

**WILDLAND FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

November 18, 2021

Zoom Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Allen Lebovitz – Wildland Fire Liaison, Chair
Tony Craven – Small Forest Landowner
Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – State Land Trust Beneficiary
Melissa Gannie – Assistant Fire Marshal
KC Whitehouse - Washington State Council of Fire Fighters
Cody Desautel – Tribal Nations Representative
Lee Hemmer – Industry Landowner (Range)
Erick Walker – USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor
Leonard Johnson – Fire Chief (Westside)

Committee Members Absent:

Vacant – Cowlitz County Commissioner
Randy Johnson – Fire Chief (Eastside)
Vacant – Statewide Environmental Rep.
Vacant – Fire District Commissioner
Vacant – Industry Landowner (Timber)
Jim DeTro – County Commissioner (Eastside)

Guests/Other Attendees:

Shelly Goodwin – WFAC Coordinator
Chuck Turley – Wildland Fire DM
Russ Lane – Wildland Fire DM
Loren Torgerson – Policy Advisor
Angie Lane – Wildland Fire
Management Planning and
Information ADM
George Geissler – Deputy Supervisor,
Wildland Fire Mgt. and State Forester
Eric Veach, Gifford Pinchot National
Forest Supervisor

I. Opening, Roll Call

The meeting of the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee was called to order at 1:01 p.m. on November 18, 2021 was taken, 9 members were present by Zoom and 6 members were excused, constituting a quorum.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the September 16, 2021 council meeting were presented in draft and reviewed. Motion to approve draft minutes made by Committee member Tony Craven, seconded by Committee member Cody Desautel. Motion carried unanimously.

- ## III. Chairman's Report – Focus on HB1168 implementation work, been really front and center. The work that I have been focusing on that has to do with this committee has been doing outreach with Fire District Chiefs and other community groups as we build out certain aspects of these programs. In particular the Volunteer Fire District Assistance program but also the Community Resiliency programs. The discussion revolves around, what do you see the needs in you're in the district being around preparedness and resiliency? What capacity do you currently have in place to meet those needs? Where are the gaps? We've been receiving great feedback. Encourage anyone that comes in to contact with local fire districts or community groups to continue to share that information with me. Membership is down 4 positions and losing some more. We are doubling down on recruitment. There are requirements in RCW on how we fill those positions. I am reaching out to those organizations that correspond with those positions to get input. Preparing a briefing for the Commissioner to let her know what the status is and naming nominees for her review.

IV. Agency Updates

- a. Chuck Turley – Wildland Fire Management Division Manager - A lot of change in Wildland Fire Management Division. I am going to be retiring on the 3rd of January and Russ Lane has been selected to fill the Division Manager role. He was selected through a nationwide solicitation process. He is very experienced, well known, and respected. Russ came to us after about 30 years in fire at Oregon Dept. of Forestry. He has been the Operations and Aviation Assistant Division Manager going on 3 years. Update by Russ Lane. HB1168 – a lot of work by the division oriented towards implementation. We have ordered 14 dozers, 4 firefighting excavators and transports. We are going to be hit with delivery delays, expect those to start trickling in next summer. Working on developing position descriptions for the 9 hand crew module leaders. We have equipment operators to hire, approximately 15 span of control overhead. We are also working with the camps programs, putting together a post release incarcerated individual hand crew. Some ongoing coordination with the Department of Corrections on how that all comes together. It will be located in the Spokane area. Standing up the expanded Fire District Assistance program. Done some initial scoping on fixed wing aircraft purchases, one of those is a Kodiak air attack platform. Looks promising that we will be able to start working that next fire season, potential delivery date of July 1. Been doing a lot of budget work this fall so we get the legislative approval and then we have to work through how we are going to implement that. Currently operating on our carry forward budget from the 19-21 biennium and waiting final approval of our spending plans. Standing up a new

Community Resiliency section. Working on hiring an ADM for it. Currently have Guy Gifford in NE Region as the acting ADM. That section will house Wildfire Ready Neighbors and also Fire Wise, Ashley Blazenia has come in as Coordinator for Fire Wise and Guy is working the Wildfire Ready Neighbors side. Currently have a project going on to refine the templates for our interagency agreements that some fire districts had an issue with. Hopefully we can get to a pretty quick resolution on those. Some of the big ones are Insurance Indemnity & Dispute Resolution. Have a number of personnel changes in the division, new Meteorologist has been hired, both division safety officer positions are vacant, looking for an Operations ADM to fill my previous position, that is temporarily being filled by Don Melton from South Puget Sound, and a couple of operations positions established under HB1168, and we are reestablishing an ADM for Aviation. We are hosting a Complex Incident Management Course in Bremerton late February or early March. It is a National course sponsored by the National Association of State Foresters and will qualify people to the type 1 level, so the equivalent of S520 for type 1 qualifications. Started framing up Wildland Fire Management Division conference, going to try and pull together many of our fire leadership people, and it will likely take place in May in Western Washington.

- b. Melissa Gannie, Assistant Fire Marshal – Still paying bills, no additional MOBs since fire season. Made great headway in getting the reimbursements completed. Same boat with vaccine mandate, 73 attestations for fire agencies, 30 vaccination verifications. Pay rates for casual hires is being discussed – conversation with State Chiefs on rates, have had some initial conversations. Nice to see Community Resiliency section is being stood up, within the fire service we have established a Community Risk Reduction Coalition with the various associations. We held a National Fire Academy course this last week on best practices in Community Risk Reduction, as well as there will be two additional courses. For local Commissioners there is an [RCW 19.27.560](#) that talks about the adoption of the WUI code at the local level and enforcement around that with new construction that you would want to look at. Through the coalition and working with WSAFM we will be talking about the WUI code and the mapping that DNR has done for the local jurisdictions in order to implement the WUI code and arming the Fire Marshals with the information that they need to try to move the needle in the communities in which their protecting. I would say that the Wildfire Ready Neighbors program as well as Fire Wise are tools in their toolbox to help them at the local level reduce risk.
- c. Erick Walker, USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor – Regional/Local – Steve Rollings is retiring the first of the year, Rob Allen will fill in – will be reporting to Portland mid-December. Fire & Aviation Management is phasing out at region level, local level will stay in place. Wont think that will affect the work that this group does, just wanted to share it for awareness. National Infrastructure Bill was signed. Have not seen what the money will be and where it will go but there will be monies that address

wildland fire needs, fuels, both on the implementation as well as what do we need to have in order to support those elements for the agency mission. We will be looking to get that budget direction. We will have some years to implement it. Also under the continuing resolution that was passed to keep the Federal Government funded through December 3rd there was disaster relief money and in that there is money to help in the recovery of the 2019 though 2021 fires, it will also have money that passes through State and private forestry as will the infrastructure bill that could then be funding mechanisms that the state and local agencies are passing through the Federal agencies to state and local agencies to do the work. So we are still waiting on some of that budget guidance and direction. We are also looking in a proactive manner as an agency rather than trying to divvy the fuels reduction pie equitably across all of the landscape, we are taking a look at revamping and therefor prioritizing where we really need it. We are using DNRs 20 Year Strategy and other information to influence where those monies might be focused in this effort. Need to get the bigger bang for the buck. This will be my last meeting, I will be moving down to the Lake Tahoe Basin and lead that unit in Region 5. Eric Veach, is currently stepping in to fill my position on the Committee. Eric Veach – Forest Supervisor on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, works out of Vancouver. Been in this role for about 17 months. Came from the National Park Service in Alaska where I worked for about 20 years.

- d. Leonard Johnson, Fire Chief (Westside) –Primary focus is on interagency agreements. Currently working on the rate schedule, one of the things that Fire Service has pushed back up through both the State Patrol and DNR is to look at where are casual hire rates are at. Our volunteer rates are actually less than what seasonal DNR employees are receiving. No after actions yet to wrap up the season. Happy to see the rain and everything has slowed down. Still working with EMD, DOH, Washington Fire Service and DNR on COVID 19 testing and impacts on the fields. We have another meeting coming up. We got a lot of feedback from the type 1 teams that operated out there this year.

V. New Business

- a. **Wildfire Season Report** – Angie Lane, ADM, Wildland Fire Management Planning and Information – PowerPoint attached. Not fire year wrap-up but through September.
- b. **1168 Implementation – Fire District Assistance Program** - George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor, Wildland Fire Management and State Forester – In Portland had a number of State Foresters there and were dissecting the infrastructure bill. There are three different themes of money that are coming towards our federal partners, the first one is we had a continuing resolution that had a disaster relief rider put on to it, that money has not come to the regions yet. While that funds our normal stuff

there is also additional funding that is expected to come that will do fuels treatments and also community resiliency work. The second bucket is the Infrastructure Bill. Primarily what we have been trying to decipher is, what is coming towards the forestry side of the bill? Actual breakdowns and what is in the bill is really only recently coming to bear. What I learned today is basically they are 30 to 60 days out to even being able to provide us any kind of reasonable numbers. In the Infrastructure Bill there are three primary buckets of money related to the forestry provision: First bucket are our normal state and private funds, \$1.5 billion over a five year period. The second bucket revolves around Wildfire Risk and Reduction and is primarily on National Forest lands, \$3.4 billion. The third bucket is around Ecosystem Restoration on the National Forest itself, \$2.1 billion. There is significant funding that is available through that Infrastructure bill. The last one that you will hear about is the Build Back Better, or the Reconciliation plan and then that is everything that is currently in the news. There is actually additional funding for wildfire reduction as well as some capacity building work, and if that should pass there is literally another several billion dollars that would be going to be coming to the forest and wildfire sector. A lot of this funding will be coming in existing programs. **Fire District Assistance Program** – We received some components, such as building more engines for DNR to be able to provide more engines fire districts, we also received money for existing grant programs and new grant programs. We will be adding Fire District Assistance Coordinators, staff that will work with the districts to assist districts to accessing the resources we can provide to them. The vision is that they will develop the relationship with the individual districts in each Region. They will compile a data base with district staff and qualifications, the equipment they have, their equipment needs, and what their training needs are. The goal is to have a better understanding of where we can serve them, and provide a menu of services to meet their needs. The document that Allen gave you is a high arching description of that program. Please review it and see if this meets the needs that that are out there on the ground. The other piece of this is we ask you to consider the priorities for working within communities and provide your advice on whether this program plan addresses these priorities. Does this still passed muster and are we implementing 1168 to meet the goals of the Wildfire Strategy and then also especially meeting the needs of the fire districts. We are asking for you to put together a review of the program plan and criteria that has been shared with you and provide the Commissioner with further recommendations, and a thumbs up, thumbs down, as well as any suggestions you might have related to how this program is proposed to be implemented.

VI. Questions, Comments and Chat

- a. Melissa – Is your appropriation a fiscal of biennial appropriation? It is biennial, some of it is tied to fiscal year 1 and 2 how it is allotted. .
- b. Erick – On the S520 the national course usually includes the agency

administrator element, is that something you were wanting to host and if so Federal Agency administrators would be able to get in? That has been a less formalized process from my limited experience. There was discussion about that, I think it's A. participation has kind of come and gone but I will take that to the steering committee and I will circle back with you. There is a couple of good opportunities that are less formalized than 520 but there is a shadow process there and has been used for AA's in the past. But we have also got some role play roles for AA's.

- c. Erick – Do to rules that have been established by respected agencies do you see the same issue we see with a struggle to fill positions as we approach fire hire? I share your concern. We just worked through our mandate deadline, we lost some folks but not a huge number and less than we were worried about losing. But some key staff with some good skills and years of experience under their belt. Going forward as we are trying to grow, hire, and expand the organization I have the same concern, it's a little bit of an unknown right now as to what is going to happen on our seasonal workforce, how many of those are going to come back. It is going to be tough and we will probably hire a number of folks that we will have to train into their jobs.
- d. Cody - We have bunch of infrastructure money and we think there is going to be a money funding increase on the federal side in 2023. So there is going to be a huge amount of money available, limited staffing now for the funding we do get so how do we increase that capacity and take advantage of those appropriations.
- e. Allen – Those needs were identified in the Fire Protection Strategy. It is something we have seen coming and it has gotten worse in the last couple years but we have been talking about how to respond to it. There elements from HB1168 that directly speak to workforce development.
- f. Russ – Initial funding is small and will need to develop over time
- g. Loren – With the strategy, one of the pieces with that was to establish this interagency working group to tackle some of these issues. There is still need for that and if we could get some momentum back to what to do, whether this group is making a recommendation I think that would be appropriate as well. I do believe we are going to be poaching each other's employees unless we figure out a way to do this more efficiently.
- h. Chuck – I was reading a communication that came out from Jeff Rupert who runs a program for all of the Dept. of Interior agencies. A part of his communication was summarizing the new permanent fire staff being hired by the Forest Service next year, by interior agencies for next year. You just hear Cody talk about what they are trying to do, several of the states are in that same position. You add all of those up and you're talking about several hundred new permanent positions and we are going to be training a lot of people to do these jobs. The people with those skill sets just aren't out there right now we are going to have to create them.
- i. Tony – Question on HR & Support positions. How are they set pay wise compared to the private sector? Chuck – It is something that is being addressed. It is hard to compete. Melissa – Bargaining unit has its own

- process also.
- j. Russ- Thank you Angie, pretty tremendous effort by the whole system across the DNR program partners, fire service, federal agencies, and our state partners. We pulled together and avoided a lot more catastrophic fires by working together and that was pretty cool to be a part of.
 - k. Cody - Thanks DNR for the crews you sent to us, those guys were a tremendous help.
 - l. George - - I want to acknowledge the team that was put together this last fire season, the team did an excellent job managing the resources, putting together the resources, and trying new things. Everyone thanks a lot it was a solid performance this year.
 - m. Cody - Do you think you are ready from an administrative standpoint to get that money out the door? George - Workforce development need is there. I am more worried about contract administrators, accountants, and purchasing people. Just being able to ensure that we can get all of the grants into the partner's hand. I am more worried about the forestry side, the fire fighter side but also equally concerned about what you mentioned. DNR is working on building out our administrative group and trying to get a plan in place.
 - n. Melissa- Are these grants going to be easy for the volunteer agencies to apply for? That is the hope! We are looking at ways so even with the existing grant programs, are people having trouble applying for these? If so we want to know that and hopefully these coordinators will be able to recognize that and say look we are having problems and we are having trouble with getting the people to fill out the right for, or whatever it turns out to be. The end goal is to make this so that it is easy!
 - o. Allen - Give me input on how we work together with the tasking of this group.
 - p. Melissa - Need time to read this through and digest it. Present this to the Fire Leadership forum and Fire Defense committee. George - We want them to engage with us to get that kind of feedback. Allen - That is our direction to reach out to individuals or organizations to get that kind of input.
 - q. Allen - Send me information to consolidate or we could hold a workshop. After Thanksgiving I will get in touch with you via email to talk about what the next step might be. . Due date Dec. 20 (next meeting).

VII. Committee roundtable – Public Comment

- a. Cody - I would not from a fuels perspective in the infrastructure bill that there was 200 million allocated for Tribal Force Protection Act and Good Neighbor Projects. We are going to try to reach out to tribes and try to engage them on how that might be useful in working with their federal neighbors.
- b. Tony - A couple of quick notes, during the conversation we did talk about funding mechanisms and not funding wealth funded departments but also trying to simplify the overall contract issue. I have generated loyalty to the contractors and in order for the DNR to compete with us they would have to do the same. The capacity part, there needs to be some level of bigger projecting.

- c. Lee – I am going to get ahold of the Conservation Commission and get their contact with their Fire Wise and I will get the information to you.
- d. KC – Challenges in labor market as it pertains to what you are doing with 1168 positions. I work for a mid-sized fire department that has 57 full time employees. Ten years ago when we post a Fire Fighter Paramedic job opening we would have a hundred applicants no problem, we are lucky now to get three or four. One of the things that we have done is, I hate using the term lowering our standards, but we have dropped our training requirements to allow for more traditional entry level testing and have had some success with that. The other thing is, maybe this is a little bit of an opportunity on the folks that you are going to hire on the operational side of things, I chair the SPS Interagency Peer Group Committee and we review all the task books for the DNR and Fire Service staff. We have got some perspective on some of the bottle necks that exist and the challenges that exist with getting folks through ICS and the task books. Maybe this is an opportunity for DNR to collaborate with the NWCG to create some efficiencies.

VIII. Adjournment and Next Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 3:40 pm. The next general meeting is scheduled for December 16, 2021 from 1 – 4 pm, by Zoom.

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