

HB 1168 – Tasking

George – We sent out all these materials to solicit your feedback. What was presented was a straw dog effort of a lot of different people within DNR with some initial input from a few fire district that I had talked to trying to formulate this idea of a holistic program to improve fire district capacity. Realize this is the first step of many. We are taking a number of existing programs within the DNR and retooling the existing efforts we are making. Almost like a menu of what we have available or what we have access to but also the idea of how do we long term build something that tells us what do we need to build on in the future.

B&D – Russ Phiffer Hoyt – D – Focus on Fire District training at or near the Fire District on evenings and weekends. Remote districts can't participate unless we can do it close to home.

Randy – Not all Fire Districts are created equal. Flexibility needed. Tailor to district and the area they are in. This is a step in the number of steps in this program, as long as we keep that in mind. Whatever we come up with now will look different as the funds come out and the implementation moves forward. Don't get locked in that we have to find the 100% solution right now. Nothing jumped out as we are missing the mark here, all of it is applicable and can be implemented to some level. Targeting it to what is best to the organization that is asking.

George – Appreciate you saying that, this advisory committee what I am hoping going forward we take the first step and we continuously improve on that. Would love to get to the point where essentially a fire chief is looking at a menu and saying this is what I need for my district and pulling those things out. Then whatever we need to do to identify what is missing from the menu eventually, adding those in.

Melissa – Where you're looking at giving equipment that was in DNRs possession to the fire agencies. We have a lot of experience with that at the fire training academy where we have purchased surplus items, and the cost of maintaining those items is really significant. Keeping in mind that the budgets of these small jurisdictions is small. If there is not a maintenance component to that they are going to find themselves getting this equipment, it's going to break, now it's going to be sitting there because they can't use it. I would encourage you to think about sustainability. Echo, one size doesn't fit all and each fire agency has their own complexity and they don't know what they don't know. Somebody has to be a good steward and show them the way. These smaller agencies that are predominantly volunteer, they will rise to the occasion every single time if you show them the path.

Tony – The other thing with the smaller departments is any kind of in kind funding may be too much for that department. Different tax bases all within the same county.

Melissa – We have a basic fire fighter reimbursement program and we also have a regional direct delivery program that is administered out of the State Fire Marshal's office. I think there is a lot of information we can share from our experiences.

Karen – We have had the Federal Grant part of the program and the Excess part of the program for years. We do definitely run into that issue, especially when we inventory and see that they can't maintain that equipment. To Randy and Tony's point - The match dollars can be an issue. We just recently with Volunteer Fire Fighter assistance lowered the match. We are also looking to add more monies in to be able to do the maintenance, to be able to even outfit it for them. We have two different

grant cycles. The Operational grant could help with maintenance for sure. Melissa we should talk about the mutual programs we have, I guarantee they would be beneficial of each other.

Randy – Efforts through 1168 were the modules, the crews that are being worked on to be implemented across the state and then the menu options, that dashboard approach to what is going to work where. I would like to see, if it's possible, if we could build a module that has direct impact to the initial attack capability that is in an area that is underserved or struggles for staffing, because staffing is a challenge for all of us. Looking for a way within these funds to build a little more of a complete module to say your area fits the criteria for us to provide you funding for seasonal staffing, if that includes apparatus, surplus apparatus, or if the apparatus is already there, we just need to do some more of that inter agency stuff like we have done in certain areas. It's a turnkey in as much as people and fire fighters can be approach to saying here is a module that is ready to go for initial attack for these days, weeks, or months of fire season in an area that really needs that.

George – The idea of being able to fund personnel in fire districts, I do know that on some of the funding there is limitations against doing that. When it was originally brought up we had some exploration that I needed to do and probably failed to follow up on some of the federal funding. As far as the state dollars that were put there it wasn't originally included in the bill but it is something that we could look at going forward. We are all going to be struggling with workforce at this time. I think we are going to have to look at a number of different solutions to figure out how to get bodies where we need them.

Allen – the input that I got from Chief Eckles was almost along the lines of building co-op engines or co-op crews that could be available for either task. Could be available for fuels treatments when there aren't fires or suppression when there are. Put more modules together with shared resources eventually.

George – There are a number of modules out there that can be utilized. The idea of inter-agency engines, positioning resources. There is a lot more of that kind of stuff that we all need to look at.

Lee – Talk about funding these smaller districts, one of these smaller districts big problem is personnel. In rural America in the last 15 years we have lost 50% or more personnel that we used to have for firefighting. With the new farming techniques and such that we just don't have the people available. A lot of these smaller districts should consolidate.

George – It is part of the workforce development that was a part of 1168. I do know that the Commissioner has been developing outreach in parts of that. It is not going to fix the upcoming fire season but there is additional work that is coming on line. We know we are all getting old and nobody is coming on line behind us. We are aware and talking about what we need to do to take next steps.

Allen – That comment was touched on in some of the written response that we got back that I put in that summary. Getting that we need to make sure that we aren't selecting against consolidated districts with the criteria that we are using because that is a trend with smaller districts consolidating in order to have the resources they need. Make sure we didn't build the criteria in a way to make them less eligible for funding because of the size that they had become because they had become consolidated.

Allen – How are we providing staffing, haven't heard much feedback on that yet. The current plan is to staff people in each region that are solely focused on working with their fire districts in that region. Getting to know them intimately, being a primary point of contact so that they know what their districts

need, the districts know who to go to to get what they need, and that clarity is there on how to provide what is needed. That is the model, the question is is that the right model?

Randy – It is a good starting point, it will adjust and adapt as we go forward, having that direct connections is important. Another thing I thought of – That filter process or the sliding scale of budgets how that effects eligibility. Some point at looking at those districts where joint jurisdiction is in play, with DNR and the district, is that a factor to consider when allocating grant dollars and maximizing the effort? Where you have got areas of joint jurisdiction, it is a concept we have talked about for a lot of years, can DNR better use its funds in an area that doesn't have that strong fire district DNR partnership and capacity and redirect funds to an area that is less populated and staffing wise and things like that? Just throwing that in to the mix of things when looking at grant requests.

Karen – The criteria for evaluating grant requests that come in, like Phase 2 grant requests, there is it's a tie breaker basically. If there is mutual aid yes or no, so it is in the criteria. For the VFA grants there is some federal criteria but there are other pieces of that criteria that DNR has put in there to try and meet the need and get things in the right places. We are always open to folks looking at that, working with the coordinators in your area to think about tweaking that. The State funds have even less criteria that are established by the legislature, so really DNR is just trying to get things in the right place. Go back to one piece - Flexibility and making sure that we realize that every district is different. That is something that we have really been working on in the coordinators. We are not going to do interviews for the six positions all at once, get a good cross section of folks to get the right coordinator for the right geographical area.

George – The other thing on this is if we do our job right these six people are going to be very quickly overwhelmed because keeping track of fire departments, understanding what all their needs are and being able to provide all these services. That is y greatest concern is that it is successful too quickly and they get overwhelmed and it fails. Where I have given a lot of direction is I would like to see a standardized job profile of what the deliverables are that they do so that we can support a state wide program with this, but obviously we have to keep a local flavor.

A&C – Underserved Communities – How do we identify underserved and vulnerable communities? Is there a way we build program criteria going to foster serving these underserved communities well?

Tony – Our previous discussion got to the heart of that when you talked about how much money various departments have, what their funding source is, and what their tax base is. Not saying it is this way everywhere but are we talking about the individual home owners or are we talking about the fire districts. A lot of the homes that are in the wildland fire interface generally would not be in the underserved group but they might surround a lower income group.

Melissa – Those regional coordinators really could help through the Fire Defense committee with this information.

Allen – Been working on some draft criteria, another part of the program is the Community Resiliency program has been working to even build that out further. Some of the criteria that we are looking at really does revolve around of community and percent of poverty, what the median income is, and it is by census track, percent of population without access to a private vehicle, percent of population over 65 living alone, people that are disabled, people with limited English proficiency, and people of color.

These tend to be people that are most underserved. Those are the equity that we are talking about and looking at.

EJ – The Environmental Health Disparities map is a critical component of the Heal Act is available for your use. If you overlay many of the tracks that are identified there are on a number of already measured environmental hazards with some of the things you were identifying around percentage of the population that is over 65, living in poverty, you might be able to build a scaffolding around some of your criteria that meets multiple avenues of harm. I would encourage where possible districts that are property poor in some of these areas that resources can most benefit from this can stack on top of that map we are going to get the most bang for the buck and cover the most amount of population that is most at risk with the least amount of resources. That map is going to be critical to your work and I hope that is a piece that is considered as you make these grants and build this work.

Allen – Some of us are well aware of the disparities map. In fact the criteria I just listed we started with that. This is the work that Ashley Blazina has been working on and she has been sharing with us.

Allen – Depending on how you use it, it tends to point more towards urban areas and less towards rural areas. At the same time there is continuousness to those urban and rural areas is something we probably do want to consider. What also Ashley has been looking at is then how you tailor that map to focus more also on underserved wildland areas as opposed to urban areas. How do we add criteria to make sure that we aren't selecting against those areas because of the health disparities map.

Tony – If you look at the disparities map where we have had fires in the last 10 years, three counties are not included. Our big fire areas are not in our colored white on those. Also eliminate the car thing because if you are living in rural Eastern Washington almost everybody has a car because there is no public transportation.

Melissa – As we continue these forward efforts and looking at augmenting the local resources within the fire service. What we are doing is taking state dollars and trying to get them at the local level. Some of the efforts with that Community Risk Reduction Coalition is taking on is doing a statewide risk assessment, and part of that is to be looking at the demographics of the area, not only from the financial side of it but who is living in these areas. It would be interesting to crosswalk this information with what is the fire service reporting on incidents to the types of calls that they are going on and then that bleed over in to wildland fire. If we have predominantly below the median income households living in those areas how are you going to get people to participate in volunteerism when they can't even pay their bills so you are asking more from people who are already stretched thin within their own house. As we look at societal issues its all inter connected. You don't have access to fire related incidents, we have the data and we are happy to share what we are working on and that is part of that Community Risk Reduction workgroup Coalition.

George – We need to have additional discussion on that. There is also some addition risk assessment data that is being done at a regional and national level utilizing informed data which has all of the wildfire reporting information associated with it so we have access to that. There is a lot of new sources and slicing and dicing of data that is coming available. With a lot of these grants one thing that I had mentioned to Karen and the team was to try to keep these things so that we are setting ourselves up so that the source of the funding becomes less and less important. We want to make sure if we do set criteria of how we evaluate an operations grant it takes into account those baseline items and then bills

on that utilizing some criteria that is not going to fluctuate or be very confusing to the applicants. Have the conversation of what is the best source of each one of these pieces of data that we are looking at and then going through and tailoring it to that. The criteria that is in there and the sources of data that create the criteria are some things that we have a little bit of an opportunity to tweak on and make sure we get it right from the beginning.

Melissa – We are looking forward to learning from you guys and sharing what we know along the way. It is a great opportunity to serve those local communities that are really struggling.

Allen – Other piece is who else should we be talking to? What key stakeholders, partners should we be making extra effort to reach out to get input on answering these questions?

Karen – Melissa is giving us great ideas in the chat.

Allen – Share with me and I would be a good conduit for that or you can go directly to others. I will be collecting all of that information and continuously passing it on. In terms of what happens next, we have been fast tracking this because there is a real need to build some criteria and a plan for deploying this funding immediately for the next round of grants.

Karen – there is really three different things that 1168 gave us, VFA federal dollar match, that is already out applications are out ready for fire districts, the six fire district coordinators, and the last is Operational Grants and there is no timeline on those but the money needs to be spent by June 30.

Cody – When you said Commissioners did you mean County Commissioners? I know they have to answer questions on suppression efforts to their local constituents.

George – Yes I did mean County Commissioners

Cody – No fire districts in Indian country that I know of.

George – The one thing you do need to think about is with the recent guidance with the federal agencies about consultation with tribal interest. That is going to potentially put some criteria on community risk funds and SFA and VFA going forward. It is a fantastic opportunity and you are part of that team that's going to be talking to that allocation but that directive is a lot broader. I would ask you to think about it, how it could potentially influence some of these state programs too.

Cody – Was going to run it by some of the other intertribal timber council tribes that have smaller land bases that deal with these more often.

Allen – Be thinking about districts that are adjacent to those tribal areas. We had one reach out to the Commissioner about helping to stand up a Wildland Fire Volunteer training program with them for reservation members or tribal members.

Cody – I thought in Eastern Washington if they weren't an incorporated cities then they weren't eligible to be considered fire districts.

NEXR – Collect this feedback to add to the other feedback that we received so far from other sources and then put together a short report that summarizes it all in response to the task order – share with folks here inside DNR to get their reaction to that. Fine tune and bring back to you at our next meeting so you can get a look at it and see how we did then to ask for approval to say that this is your final

product. Know that we are going to start using it immediately because time is neigh in getting this money out the door and we are going to need to be adaptable and continue to evolve this as we get more information and learn new things.

George – The Commissioner is being kept in the loop as to what is occurring on this process.