

WILDLAND FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
September 24, 2020
Zoom Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Allen Lebovitz – Wildland Fire Liaison, Chair
Lee Hemmer – Industry Landowner (Range)
Tony Craven – Small Forest Landowner
Cody Desautel – Tribal Nations Representative
Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – State Land Trust Beneficiary
J.D. Marshall – Industry Landowner (Timber)
Melissa Gannie – Assistant Fire Marshal
Jim DeTro – County Commissioner (Eastside)
KC Whitehouse - Washington State Council of Fire Fighters
Reese Lolley – Statewide Environmental Representative
Dave LaFave – Fire Chief (Westside)
Dave Johnson – Fire District Commissioner (Eastside)

Committee Members Absent:

Joe Gardner – Cowlitz County Commissioner
Erick Walker – USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor
Randy Johnson – Fire Chief (Eastside)

Guests/Other Attendees:

Loren Torgerson – Wildfire Policy Advisor
Andrew Spaeth, Forest Action Plan Coordinator
Russ Lane –Assistant Wildfire Division Manager, Operations and Aviation
Shelly Goodwin – WFAC Coordinator
TJ Martinelli – Reporter
Chris Lindberg – slatewildfire.com
Dave Morgan

I. Opening, Roll Call

The meeting of the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee was called to order at 10:12 a.m. on September 27, by Zoom. Roll was taken, 12 members were present by Zoom and 3 members were excused, constituting a quorum.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the July 23 and August 27, 2020 council meeting were presented in draft and reviewed. Motion to approve draft minutes made by Committee member Cody Desautel, seconded by Committee member Melissa Gannie. Motion carried unanimously.

III. Chairman Report

IV. Chairman Lebovitz, provided a verbal chair report. Really intense end of fire season. Rain in many places that is hopefully going to be bringing many of these fires to an end in Washington, hope the same down in Oregon too. I visited most of the large incidents in Washington. Saw some pretty profound devastation to many

communities. Loss of homes, buildings, utilities and loss of natural resources. Grazing lands were hit pretty hard and it is putting many cattlemen in a rough spot for grazing this fall. I have received requests for assistance for finding grazing land. I saw an incredible response from communities helping each other. Cooperation between neighbors and non-neighbors helping each other out. I've also been in touch with relief groups that have been stepping up to help. This brings to light the importance of the work we are doing. Preparing for and responding to wildfire and assessing the impacts and helping to repair them. Questions from the group – Lee Hemmer mentions that the Conservation District in Douglas County is having a Zoom Meeting with FEMA to get relief for farmers. Reese – Requested context on what you think in focusing on recovery short term and long term – The roll of this committee and at what level we operate. Allen responded that he thinks our level is a fairly high one. Advise on issues related to how we address the impact and how to assess that and how we facilitate the process of recovery. Tony – mentioned that FEMA is not classifying the Cold Springs fire as not a fire but a wind event, thought that would be of interest. Allen plans on looking into this. Russ stated FMAG is in place for this and the Pearl Hill and Cold Springs fires. I want to mention the roll out, refinement and operationalization of the HB 1784 project and identification of PODS in the pilot areas is taking place. I have been actively involved in rolling it out in Leavenworth. The 1784 team has held community meetings to introduce the initial drafts to all the pilot communities. We are currently at a phase where the team is meeting in each community with fire chiefs, other fire officials and partner groups to talk about more of the details of how those PODS are being established, what they look like on the ground, and how people in those areas feel about them. There has been a very positive response so far. A direct link between Forest Health treatment implementation and Wildfire preparedness is being made in the process, which is what I focus on facilitating in the work. I will continue to report back on this as work progresses.

V. DNR/WSP Update

a. Russ Lane Assistant Wildfire Division Manager, Operations and Aviation – Hard to give a concise update, our Wildfire division is still all over the place supporting incidents in Oregon and elsewhere, still trying to staff what we have going on in Washington. Trying to get normal business back on the rails. In August we weathered the dry lightning storm that started a number of fires, approaching Labor Day we were wrapping up the Evans Canyon fire that had a lot of resources committed. Then a predicted wind event occurred that was really tough. We responded, but we had limited resources due to Oregon being hit hard as well. Folks pulled together though and did exceedingly well, calling it a team effort is a huge understatement. As of now we have 3 type 3 incidents left on the landscape. The rain is a welcome sight and hopefully it extends to the eastside. The forecast is saying sunshine so we will get a drying out period again. We are going back to initial attack and normal fall fire season pace. Fire Season is not over and we are looking on closing it out strong, however we are in a down glide releasing aviation assets as the contracts expire, starting to step down a little with our seasonal workforce, trying to return to whatever normal was before this started. COVID-19 was part of the normal before going into this so I want to touch on it.

Really excellent results with only a handful of positive cases around fire camps but really not any more than you see in the overall background community. Seasonal pre-planning feels like it paid off and the plan was executed the way we hoped it would be. Still a lot going on in Oregon and a lot to do as far as community recovery. We will be continuing to support that through the fall.

- b. Andrew Spaeth Forest Action Plan Coordinator – Report attached
- c. Dave LaFave Westside Fire Chief - Strike teams under EMAC left yesterday morning to go to California. There was a request for 78 strike teams or task forces so there is still 70 that are unable to fill. We still have single resources so if they make more strike teams we have resources. Everybody is still running a little thin. Trying to recoup. Most everybody got extended if they were out on assignment.
- d. Melissa Gannie from the State Fire Marshal's Office - 2020 statistics – 24 incidents (2 all-risk incidents and 22 fires), revised initial estimated cost for this year is \$14.8 million. Bill Slosson did an analysis on damage and structures based on what was reported into the 209 situation report and we are showing 299 single family structures, 1 mixed occupancy, 21 nonresidential buildings, and 335 outbuildings. We had 3 active mobilizations on the west side this year and many incidents that occurred over the Labor Day weekend, we had 11 mobilizations by the 8th with many resources stretched thin.

VI. Old Business

- a. WFAC Operating Work Plan - Reese was not at the last meeting so he had a few questions on what staff are assigned to the risk assessments and how we are coordinating with risk assessments that have already been done with Forest Health, and our role. Allen stated that he doesn't know which staff are involved currently. It does closely align with the work the Forest Health group is doing. Part of the mechanism would be through the joint work group if we decided to stand that up and task it with this particular work function. Allen's expectation would be that DNR staff present that to us when it is ready for review and input. A lot of it will come from the Forest Health Risk Assessment project. Loren thinks we still need to do some work internally to develop that framework. Allen also added that as he becomes more familiar with the 1784 work it appears that there is a vital need to take that assessment work and integrate it into and communicate it with the Wildfire division in DNR and other wildfire response resources to get them to take a hard look at it, provide input, and to agree that it makes sense. We may play some role in facilitating that.
- b. Motion to approve the work plan as it stands made by committee member Dave LaFave and seconded by committee member Lee Hemmer. Motion carried with no opposition.
- c. Allen Lebovitz– Sub work group between FHAC and WFAC, a standing group for when there is work to do. There will be an internal organizational meeting at DNR on how to staff this and stand it up, then come back to this committee and ask for our first work items. Ideally they would come from our work plan.
- d. Motion to approve establishing the joint work group made by committee member Dave LaFave and seconded by committee member Cody Desautel. Motion carried with no opposition.

VII. New Business

- a. Loren Torgerson – Electric Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Task Force – Legislative taskforce that is looking at wildland fire prevention as it relates to electric utilities around the state. We have had 6 meetings and because of the governor order had to skip a few but are back into doing them by video. We have a final report due by December 1st. The legislature tasked the taskforce with recommendations for investigation protocols particularly with the provisions of the statutes that address DNRs investigation responsibilities and authorities and then to publish those protocols when they are done. Next create rosters of certified wildland fire investigators or firms and same roster of 3rd party qualified utility operations personnel who could be called upon by DNR or the utilities in the event of a wildfire that is associated with utilities, or helping both to understand reducing risk and liabilities from the wildfire. Next was Develop communication protocols and educational exchanges from the department and electric utilities for identifying and addressing issues relating to utility infrastructure to reduce the risk of wildland fires. Final task is to develop a model agreement between State Uplands and this taskforce that utilities could use in the future addressing how to manage hazard tries in their power line infrastructure or adjacent to them. We have a draft model agreement that will continue to get refined over the next month or so. We had an actual taskforce that worked with State Uplands to develop that. It attempts to streamline the process for identifying, evaluating, and mitigating any hazard tries that are in the right of way of DNR trust lands or adjacent to them. Agreement does not apply to any private lands or Federal Lands. Protocols for investigations have been pretty well drafted insuring that utilities have the opportunity to be engaged early on in the process as DNR investigates the cause and origin of a wildfire that is associated with the utilities, also evidence preservation and evidentiary chain. The roster has been more challenging, developing the criteria and there really isn't an existing pool that meet that criteria. Taskforce is providing us with some of that criteria. Communication and information exchange is very positive and will probably provide a taskforce for that also. Most utilities in the state are represented on this taskforce as well as large forest land owners and representatives from small forests as well. Haven't engaged with other states.

VIII. Final Q&A – Committee roundtable-Public Comment

- a. JD – Comment on utilities – How about we just bury the lines? Has anybody run the cost benefit on that? I like the work plan but I would like us to not limit ourselves to what the legislature tells us to do or what anyone else thinks we should do, I think we have a good committee here with lots of good ideas and I don't think we should be afraid to throw out the crazy or stupid ones because there might be something there. Loren – short answer it is super expensive. It would be a good conversation to have with George.
- b. Jim – Every single gas line in 15 western states is buried underground. Power pole life expectancy is 40 years, a lot of the poles are over 50 years old. Might be something to do a pilot project on, might be time to do some underground work.

Main event last night – cleanup started – process we have been through before.
Rain event – don't expect to see anything drastic if it comes slow and steady.

- c. Lee – Douglas Conservation District meeting @ 3 to discuss Pearl Hill Fire recovery
- d. Melissa appreciate conversation with thinking about the local communities. Look at community risk reduction.
- e. Cody – Interested to see how these work group's pans out and what discussions come out of them and how we incorporate them into our recommendations or work plan. Assessing fires that will give us information of what the fire impacts were. Will be a good example of how we use these late season fires in the future. Will share that with the group maybe next meeting. Will do outreach on these events and follow up.
- f. Reese – We need to figure out how to use fire to our use. Next meeting better understanding of what happened with 2561 recommendations. What are some further lessons on those recommendations with what happened this summer? Modified prescribed fire training exchange this fall.
- g. Russ – Fire in Western Oregon serve as a warning to Western Washington. Look at the unique issues of wildfire west of the cascades. Both the urban density and density of timber change the equations over here. It is not just fire but smoke impacts also. Keep in mind fire is not just eastern Washington.
- h. KC – State Council of Fire Fighters start ramping up for legislative priorities and our plan there. If there is opportunity to develop cohesive strategy we are more than willing to help out with that.
- i. Loren – Legislative ask updates at next meeting.
- j. Tony – Is anyone having discussions on what could be done in sagebrush country. Allen said nothing yet but I think it is coming soon. Reese stated he will send something out, that the Washington Fire Adaptive Communities Learning Network was putting on a shrub step fire workshop that got canceled due to Covid but they are going to go virtual with it soon. Loren – 2561 has touched on it and the 10 year strategy too. So it is out there. It is a conversation that I think is likely to again come up in the next several months.
- k. Allen - Non-English speaking needs, in the Leavenworth area they have been working on that hard. That might be something we want to carry forward to our communications staff a little bit more. I will bring that up.

IX. Adjournment and Next Meeting

Motion to adjourn by committee member Cody Desautel and seconded by committee members Dave LaFave and Lee Hemmer. Meeting adjourned at 12:38 pm. The next general meeting is set at 10 am, on November 12, 2020 by Zoom meeting.

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