Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes April 17th, 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 1:05 pm April 17th, 2025.

b. Committee chair Allen Lebovitz introduced a new committee member, Katie Fields representing Statewide Environmental Organization.

i. Katie Fields – Excited to be here in an official capacity. I am the Forest Fire and Communities Senior Manager at Washington Conservation Action. I've been with WCA for about three and a half years. Some of you may know us better under our previous name, Washington Environmental Council. Just a little bit about my background. Prior to becoming a member of the Washington Conservation Action organization. I worked with a forest collaborative in Oak Ridge, Oregon, the Southern Forest Collaborative. I started working with them while I was in grad school for public administration and conflict and dispute resolution with an emphasis on environmental policy. And so, it's through the work with the forest collaborative that I really got more into the prescribed fire space and the community wildfire, resilience, space as well. The work that I do with WCA is primarily focused on community wildfire resilience and prescribed fire.

c. Allen Lebovitz – Glad to have you on the committee and this important position filled. Kari Grover-Wier has retired from the Forest Service and that Federal Agency position is now vacant. We have two more vacant positions, Range and Timber Industry Landowner representatives.

i. Chris Martin – Will the FS decide who will be taking Kari's place, or can we identify individuals who would be a good fit? A – It is a federal position, so doesn't have to be FS, and we do have a flexibility to identify and nominate for the position.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business

a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from March 20th. Melanie Bacon motions to approve minutes, Tony Craven seconds. All members vote yea and there are no abstains.

IV. Public Comment

a. There was no public comment.

V. Round Table

a. Russ Lane – Routine preparedness going on currently. One fire academy wrapping up right now, another in May and another in June. Heading into management training for teams on Wednesday. Going into season right now with seven incident management teams, one down and hopefully no more. We have directed reductions in suppression, staffing three on engines rather than four, will see if that becomes permanent. Federal staffing levels is still up in the air. Contributed to DNR around concerns shifting duties to private sector, private companies having more focus on bottom line than public safety. That is not the department's policy, we'll work on getting that message across related to our private public partnerships.

b. David Way – We had our PNW Team training on Tuesday the 15th, changed it to a virtual training due to uncertainty at federal agencies, overall went well, but with concerns over what's going on at federal agencies. The second round of deferred resignations has rolled through, expecting a third round as well. Any personnel taking the deferred retirements cannot be hired as casual hire AD's with a federal agency, we are trying to pick up the slack on the state side. A different geographic area incident commander has taken the retirement, so gaps may still develop and expect to see increasing impacts to fire preparedness and response.

c. Bill Slosson – We just had PNWCG meeting and we are discussing the same issue. Seeing the expectation of not having resources and needing to hold back, that a type 3 team is now effectively a type 2. We won't be able to see the teams being used as we intended them to be used. A couple of pieces of legislation; preposition and mobilization legislation are looking to be made permanent and move into the Mobilization Act. It is being sent to the governor's desk for signing, uncertain if our fiscal note for an FTE will pass. Another bill recreates the fire protection policy board, SB 1628 must go back to the house for concurrence. Will advise the state fire marshal and fire service.

d. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Was pleased to see Tom Schultz appointed to director of Forest Service. He has qualifications thankfully and understands the Northwest.

e. Chris Martin – From a prescribed fire perspective, excited to have Katie on the committee. Want to flag the insurance issue again, more and more people have their policies canceled. I believe Melissa mentioned the cost of state mobilization at around $20 million, it would be great to have a presentation on that cost and breakdown of it.

    i. Bill Slosson – My current biennium estimate, $46 million is all response dollars. Almost all of it is either to casual hire volunteer firefighters who become an exempt State patrol employee for the duration of the incident or reimbursement to fire districts for their apparatus personnel. And then, whatever our share of cost apportionment is, so for the Pioneer Fire, we're probably seeing a $10 million reimbursement for the corner of the fire where mobilization provided protection resources. Our biennium budget is $8 million, and we blow past it

every time. We would be happy to do a presentation on it. This is not just for wildfire, it's for all response and mutual aide.

ii. Tony Craven - In that discussion, what Chris is really getting at is, if you got 200 more people around to do initial attack with all season long versus having to call people up, you have the added benefit of them being able to do work while they are not responding.

f. Carlene Anders – Wanted to share the Wildfire Recovery website that RC&D, DNR and OCLTRG have been working on. Thank you to all those who participated in gathering information meetings. Looking forward to the All Hands Post Wildfire Workshop in Ellensburg on May 12 and 13th. After the Fire Washington. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Review Council requests information and comments from the public and other interested stakeholders to gain an understanding of their experience with FEMA during disasters. The public information and comments will ensure that the FEMA Review Council's findings and recommendations are informed by a broad spectrum of perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Comments on this notice must be received by May 15, 2025. Visit this site to add your comments: https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/03/26/2025-05057/request-for-public-input-on-experiences-with-fema-disaster-responses

g. Allen Lebovitz – There is a lot of work going on in non-forested land, around fuels and invasive species treatments through WSRRI. Hazard and risk maps workgroup have been meeting for a couple of months now, making good progress and anticipating having good information to share in few months. The wildfire protection workgroup bill has passed, that workgroup will set up standards for insurance industry to use around basing premiums and providing insurance to homeowners. DNR and the committee will play a role and be represented there. The prescribed fire claims fund bill passed, awaiting governor's signature.

i. Katie Fields – One other thing to note on the claims fund is that that was proposed in the House budget at 2 million but wasn't picked up in the Senate with the proposals that came out. So, still undetermined on where that will land in terms of the number.

h. Melanie Bacon – Speaking on community resilience, on Saturday we will be having preparedness call to action on Whidbey Island. Expecting about 400 people. I intend to share the outcome of the event with the WA state association of Counties. We are seeing people say, "I can't rely on the state and feds in the in the way that maybe I have in the past." So, we in the local communities are going to have to really prepare because we're going to have to depend on ourselves more than perhaps we thought that we would have to.

i. Katie Fields – EPA region 10 smoke management conference this Thursday. Update on the forest action plan: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/forestactionplan2025. The Joint Working Group will have one more meeting on the 1168 funding.

j. Leonard Johnson – Fire Service working with DNR on getting everyone over on a single forestland response agreement template. Cleaning up 1498 bill operationalization. Prepping for fire season, mobilization plans are updated. Just got back from St. Louis and WA had good representation there at the wildfire prevention, mitigation, and best practices class.

VI. Adjourn

a. Meeting is adjourned at 2:03 pm.

VII. Appendices

a. Attendance

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.