Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes March 20th, 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 1:01 pm March 20th, 2025.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business

a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from February 20th. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt motions to approve minutes, Carlene Anders seconds. All members vote yea and there are no abstains.

IV. Public Comment

a. N/A

V. Work of Wildfire Assessment Update

a. Garret Meigs, Forest Health Scientist, DNR – Garret presented the Work of Wildfire Rapid Assessment results that cover from 2021-2024. Discussed applications for treatment evaluation and wildfire operations, integrated into DNR's 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan. The historical context is that we are still well below historical averages for fire regimes. Methods for assessment: burn severity maps from USFS rapid assessment in google earth engine, satellite based RdNBR (Relativized differenced Normalized Burn Ratio) classified into low, moderate, and high. Recent fire history: decade averages increasing across the state, average 200K acres burned. 2021 is still a standout year for wildfire, for 2024 more dry forest burned than moist or cold, like average in overall amount but more weighted to moderate and high severity and less low severity fire. Western WA, 2022 was a standout year, 2024 was relatively low. In eastern Washington USFS was the most extensive jurisdiction burned, followed by Tribal and other state lands. Using the Retreat Fire 2024 as an example, moderate severity and high were significantly higher than historical average. We are working on analysis of the effects treatments had on the outcome of the Retreat Fire. Study on 2021 Schneider Springs fire showed that recent prescribed fire and thinning followed with prescribed fire treatment areas had measurably less severe fires. Overall lessons: in eastern Washington low and moderate severity fires can advance landscape restoration objectives. In western Washington wind driven wildfires contribute to landscape variability. Treatments and fire operations can help increase beneficial work of wildfire and support forest health goals. Rapid assessments are snapshots needing pre-fire conditions and post-fire trajectories to complete the picture.

    i. Hillary Lundgren – Is it possible to get a version of these severity assessment maps and metrics by priority landscape instead of by fire, and could they be available and updated annually on the Forest Health tracker by landscape? A –

Not currently but that is something we can work on; most priority landscapes don't have a lot of fire but can look at ones that do.

ii. Michael Norris – Have you added the progression to the fire to your overlays? A – Progression maps are important; we are working on improving how that data gets inputted and flows into final product.

iii. Allen Lebovitz – There is the 1784 project, would there be a way to present the data in POD context? With the WITS is that information being presented in the Work or Wildfire at this point and is there a way for non-DNR firefighters to respond to it? A – We need to work on analyzing in that context, going to get that in the pipeline. It depends on when we finish the report and how many responses we have received as it is finishing up. Yes, there is a way for non-DNR to respond, but it needs to be disseminated more.

iv. Tony Craven – Looking at mapping treatments, do we have it being tracked by when it was treated, e.g. summer vs spring? A – Yes, it is being tracked but needs to be summarized in a way that does not create so many categories. Lot of prescribed fire is small acreage so hard to track and display in a readable way.

b. Presentation attached

VI. DNR Prescribed Fire Update

a. Michael Norris, Assistant Div. Manager for Cross Boundary Restoration, Forest Resilience, DNR – Last year, we updated agency prescribed fire policy. Created roles and responsibilities document to guide the three divisions and regional prescribed fire activities. Hired two All-Lands Prescribed Fire Coordinators; burn plan development and mentor other staff on writing them, assist with Certified Prescribed Burn Manager courses, assist with prescribed training and implementation. In the Wildland Fire Management Division, we are hiring two Prescribed Fire Operations Coordinators. Updated burn portal and smoke notification process. State Uplands developing biennial targets for prescribed fire. HB 1563 Prescribed Fire Claims Fund, bill continues to move forward and is in the Senate. SB 5360 Environmental Crimes bill, we added language to keep the prescribed fire under the DNR burn permit systems rather than under environmental crimes. HB 1168 funds supported staff going to Prescribed Fire Training Center in Florida, along with NWCG prescribed fire courses. Forest Resilience Division Prescribed Fire Program; leads planning for prescribed fire across all lands, provides technical and financial assistance to internal and external partners, facilitates prescribed fire leadership beyond NWCG qualifications, increase fuels and fire effects monitoring. Request for proposals program supporting funding to NGOs doing prescribed fire work. Prescribed Burn Associations, three active and four developing.

i. Carlene Anders – Is there a percentage of prescribed fires that get out of control and need to use liability? A – It is difficult to track, and we are improving our tracking, but the data we have is that it is less than 1%.

ii. Allen Lebovitz – How many acres for prescribed burning compared to last year? Do you have an update on the barriers report? A – We have 67K acres available and planned for prescribed burning this year, compared to little over 25K last year. Still have a way to go to reach our previous goal of 100K acres. There are a lot of things being addressed, one major barrier being addressed is training regulatory staff on the difference between broadcast burn is in that burn plan compared to slash or pile burn, making sure permits aren't rejected due to lack of understanding. Working on union issues with staff being on prescribed fires.

iii. Chris Martin – On certified burn manager, where are we on the crosswalk for people with other qualified credentials? A – With the claims fund its mentioned you must be certified burn manager, and we are finalizing the first draft of what that looks like to become certified and what other training and certifications will qualify towards certification.

b. Presentation attached

VII. WA State Forester Update

a. George Geissler, Deputy Wildland Fire Management Division, State Forester, DNR – We did a significant rewrite of the prescribed fire claims fund, worked with TNC and state representatives. The bill will apply to DNR protected lands and tribal lands, with the potential to expand to other lands in the future. There is a commitment to put a working group together to work on expansion and implementation. We are still working through what the 1168 fund will be based on the state legislature. Had a meeting with Casey Sixkiller, new lead for the Dept. of Ecology, discussed prescribed fire and how to get it on more lands. Willing to work through smoke issues and wants to work with us on increasing prescribed fire. Commissioners intent letter for prescribed fire is being updated, there are changes both myself and the CPL want to see. Planning on having the draft ready by late April. On the Federal side, we had a meeting with USDA on grants and state and tribal programs. On grants, all of ours except for forest legacy and urban forestry have been approved and all programs will receive notification of that today. All the GNA funds have been approved. On fire response at the federal level, while there was an intent to not layoff firefighters, there was a lack of understanding on all personnel that are involved in firefighting and were let go or took early retirement. We are expecting to see a significant reduction in federal personnel for the fire season, they also started hiring their seasonals a month late. Aviation contracts are progressing and should be online, there was some discussion on VIPR contracts and still no expectations on that. There is a lot of leadership change at the federal level. Discussions were had on how state forestry programs can improve the efficiency of federal programs. Legislation by senator Sheehy of Montana to consolidate federal fire fighting under one agency has been introduced. We are standing up a team in Boise Idaho to see how federal response will be. We are looking at how we can better use local resources to meet response needs. Last year over 100K personnel were mobilized for wildfires, 40% on federal fires. On the Addendum, we have two positions we are hiring directly impacting the Addendum. First is replacing my Strategic Advisor, in process of interviewing and hope to have that person named next month. The second is Assistant State Forester position that we are a third of the way through interviews. Both roles are critical to the planning and facilitation of

implementation of the Addendum. After reviewing the Addendum, broke it down into three major priorities: wildland fire prevention, prescribed fire implementation, human health and community preparedness, for smoke especially. The use of data and collection was mentioned specifically to be prioritized to focus prevention efforts. The investigation process was also identified as a priority. On prescribed fire, expanding programs was identified as high priority, the related liability legislation is a big barrier that is being removed. For human health and community preparedness, focusing on smoke both with wildland fire and prescribed fire. The smoke management plan needs to be updated. There are others in the addendum we can work through after these but want to focus on what we can dramatically improve in the next 12 months. Main priority following is improving and expanding to partners and making this an all-Washington plan, not just DNR plan.

i. Cody Desautel – The CR didn't include permanent the pay increase to firefighters that was part of the bipartisan infrastructure law. Jeff Rupert, who was the director of the Office of Wildland Fire, took the deferred resignation. Joe Majewski is acting director of the Office of Wildland Fire. Will see how that impacts funding coming down through Dept. of Interior.

ii. Tony Craven – I heard CWDG round 1 signed now, round 2 in the near future? A – Yes

iii. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – What was Tom Schultz's role? A – New Chief of Forest Service.

iv. Chris Martin – Is it possible for DNR to put a written statement out on CWDG? There is a lot of confusion out there right now. A – It will go out, finalizing the email that will go out to update everyone.

v. Melissa Gannie – Do you have anything on the executive order on FEMA? We are tracking that closely. A – No I have not yet discussed with FEMA, will be meeting with them tomorrow. Unfortunately, we have a lost a lot of people that could have "fixed" FEMA with the resignations.

vi. Bud Sizemore – Governmental and External Affairs are under one roof now at DNR; I am running the external affairs and boards and commissions are under that purview. We are in a revamp right now working through the application process and other boards and commissions policies, please send any feedback so we can improve.

VIII. Round Table

a. Russ Lane – Coordinating group update: we just approved incident team rosters for 7 CIMTs to start the season. Continuing to work through the issues of not all teams having the same number of personnel and capabilities. I don't know if there is any additional impact to CIMTs from the federal government, likely there will be. A lot of frustration to see the uncertainty. Great meeting with the coordinating group yesterday, this year we are really getting into each of our readiness status and where we can prop each other up.

Division: we are in the normal springtime rhythm of training and readiness. We are pivoting this year as we get deeper into prescribed fire implementation. Working on HR process to make sure full breadth of fire fighters are available for prescribed fire implementation. Hiring a Deputy Division Manager position, with the growth we've had we need more capacity to manage and provide leadership, deputy over aviation and operations. There is a large talent pool out there right now, I am excited about the timing of the recruitment.

b. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Working to still lift the 6-month pause on legacy forest logging is important to keep focusing on.

c. Melissa Gannie – Had a community risk reduction summit March 10th and 11th. Guy Gifford was able to participate, and it was great, he mentioned we need more of this and we look forward to coordinating with DNR to do more. There is a class on March 10th and April 4th at Spokane Fire District 3, community risk reduction related, let me know who best from DNR to attend.

IX. Adjourn

a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:34 pm.

X. Appendices

a. Attendance
b. Work of Wildfire Assessment Update
c. DNR Prescribed Fire Update

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.