Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes January 23rd, 2025

Meeting Venue: Zoom

I. Attendance

a. Quorum met, see attached for meeting attendance.

II. Call to Order

a. Committee chair Allen Lebovitz called the meeting to order 1:00 pm January 23rd, 2025.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business

a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from November 21st and December 19th. Carlene Anders motions to approve minutes, Wade Pierce seconds. All members vote yea and there are no abstains.

IV. Public Comment

a. Katie Fields – Questions on bills moving through the legislature on wildfire mitigation and on utility mitigation plans.

    i. A – HB 1522/SB 5430 moving forward requiring investor-owned utilities to submit their wildfire mitigation plans to the Utilities and Transportation Commission, DNR's position is neutral. The rangeland fire protection associations pilot project is put forward again. The committee has looked at this in the past, not recommending it then but not ruling them out entirely. There is a bill that would define in statute negligence in terms of prescribed burning, DNR is neutral on it but tracking closely. HB 1563 Rx pilot program to create a fund to compensate landowners damaged by neighboring Rx burns, DNR is also neutral on this bill.

V. HB 1168 2024 Legislative Report and HB 1168 DNR Dashboard

a. Loren Torgerson, Strategic Advisor Wildland Fire Management Division, DNR – Allen asked me to provide a report on the Long-Term Forest Health & Reduction of Wildland Fire Danger Account implementation (2SHB 1168). Marissa Grimsley has been critical for pulling the report together. This catalogs the dollars spent on various projects. The purpose is to report biennial progress on expenditures made from this account. Report is on FY 2023 and FY 2024. Key achievements; $14.9 million to boost wildland fire response capabilities, $16.7 million to increase forest resilience to insects, disease, climate, and wildland fire, $6.4 million to increase regional and community preparedness to wildland fires and other disturbances. Developed data dashboards, refined internal structures, deepened partnerships with communities, federal agencies, and other stakeholders.

i. Allen Lebovitz – 1168 did specify specific amounts required to different areas, do you have those numbers. Did we spend the allotment?

    1. A – 1168 did not specify minimum on suppression response, there is a 15% minimum on community resilience and 25% on forest treatments. It tends to focus on preparedness and response. Hitting marks in all areas can be a challenge sometimes but we are making sure we do.

ii. K.C. Whitehouse – Now that we've had a few years of 1168 funding, is there a short answer whether $125 million is still adequate?

    1. A – We are trying to ensure we get the full $125 million right now. We are not looking to ask for more given the budget environment. We deferred some purchases due to one-time equipment purchases, so we still need the full amount and need to account for 5% adjustment per year.

b. Marissa Grimsley, Enterprise Performance Manager, DNR – I'm the Enterprise Performance Manager in the Performance and Project Management Office at DNR. My role is essentially to take existing measures or help develop new measures related to our strategic priorities. I turn the data into a digestible visual representation to tell the story. That is what I did for 1168, creating a visual dashboard on the DNR webpage for public viewing. The dashboard shows the date of when the data was last updated. Shows the categories, what has been spent, what is outstanding and the deliverables. Left hand menu has options for seeing more detailed breakdowns by category.

    i. Chris Martin – Is it possible to add who is responsible for these items? It would be great to acknowledge success and nudge who needs to improve.

        1. A – In the reporting data we do have it down to owner for who is responsible. There isn't a page on the dashboard yet that shows that information.

    ii. Carlene Anders – If an organization meets their benchmarks, what happens with deliverables that go beyond the benchmark and are not funded? Does that skew the data or get included?

        1. A – Always happy to report overachievement. If it is a situation where we have extra funding because we were able to achieve our goals and have funding left over it is always a possibility to move that funding somewhere else.

c. Dashboard: **https://www.dnr.wa.gov/Wildfire-Forest-Health-Resilience**

d. Legislative Report: https://app.leg.wa.gov/ReportsToTheLegislature/Home/GetPDF?fileName=Long-Term%20Forest%20Health%20and%20Reduction%20of%20Wildland%20Fire%20Danger_2024%20Legislative%20Report_FINAL_ae246941-1179-4469-ab97-fc9a364ab913.pdf

VI. Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, & Community Resilience Account JWG Tasking

a. Jen Watkins, Forest Resilience Division Manager, DNR – We've been tasked to convene this work group to really achieve 3 things. It's building off the work previously done by this joint workgroup and provided us previously on how to consider investments from the Wildfire response, forest restoration and community resilience account that was established in HB 1168 back in 2021. The timeline is tight, working through April 2025. Will be reviewing past and current investments, establish shared understanding of priority objectives, develop recommendations to prioritize investments with our tight State budget and uncertain Federal funding. Propose 2 meetings of 4 hours, first starting in February, meetings will be hybrid. Will produce a final report addressing these three areas.

b. Tony Craven, Carlene Anders, K.C. Whitehouse, and Wade Pierce volunteered to participate.

VII. Round Table

a. Allen Lebovitz – Unless the committee desires otherwise, the February 20th meeting will be held in person in Olympia. I am also considering extending an invitation to the new CPL.

b. Wade Pierce – CPL paused 20 timber sales in western WA. I feel the committee should be there to advise the commissioner on what I see as a counterproductive decision for meeting our forest health and wildfire mitigation goals.

    i. Allen Lebovitz – If you can draft a formal request for us to review and discuss at the next meeting.

c. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – I echo Wade's concerns; we should specifically look at it from wildland fire. The management account is impacted by trust revenue. The personnel who work in trust management are also personnel that work in wildfire management in the summer. With the wildfires in L.A., evacuations are an issue to look at, the evacuations in L.A. wildfires and Spokane had good evacuations but it's still an area that needs to be addressed more. Insurance also needs to be brought forward.

d. K.C. Whitehouse – There is HB 1539 that talks about establishing joint workgroup to address the issue of insurance. HB 1271 would expand our prepositioning funding, trying to codify that and make it permanent.

e. Chris Martin – The issue that Wade raised is complicated and it's an issue the CPL campaigned on. We should focus on how we can frame the definition of legacy forests and as desire to engage in the process.

f. Tom Smith – Looking back at the Boldt fire, I'm curious how much of that area has recovered and whether it is considered legacy forests. In December Angie presented the year in review. The thing that jumped out is fire by cause, about half of western Washington fires are undetermined while a third in eastern Washington are undetermined. What can improve fire investigations?

    i. Russ Lane – I don't think moving investigations to enforcement has served us well. We are talking with them on how to improve things. We'd have to reprogram funding from other efforts or a legislative ask.

g. Valentino Villaluz – Support Wade's point. We have these groups to provide expertise, and it needs to inform these decisions. We need some numbers to help inform a recommendation. Actions like this create chaos. Should include FEMA in the insurance conversation.

h. Tony Craven – In general everything in eastern Washington starts with fire, and it's almost as important in western Washington. If that disturbance is going to be removed, then how is it going to be added back? I see nothing wrong with holding that discussion while CPL is there.

i. Russ Lane – HB 1048 is back; we've taken neutral position. This bill is looking for one rather than three pilot projects. Fire chiefs are opposing. Three bills for smokey bear license plates. HB 1254 builds on 6120 from last session, concern we have not had the chance to put together 6120 and may be moving ahead too fast. Doing work on forest resilience around central WA and smoke. NWCG is having meetings, red book updates are due at end of January. Standards around type 3 teams and mobilization around GACs. Community resilience, that program has been driven by the previous commissioner's vision. Guy is doing work defining program mission and what it will look like in the future. Response, we have 4 strike teams around 100 people down in California. We were on the Palisades fire and on the Hughes fire. Nearing the end of 14-day rotation. Insurance, George and I were down at CMF meeting in Arizona, it's a hot topic right now. It would be good to talk to other states and how they are viewing that problem as well.

VIII. Adjourn

a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:28 pm.

IX. Appendices

a. Attendance
b. HB 1168 Report Presentation
c. HB 1168 Legislative Report
d. HB 1168 DNR Dashboard
e. Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, & Community Resilience Account JWG Tasking

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