



# Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Meeting Venue: Zoom

- I. **Attendance**
  - a. Quorum not met see attached for meeting attendance.
- II. **Call to Order**
  - a. Committee chair Allen Lebovitz called meeting to order 1:01 pm June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
- III. **Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business**
  - a. Minutes not approved due to lack of quorum.
  - b. No outstanding business discussed.
- IV. **Agency Updates**
  - a. **State Mobilization Update** – Melissa Gannie, Assistant State Fire Marshall. N/A
  - b. **Federal Update** – Kari Grover-Wier, District Ranger, Acting Chief of Staff, USFS, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. N/A
  - c. **Fire Service Update** – Leonard Johnson, Fire Chief Thurston Co. Fire District 9. We have 4 mobilizations in WA, 3 in Benton county, and other in Walla Walla. 6 strike teams committed, and type 3 team with BLM. Expecting to demobilize in 36 hrs. Fire Defense Committee is getting ready to talk about CIMT. Did some capacity analysis with regional coordinators 13 strike teams available this year, going to struggle with mid-level management. The Southeast type 3 teams have completed IMT training and have their rosters up and running. We've also been looking at how type 3 teams are going to be impacted by all hazard qualification system coming into place.  
  
Cody Rohrbach, Fire Chief Spokane Co. Fire District 3. We provided support via the Northwest Compact for mobilizations. Fire season is 3-4 weeks ahead of historical trends this year. Appreciate all the collaboration and work done on CIMT.
  - d. **Wildland Fire Management Division** – Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager. Fire activity so far has been driven by winds, few weeks ago we were dealing with fires in western WA, in 50-60 acre range, and Westside is primed for fire this summer. Started our daily briefings on June 25<sup>th</sup>. 2<sup>nd</sup> fire academy class completed, upwards of 200 students have gone through. Eastside has had outbreaks of smaller, 100-acre fires when wind picks up and humidity drops. Eastside fires are getting significant air attack, 4 fires in Benton County wrapping up, turned the corner on Columbia River fire that came into WA, and we are assisting our partners in Oregon on the Rock Creek Fire. Sent support to Alberta included 6 DNR, 6 Washington Fire Service personnel, and 12 ODF personnel. We have 2 Q400 air tankers up there, for about 7 days, should be coming home end of day. Recalled for the next cold front passage. We also sent 3 type 2 contract crews up to Canada under DNR preseason agreement, those were from Miller



Timber and Patrick companies. The preseason contract lets us manage that directly rather than going through Boise. Putting the air tanker base back in Olympia, we didn't need the portable tanker in Pasco. We put 5 State to State agreements out to State partners that have requested that direct relationship; North Carolina, Florida, New Mexico, Minnesota, and Cal Fire. We are going to reach out to other States after we get the first 5 executed. Includes Texas and Kentucky and a few others that are interested. These will enable us to mobilize both our own and Fire Service resources through our sub agreements.

Q: How did the academies do in local fire district participation? A: Doing a single class at a time is very expensive to do. We are offering online courses throughout the year for those that can't travel or stay for the whole academy. Being at North Bend lets us partner with Fire Service, and is a time savings for us not having to shuttle people to a field site. Second session had 46 DNR, 9 Federal, 3 BIA, 4 Fires Service, 2 Parks. 3<sup>rd</sup> session has 98 DNR, 5 federal, 2 BIA, 8 Fire Service and 2 Parks registered. We had good turnout for our virtual courses last fall.

Q: Are the online courses available to anyone? A: Yes, the schedule is posted on our website and anyone can take them.

- e. **WA State Forester Update** – George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management Division and State Forester.
  - i. Smoke Mitigation – There was a lot of discussion in D.C. because of the smoke caused by Canadian fires. Federal agencies are being pushed to provide assistance as it gave an understanding the impact WA faces from smoke. There is already an agreement with U.S. Forest Service international branch, negotiated by the State Dept. with Canada. The Canadian government does not have a role in wildland fire, it is the provinces that do. We have been coordinating resources up through the Northwest Compact to provide response. Local fire service does have the ability to deploy through the Northwest Compact via DNR. On the national level, people took notice that the local response from the Northwest Compact was quicker than the Federal response. There has been discussion within the Federal Wildfire and Mitigation Commission and I have been working with FEMA on gaining greater clarity and to expand upon the compact system.
  - ii. 1168 budget – We did not receive the full amount and we are using the memo that was created from the joint WFAC and FHAC workgroup to inform the decision making on funding levels. We are still determining the splits between the programs, however current plan is to fund at current levels in first half of biennium and request a budget supplemental for the second half of the biennium. Will be able to give a clearer picture at next meeting.
  - iii. QWRA – Meeting few weeks ago to discuss the priorities within the risk assessment and how to utilize going forward. There is an increased emphasis on the timeline to have it available quicker, as well as improving the plan for outreach.



- iv. Farm Bill – The bill is the current major effort at the national level to get completed. The bill impacts prescribed fire, suppression, etc. Updates expected in the next month.
- v. National Wildfire Cohesive Strategy – Wildland Fire Leadership Council announced the update and is now available and been briefed at the House and Senate. Our DNR strategy documents are all linked back to this document.

## V. Legislative Session Bill Update

- a. HB 1578, Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager – We did not get the funding we asked for and got additional work to complete. Implementation for Wildfire Ready Neighbors on the Westside is in the bill, as is smoke preparedness, planning concerning what we can do with the funding available is underway. Debris flow prediction and BAER team implementation have to be pushed to later implementation dates given funding. Due dates pushed out to 2027. The smoke piece would help with wildland fire and prescribed fire.
- b. HB 1498, Russ Lane, Wildland Fire Management Division Manager – Bill takes effect officially end of next month. Still trying to unpack what has to be done immediately. We'll consult with Forest Service, Fire Districts, and State Fire Marshall to determine aircraft needs for the following year. It's late in the year to implement, it's off cycle with fire preparedness for this summer. We have some opportunity to hire people to implement through fiscal note. Not going to get anyone hired or training done this summer, but will have personnel to help train fire districts on serving as ground contact for aircraft and building our air attack capacity. We'll try and implement as well we can this summer, providing air attack and air resources for initial attack if local districts call for support. We'll try and get an air attack up whenever air resources go out into the basin to mitigate the lack of training this year. Intend to put the two fire bosses in Richland, start date July 1<sup>st</sup>. Drop an air attack somewhere like Pullman. We have enough to meet most if not all needs. The intent is not to send a bill to fire service for that initial attack. Still working on all the parameters, but goal is to send the aircraft to whenever it's needed to prevent the need for State mobilizations and we don't want the billing to be a barrier to prevent people from calling.
- c. Bills attached.

## VI. CIMT Workgroup Update

- a. Gary Berndt, CIMT Workgroup Facilitator – History of IMT; prior to 1985 DNR and USFS had separate teams. Incident in 1988 caused review to establish interagency teams. 5 teams established in 1990. 1994, 5 WA interagency type 2 IMT, 5 State Mob Teams, and 3 Type 1 USFS IMTs were staffed. In 2000, the Geoboard was formed and integrated WA State Mob and DNR "all hazards" Type 2 IMTs. 2012 merged WA Type 2 IMTs with Oregon Federal Type 2 IMTs to create 10 NW Type 2 IMTs. In 2023, we've dropped to 6 Type IMTs and 2 Type 1 IMTs due to staffing capacity.
- b. David Way, Assistant Division Manager for Operations, Wildland Fire Management Division – The first task of the workgroup was to provide an update on the progress of



the transition to date. The next task to provide recommendations on the ongoing use of CIMT, focusing on the inclusion of WA State type 3 and maintaining needed availability in WA State. Intent is to get draft recommendations to George shortly and to have final recommendations in September, and share with this committee ahead of that. Four main categories for recommendations; IMT Capacity, WA State and PNW Geographic area IMT drawdown planning, Type 3 IMT Relationship to CIM, Agency Administrator Transition.

- c. Presentation attached.

## **VII. 2023 Wildland Fire Forecast**

- a. Angie Lane, Assistant Division Manager, Plans and Information, Wildland Fire Management Division – DNR produces a weekly and monthly report, based on information from our own team and the Interagency Coordination Center Predictive Services to Northwest Coordination Center Predictive Services. The dry beginning to June west of the cascades puts the region firmly in the below average category for precipitation, even average precipitation in the back half of the month will still yield a deficit for the year. Summer and early fall look to be high risk for WA, but other states in the SW have normal outlooks and may be able to help with resources.
- b. The Benton fires alone were almost 16,000 acres, June will not be a month where we meet our goal of 95% fires below 10 acres. In May we were able to keep on top of fires though. Rest of season is going to be tough to meet our goals.
- c. Presentation Attached

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

- a. Russ Lane – The red throughout WA from the forecast is reminiscent of the 2020 fire season and I would expect that to happen again this year, very likely to stretch our systems. Have to be prepared this year to bring our A game. The products shown during Angie’s presentation was from our first Kodiak. These are powerful products, able to downlink directly to fire commanders in the field. Being able to have those by first morning of fire was not something we could produce till now.
- b. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Glad to see Gary engaged here, he provides a great model for leadership and interpersonal relationships. Appreciate Angie’s reports, well made and clear information.
- c. Wade Pierce – Appreciate the DNR prompt response on local lightning strikes.
- d. Samantha Schinnell – From prescribed fire perspective, working on a barriers assessment document for WA State. Will be a good document for overcoming current barriers to getting more prescribed fire on the ground. Document should be published next month.
- e. David Way - Lot of the same issues of capacity on the suppression side is reflected on the prescribed fire side.



**IX. Adjourn**

- a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:02pm

**X. Appendices**

- a. Attendance
- b. HB 1578
- c. HB 1498
- d. CIMT Workgroup Update
- e. 2023 Wildland Fire Forecast

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.