



Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

November 20, 2024

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Meeting Venue: Rm 175, Natural Resources Building

I. Attendance

- a. Quorum met see attached for meeting attendance.

II. Call to Order

- a. Committee Chair Loren Torgerson called meeting to order at 1:08 pm on November 20, 2024.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Introductions

- a. Committee chair Loren Torgerson entertained a motion to review and approve minutes from August 21, 2024. Allen Berreth motioned to approve minutes; Jason Callahan seconded. All members vote yeah.

IV. Utility Wildfire Mitigation Plan Update

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – We have received 42 plans out of 62 utilities. We have our summary and compilation report due to the legislature on December 31st, we will be accepting plans until we submit the report. We will send an after-action survey out through Department of Commerce asking recommendations for improving both the process and plan itself to report to the legislature and improve the next round of the plans.
- b. Department of Commerce will assume a technical assistance role for the mitigation plans. We are developing an interagency agreement and have that for review at the February meeting.
 - i. Jim Smith – What have you seen overall for technical support requests?
A – Around the template there were questions on vegetation types in utility jurisdictions. Another was if they had an existing plan, did they need to update to the new format. Most requests are coming from smaller utilities who do not have large staff. Also providing support on PSPS. We have been awarded a hazard mitigation grant; we would be able to provide GIS tools to utilities that don't have that capacity internally.

V. Biannual Fire Pre & Post Season Meetings

- a. Elizabeth King, Emergency Resilience & Emergency Management Director, Washington DoC – In October we held the season after action workshop for just utilities, mostly focused on response coordination. We had feedback that we implemented with our team, standing up weekly coordination calls with the utilities. Heard the need to change cadence as fire activity changes through the season. We did hear requests from some utilities to coordinate more with DNR. Looking for coordination on information on local



water use, willing to share maps with DNR, want to know when DNR is pulling water from reservoirs etc. Discussion on how DNR identifies which power providers infrastructure belongs to which utilities. DNR and Commerce need to coordinate better on communicating smaller fires, e.g. communicate what infrastructure is in the area that needs protections. We are putting together our spring agenda for the Preseason workshop. We are going to include energy safety in that workshop. They will intersect with DNR, and specifically focus on large solar and battery storage systems in the WUI. We have a list put together to work through these needs. Looking to have a statewide wildfire risk assessment done. The feedback we received is receiving reporting on fire related to utility equipment from DNR quicker. Having similar discussions at the regional level at the Western Electric Coordination Council.

- i. Loren Torgerson – On reporting of fires, we were trying to get all fires incorporated into that process. Now that the process is refined, we will be able to improve the timeliness of reporting.

VI. Department of Commerce Update

- a. Elizabeth King, Emergency Resilience & Emergency Management Director, Washington DOC – Focusing on the operational side of utilities. Have new personnel that we are training up. Regarding the bomb cyclone, we had 500,000 meters out, had to educate that meters are not people and do not correlate one to one. Working on tools to assist utilities with grant applications.

VII. 2025 Legislative Session

- a. Brian Considine, Legislative Director, DNR – DNR Legislative priorities on website: [Legislative Priorities | WA - DNR](#). It is a transition time and looking at position changes. There are a lot of changes in the executive branch, Gov. Inslee was focused on the environment, remains to be seen how involved the new Gov. will be. In addition, there is a significant budget hole, expect to see cuts in operating budget. One of the big line items is the wildfire forest health, \$125 million. This year it is fully funded, but I expect that we will have to fight to keep it fully funded going forward. We received additional funding that will help 1168 balance out. 1578 items: post wildfire debris flow we will go back to request full funding; post wildfire recovery teams will go back to request full funding as well. Items like LIDAR we must continually go back for funding. Trust land transfer, derelict vessels, etc. are focused to keep the lights on. New energy on wildfire insurance and working on that problem. Insurance office was not programed for community grants so that was an avenue that they looked at DNR pursuing. Wildfire suppression bill will be significantly large this year, larger than last few years. We will see if that eats into other line items funding. Committee days are in a few weeks, on Senate Agriculture Committee, we have been asked to give presentation on wildfire, how is the investment being used and improvements made. Committee restructures should be complete, Senate will likely have a new Agriculture, Parks, and Natural Resources Committee Chair. We are bringing back the Smokey Bear license plate bill, burn permit appeal process, identifying the pollution board to hold the appeals process, forest land excise tax bill. Most of the bills we are bringing are revenue neutral and that's why we feel confident bringing forward.



- i. Elizabeth King – Having a better idea of liability. There was a report on cost of insurance for utilities and they would like to see a new one done.

VIII. 10-Year Wildland Fire Strategy Update

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – The 10-Year Wildland Fire Strategic Plan was created in 2018, the State Forester wanted to do a midway review of the strategy and implementation utilizing the WFAC to assess it. The WFAC has reviewed the strategy and drafted an addendum to the strategy to articulate what DNR and other organizations should focus on to accomplish the goals of the 10-year strategy. Identified 3 key areas: Preparedness response and recovery systems, landscape response, community response. To support implementation, provide leadership and coordination all hands approach, enhance and sustain a highly capable workforce, advance sustainable funding, expand programs and practices to manage fuels and vegetation, establish and sustain fire adapted communities. Committee identified that many goals have been achieved and there has been many successes; response to wildfire has improved with new detection and suppression systems. Additional integration is important, with agencies working together on the same goals, successes around community protection have been achieved. Will send out the addendum to all members to review.
 - i. Allen Berreth - Were there quantifications of funding as part of this? A – It was not for this part of the process; it was at a higher level. Next part of the process will be analyzing and quantifying those needs to complete the strategies.
 - ii. Matt Ugaldea – With the change of leadership, is it anticipated that strategies would remain the same? A – Over the next few months we will get a better understanding of how the new administration may change or keep the strategies.
- b. Strategy & Addendum attached.

IX. Resolution For Ad Hoc Members

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – Resolution is as follows: Be it resolved that any person who has been recommended by the Commissioner’s designee to serve as a member of the Committee and has applied for membership to the Office of the Commissioner may participate in discussion of committee business without voting until such time as their appointment to the Committee is made or the Commissioner’s designee withdraws the recommendation.
 - i. Jason – We should make sure anyone is interested to participate can, and not be held up.
 - ii. Elizabeth King – What are the open positions? I will send applications to you. A – One small forest landowner position, two municipal utility positions, one underrepresented communities’ position, two at large positions
- b. Jason Callahan moves to approve the resolution, Garry Rosman seconds. All members vote yeah, there are no abstains.



X. Transcript Recording Discussion

- a. Bryan Perrenod, Senior Secretary, DNR – Requesting a motion to utilize Microsoft Team’s transcript recording to assist in note taking. Transcript will be incorporated into the notes and the document will not be kept. Pending approval from IT that the transcript function does not run afoul of AI policies.
 - i. Jim Smith retaining recordings will inhibit discussion, if they are not being kept it is acceptable.
 - ii. Evlyn motions to move, Allen Berreth seconds. All members vote yeah, there are no abstains.

XI. Committee Work Plan

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – What topics should be discussed at the next meeting?
 - i. Matthew Ugaldea – Being kept abreast of the new commissioner and leadership changes and priorities at DNR.
 - ii. Loren Torgerson – Will have another legislative update. Interagency agreement between DNR and DoC for utility technical support.
 - iii. Elizabeth King – Pre-season wildfire conference. Energy Resilience grant program update.
 - iv. Jim Smith – Having insurance and liability discussion as a placeholder, we may not be able to discuss depending on where the legislature is at.
- b. Work plan attached.

XII. Closing Comments

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – Thank you all for attending.

XIII. Public Comment

- a. Jacob Gear – [Rapid Analytics for Disaster Response | PNNL](#)
- b. Joshua Lozano – Wildfire liability and access to fire insurance is important to Washington electric cooperatives. Wildfire Mitigation Plans: from a small utility perspective it was difficult to complete the plans. For small utilities, access to assistance is crucial for supporting utilities in completing these plans as we lack resources. Benton REA needs to update its point of contact. Can you add me to the distribution list. My email is jlozano@bentonrea.org

XIV. Adjourned



- a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:16 pm.

XV. Appendices

- a. Attendance
- b. Committee Work Plan
- c. 10 Year Wildfire Strategy Addendum

Draft minutes submitted by Bryan Perrenod, approved by Chairman Loren Torgerson. Formal action to be taken to approve the minutes at the next general meeting.