higher-level gut check. Can't help at looking at the national and other organizations and agencies, that is included as a part of this.
- f. Tony Craven – I sat through a few presentations on the severity maps. Showed how projects and treatments reduced intensity. That product would be a great resource when we get to that goal.
- g. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to accept the tasking. Cody Desautel motions, Tony Crave seconds. All members vote yeah, there are no abstains.
- h. Presentation attached.

#### **VIII. WDNR 2023 Wildfire Season Report**

- a. Angie Lane, Wildland Fire Management Assistant Division Manager, Plans and Information, DNR – As the season started, it felt like it was going to be big year. By end of may fuels became dryer, Shannon Lake fire took off in logging slash and burned 85 acres. In June fire danger was trending a month ahead of schedule. Sutherland fire burned 108 acres near Port Angeles. McEwen fire started on July 4<sup>th</sup> outside of Shelton, burned 250 acres. By End of July ERC values in the lower basin were up to the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile. We had the Tunnel Five, Eagle Bluff, and Newell Road fires. August another cold front tamped down on fire danger again, lighting started several fires mid-August. Fires included Sourdough, Oregon Road, and Gray fires which were our most damaging fires. September wind events brought wilderness fires to life like Airplane Lake in the Olympic National Park. In October, three long duration precipitation events contributed to a quiet fall. Saw fewer larger fires but increased widespread small fires, especially on the westside. We were still responding to large number of fires but were able to keep them small.
- b. Cody Desautel – We missed an opportunity to get more acres burned with prescribed fire, we had good opportunities to do more on the shoulder season. We recognize that the 1168 resources made a huge difference this year on suppressions success.
- c. Chris Martin – Will echo that, we had good weather in July that we could have done more with prescribed fire.



- d. Russ Lane – The vision we mentioned earlier talks about safely suppressing unwanted fire and using beneficial fire whenever we can. In terms of suppressing unwanted fire, huge success this year and I think 1168 resources made a big difference. We are working toward improved collaboration with resilience. We are looking to give hard targets as deliverables to our regions on prescribed fire to facilitate this.
- e. George Geissler – We have been having the joint conversations between the divisions are going to help going forward. Understanding the resources available and the demand needed and how we can cross level between the divisions.
- f. Tony Craven – the Naches Ranger district was burning acreage in July and when the Schneider Springs fire came through when it hit the treated area it went down and became a low intensity. This seemed to be most affected by the summer treated acres vs. other times of year treated acres.
- g. Presentation attached.

#### **IX. Roundtable, Public Comment, Future Topics**

- a. Reese Lolley – Great to see progress with 1168. With the review of the 10-year strategy, be important to look at the reports on the Oregon and Gray’s fires. There are these events that happen even in low years. How can we incorporate that into the strategy to see what we can do to plan for future events like them.
- b. Cody Desautel – Notice of intent that went on the federal register on old growth forests management, they plan to revise the Northwest Forest Group. Something to be aware of, they want comments by February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Plan to have a draft by May.
- c. Bill Slosson, Chief Deputy State Fire Marshal – State Mobilization had an impactful fire season in the basin. We have \$25 million spent, have supplemental funding request to fill the gap. Fire service workgroup on the size, shape, color, and texture of the fire marshal’s office and the services we offer and how we offer them.
- d. Cody Rohrbach, Fire Chief Spokane Co. Fire District 3 – Hopeful to have a FLA product for the Oregon Road and Gray fires late spring to distribute. Finished our county wildland AAR, was the most well attended AAR we have had. Will share the outcomes from that as well. ne of things we talked about was we have all the metrics to support the analysis. Spokane is the 4<sup>th</sup> at risk community to catastrophic fire, we have data on recent fire behavior. The opportunity to use the recent fires to implement improvements for the future. Another item was on mobilization and capacity, we saw the drawdown related to the Oregon and Gray fires as we were at capacity.

#### **X. Adjourn**

- a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:34pm



## **XI. Appendices**

- a. Attendance
- b. Washington State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan Review Tasking
- c. WDNR 2024 Legislative Priorities
- d. WDNR 2023 Wildfire Season Report

Draft minutes submitted by Bryan Perrenod, approved by Chairman Allen Lebovitz. Formal action to be taken to approve the minutes at the next general meeting.