

**WILDLAND FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

September 16, 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 State Fire Marshal
KC Whitehouse - Washington State Council of Fire Fighters
Randy Johnson – Fire Chief (Eastside)
Reese Lolley – Statewide Environmental Representative
Erick Walker – USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor
Leonard Johnson – Fire Chief (Westside)
Cody Desautel – Tribal Nations Representative

Committee Members Absent:

Vacant – County Commissioner (Westside)
Vacant – Fire District Commissioner
J.D. Marshall – Industry Landowner (Timber)
Lee Hemmer – Industry Landowner (Range)
Jim DeTro – County Commissioner (Eastside)

Guests/Other Attendees:

Shelly Goodwin
Chuck Turley
Julie Gilling
Janessa Subido
Hilary Lundgren
Rose Shriner
Jim Cahill
Annie Schmidt
Andrew Spaeth
Ryan Anderson

I. Opening, Roll Call

The meeting of the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee was called to order at 1:02 p.m. on September 16, 2021 was taken, 9 members were present by Zoom and 3 members were excused, constituting a quorum.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the July 21, 2021 council meeting were presented in draft and reviewed. Motion to approve draft minutes made by Committee member Cody Desautel, seconded by Committee member Russ Pfeiffer Hoyt. Motion carried.

III. Chairman's Report – The implementation of HB1168 has been demanding the focus of our efforts now as we are shifting out of active fire suppression season. I have been reaching out to fire chiefs and fire districts all across the state to seek input in implementation of 1168, in particular focusing on the Community Wildfire Resiliency and Prevention program that that bill directs us to implement and gives us the opportunity to actually build a very substantial program for. That is a place where our partners are going to be playing a vital role. With that comes resources for fire districts. There is a clear tie to the Wildfire Ready Neighbors program that we finished the piolet on this fall. The intent has been to go to our partners and say rather than us coming to you with a plan saying here how do you like what we are doing for you, it is soliciting their input. Asking them, what are your needs for increasing community resiliency and prevention work? What capacity already exists, and importantly, what are the gaps in capacity that 1168 can be used to fill? We are currently setting up meetings with George, Chuck, myself and Fire Chiefs across the state to continue that conversation. Strong effort to seek that input far and wide. If you have input or have constituents with input, send that forward in whatever form makes sense. I am more than happy to field individual emails, phone calls, and set up meetings.

I also want to touch on Wildfire Ready Neighbors, we did do a bunch of follow up work after the piolet to assess how it went. We are planning on preparing a final report that summarizes that information. We held after action reviews and collected a large and valuable body of information that will be synthesized and will be in this report. We also sent out a series of surveys on various aspects of the program to the end user to see what their experience was like, also to the people engaged in providing the services and then taking a deeper dive into the survey tool we developed with Survey 123. All that information has been collected, synthesized, and is in a draft report. With fire season the ball got dropped a little bit with finalizing that report, but we have picked it back up and prioritized getting it finished in a format that can be shared. The next step will be to bring it to George so he can review it, once that is done hopefully we can then share it widely so everybody can learn from this. Then the intent is to continue the work that has been started, go back out and pick up where we left off, and build the program out.

PODS and PCLs, we saw the analysis completed in the 1784 project employed at the Cedar Creek fire and Cub Creek fire. The team fielded a request to provide that data directly to the incident management teams managing these fires. We had our fire scientist produce the map products for them and other data that they shared that did prove to be quite useful. We were happy to see the real time test. We are not letting that test go to waste. I got to look at one of the areas where we did complete treatments that are in line with the PODs assessment and Forest Health treatment protocols where the Cedar Creek fire had actually burned and was used as a burn out operation for fire suppression. Had a chance to see how that played out in a treated stand and also adjacent untreated stands in the same area. Our fire science team is going back there to collect more detailed data on the results there. How those treatments faired and an analysis on the effectiveness.

IV. Agency Updates

- a. Chuck Turley – Wildland Fire Management Division Manager – It has been a busy 2 ½ months. For much of July and August we have had all of our northwest teams allocated here within the northwest. The most we have had is 5 teams out of our geographic area coming in to help us. That is starting to wind down now. Everybody is paying attention to the weather forecast now, the expectation is we will see a significant change tomorrow with significant rain through the weekend. Oregon might be getting more wind than rain. Based on having gotten some of our large fires in the northwest off of the landscape and the weather our MAC group did make the decision this morning that we are going to go to preparedness level 4 at midnight and we are going to put preparedness level 3 in our 10 day outlook, and we will review that on Monday once we see what actually happens with the weather.

Most of the last 2 months I have spent in Portland, our MAC chair is actually a type 1 incident commander on one of the California teams and because I am the past chair he asked me to fill in for him while he was gone. During July and August I was normally spending 4 days a week out of the coordination center which is why I have missed the last couple of meetings. We are starting to wind down some of the additional resources that we have brought in to the state. We had 4 CL415s on DNR contracts for most of those 2 months. Two of those we have given up and allowed to go elsewhere and the remaining 2 we were supposed to have lost on Monday, we have extended them for a week. Of the 5 fire bosses, 3 will be going probably by Monday at the latest – the rest are on contract until the end of the month. We have one exclusive use helicopter on contract that we will probably let go on Monday as well. We have also had quite a few out of state engine and single resources – as they end current tours they will not be replaced. Also seeing our seasonal fire fighters leaving and heading back to school.

Within the Division - I will be retiring the beginning of January. We have done a series of interviews for replacement. George is now preparing to take a recommendation on next step forward to the Commissioner, probably next week some time. Most of the attention now that fire season has wound down will be shifted to budget, like writing spending plans, is going to be taking up a lot more of our time. We had a very successful fire season, kept a very large percent of the fires small. I think a lot of that had to do with bringing those additional resources into the state, being able to hit fires quicker and harder. Again we had some help from our National Guard, we are just finishing up with our second rotation of our Guard hand crews and we did have National Guard aviation resources on hand for about 2 months.

COVID is still a significant issue. On our daily MAC calls we are still hearing about fortunately small numbers of positive cases that come about on just about a daily basis. There are also a lot of questions about vaccination mandates on both the state and federal level, not something I can address on this call, I have been asking questions and not very successful in getting those answers.

- b. Melissa Gannie, Assistant State Fire Marshal –Written report attached.
- c. Erick Walker, USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor – Document attached, map of Washington ongoing fires. We still have fire on the landscape but we are ramping down. Many fires won't be put out until Mother Nature puts them out. Challenge we had this fire season was being very strategic with the resources we could find. That was hard on the agency administrators. I want to complement our partners, it showed the health and strength in our relationships, that is the foundation of how we take on these challenging times, we rely on the strength of the relationships to get us through and support one another.

Reducing closure areas around local incidents – there will be some that will still stand through the winter. Reduction in public use restrictions, BLM is doing similar – weather is helping with moving this way. Most federal agencies are at a public use restriction 2, which restricted all types of open flame anywhere on the landscape including recreational shooting. We will go out of public use restriction by the weekend and we will go down to public use restriction 1 which will allow open flame.

Moving in to the post fire recovery stage, also doing various rapid assessments. We have these extended fire seasons that subsequently have extended recovery seasons.

Canadian crews came down to Schneider Springs, but international response was impacted by COVID – COVID was a bigger challenge this year than last year.

- d. Randy Johnson, Fire Chief (Eastside) – Good news is there is not a huge bunch of chatter in fire services. We were able to tap in to the data and map layers that were developed for PODS and PCLs and roll that in to our strategic planning for operations on incidents. Our strategic ops folks had an opportunity to work pretty close with Rick Stratten and Region and really validate on the ground those PODs and PCLs that had been put in the layer. We ended up using a fair amount of that information for our strategic plan for the 25 mile fire.

There are some upcoming meetings with Google to bring Google Earth into more alignment with what we need to work with on the ground.

The COVID response was one of our main tasks on this last incident, 25 mile. The response was to really engage and get a base line established on where we were at and how we were going to do our mitigation. We were able to access a couple of Redmond folks and bring them on scene and help bolster that response. At one point the previous team was tracking up to 51 individuals with various things related to COVID, not to say there were 51 positive cases by any means, but through the tracing efforts and tracing it was quite a lift.

- e. Leonard Johnson, Fire Chief (Westside) –Weather pattern change has moderated some of our continued risk. From the Fire service standpoint, we have seen a lot of reduction in resource availability but continue any inter agency efforts we can.

Fire defense standpoint at the State level we have been working with State EMD to kind of piggy back what is going on with some of the teams with COVID.

Currently working with DOH to start a pilot program for providing all of the COVID modules testing materials and testing capability that can broadly go as full surveillance in demob., The project is being headed up by KVFR, the DOH has committed resources. We are reaching out to 25 mile and Schneider Springs in the next week to talk about being able to do surveillance testing on their demob. process.

We continue to appreciate the relationship with DNR.

V. New Business

- a. **1168 Implementation** – George Geissler, Deputy Supervisor Wildfire - George was not available.
- b. **1168 Implementation** – Allen Lebovitz update – A lot of discussion still going on about what the plan is going to look like, there are more questions than answers still at this point. That is why we are having these conversations now so that we can get input that we can consider while developing the plans. What I can share about the build out of the Community Resiliency and Preparedness program is it will be a robust program led by an assistant division manager so it's going to be a full-fledged permanently standing program. There is an org chart that is being developed, but that is not finalized. We have a draft plan for how the program will work that we would like to share and get feedback on. Having met with the Commissioner of Public Lands on this topic, she is extremely engaged in it directly, she has a vision on how to build this community resiliency program out. It is her vision that was represented in 1168. That vision was clearly shaped by the Strategic Plan. I have been asked to build a crosswalk between 1168 and the Strategic Plan to make clear what the relationship is between the two and how 1168 helps implement specific items that are addressed in the strategic plan. It is vital and forms basis for what we are doing. It also ties directly back to our work plan that we developed and have yet to fully put to use. The Commissioner will stay engaged as this program gets built, she wants to be an active participant in its inception all the way through its implementation.

Wildfire Ready Neighbors continues to be a priority for her. She is raring to launch more communities with Wildfire Ready Neighbors based upon what we have learned. It is vital that we use it to support not supplant ongoing efforts, that was something that we heard loud and clear throughout the whole process. The way that we would like to look at it is an umbrella that provides a network among all of the other efforts that are ongoing and finds ways to support what is currently being done. To draw more attention to them, more participation in what's going on and to back that up with support from 1168 and DNR in building capacity. Somebody called Wildfire Ready Neighbors as a gateway for fire preparedness – getting people hooked on the idea of building resiliency in their communities that leads them on to harder core programs, like Fire Wise or Fire Adapted Communities where it requires a greater commitment to participate.

VI. Questions, Comments and Chat

- a. Randy – The testing you were just talking about, are you talking about blanket testing as demob. before they travel home, A-symptomatic as well? Yes, full broad spectrum for anyone that wants to consent to a test during demob. is where the first pilot is going.
- b. Russ– Broad scale, are you combining 10 people per test? Every fire fighter who will take a rapid antigen test on demob. Been doing it on agriculture workers through the summer.

- c. Erick – Can you share information electronically? Bill Slosson is coordinating those parts because if there is not consent then we aren't going to do it.
- d. Leonard – Will there be a link to the King5 Scorched Earth? <https://www.king5.com/mobile/article/news/regional/scorched-earth/scorched-earth-special/281-ebb23148-5e50-4054-9001-eb23a627e957>
- e. Reese – You asked for feedback and outreach, you are talking about agencies and constituents engaged before, during, and after a fire for feedback and conversation around the Community Resiliency program, correct? Yes
- f. Reese – It was a busy fire season and forecasts are this is a trend that will continue so in my mind to develop the Community Resiliency program it is important that we engage the response organizations, but what are organizations that aren't involved in response that can be working on these issues when agencies are and need to be first priority on response. How does the program incorporate different agencies and people that are preparing for post fire? Who are the people that are engaging those people in the public about what they can do? Point taken, there were 2 groups doing this during the height of this season. I will think about groups like that to reach out to find out what their needs are. If you come across others that can provide that I encourage you to share or have them reach out to me.
- g. Tony – Second what Reese said. When we developed the community plan, the fire departments were a part of the community group not the drivers. – noted again, I appreciate reinforcing that. You are reminding me the need to be sure we are reaching out to other groups as well.
- h. Reese – Kittitas Fire Adapted Coalition – looking before, during and after the fires and how are we engaging. – I am meeting there next week who should I reach out to?
- i. Rose – I am happy to help coordinate for Kittitas County
- j. Hilary – I am happy to share contacts from around the state.
- k. Hilary – How is this different from the Washington Adapted Communities Learning Network? Wildfire Ready Neighbors is just an entry point to build broader awareness.
- l. Reese – We want to get this right and time is short, in the legislature's perspective the money is there. So far so good on the response efforts and the outcomes. But this is money that has to go back if it's not spent, used in a good way that helps us build stories and successes then we are going to come up short. Just the urgency I think how do we engage in the pieces and move them forward and make the connections that is relative to the work that's been on going and the opportunities to really amplify it, move forward and accelerate the work. How do we have the conversations that match up and make that work? Urgency is imperative – I appreciate hearing this and that is the perspective of the people that are on the ground trying to get work done. We definitely feel the urgency. \$125 million is a lot of money but it isn't enough. The need is to put funds on the ground in as an efficient way as possible because we don't have enough money and we want to make sure that they do count. So you are seeing us be as deliberate as possible in making sure we put these funds to work in as efficient way as possible is why we are not rushing to just spend money because we have to spend it. We realize there are urgency related to getting work on the ground because of what it takes to actually do that.

VII. Committee roundtable – Public Comment

- a. Tony – Waiting to see how HB turns out
- b. KC – Relaying the praise to DNR – I was out about 40 days, mostly on Federal land not State land. Wanted to provide praise to DNR – really good things to say across the board.
- c. Russ – Appreciate discussion on COVID mitigation adaptation, the school community is right in the middle of that. Clear leadership in being proactive not reactive. All the leadership has to stay unified for us to be able to work our way through it. Simple positive messaging on the 2021 fire season, the success is the above average fire starts and about average acreage burned, particularly Western Washington. This was an incredibly dry summer in Washington. Highlighting that and also the role of aviation resources, spending some of the money up front is paying off. In the school community we are going to be engaging in workforce development in forestry and fire fighting.
- d. Reese – Summer has been fortunate relative to property loss and structure loss. Level of coordination relative to responses. Would like to learn more about PODS, excited to hear those elements are moving forward. We are moving forward with prescribed fire exchange, type 3 team, structure, local fire districts are engaged. Looking at units on private lands. Very positive as we look at more moisture moving in.
- e. Hilary – November 3 & 4 University of Washington hosting workshop in Okanogan County for prescribed fire. Supporting communities on community resiliency work through 1168 and what capacities they need.
- f. Rose – Echo- local communities and working together on 1168
- g. Annie – Appreciate the discussion on making sure we are talking holistically on 1168. How can we work with you

VIII. Adjournment and Next Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 3:13 pm.

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.