Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes May 15th, 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 1:02 pm May 15th, 2025.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business

a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from April 17th. Carlene Anders motions to approve minutes, Tom Smith seconds. All members vote yea and there are no abstains.

b. Kari Grover-Wier retired from the Forest Service recently, we have found a replacement for her. Tara Humphreys is the Okanagan Wenatchee supervisor now and will be taking Kari's place on the committee. We are still looking to fill the industrial landowner rangeland & timber positions as well.

IV. Public Comment

a. There was no public comment.

V. '25-27 Conference Operating Budget Update

a. Russ Lane, WFMD Division Manager – Had governor request budget in November timeframe, there were requests for reducing budget in it that we had to adjust for. Additional adjustments in January that made it to the final governor's budget, with suppression and 1168 reductions being part of it. We planned for some of the 1168 budgets, so we should see a 10% reduction to the base. The big surprise was $60 million budget for 1168 for the next biennium, we were expecting $80 million. With a 31% overhead on personnel, it takes a big bite of the $60 million., and there will be nothing for pass through funding as a result. Jen Watkins and I will be meeting to see how our funds for each of our programs meet and can mitigate the impacts as much as possible. We are seeing what can be cut from facilities and some other maintenance funding. Once we have what the budget breakdown is will request a supplemental budget to the legislature.

i. Chris Martin – Can you provide some clarity, is it $40 million in the first and $20 million in the biennium? How is it in 2025 that the finance people don't know what's been spent and what hasn't, why is it going to take until July? What is the overall effect on manpower on the reduction from 4 to 3-man crews on engines? A: We haven't heard anything about how it will split, hopefully there is room for discussion. We don't know what all in the account and it is taking time to analyze what is remaining and what can be carried over. That would reduce about 20% of our seasonal workforce, around 120 people.

ii. Allen Lebovitz – Is there anything the committee can do? A: Continue supporting the joint workgroups.

iii. Katie Fields – The $40/20 split is listed in the budget. Is there a plan to do an AAR as things ramp up for the supplemental budget request? In terms of the percentages, where does the conversation stand around that? A: There is no formal plan, but the recommendation has been put forward. Jen and I are committed to staying at the minimum of 25% and 15%. As to the $40/20 split, we don't know how to budget for that, other than underspend in the first year to $30 million and carry forward $10 million to make $30 in the second year.

iv. Russ Pfieffer-Hoyt – Given the success DNR has had in keeping 95% fire under 10 acres, what changes do you anticipate in the prepositioning will this budget affect? Are you having to include the COLA in the budget reduction? A: We have already budgeted a reduction going into this year, so hopefully it won't affect it too much. Will see an effect on how quickly we bring resources out of state and how quickly we release them. We will be including the COLA adjustments as part of the budget, excluding WPEA which negotiated late.

v. Carlene Anders – Is the 25% and 15% coming directly from the commissioner? A: That conversation involves the executive team, that's where the decision making happens. I can tell you I won't ask for more than 60%. Jen and I are locked in on those percentages, George and Katie support that.

VI. '25 DNR Wildland Fire Preparedness and PNW Outlook

a. Russ Lane, WFMD Division Manager – Bottom line the outlook for fire season is not good. Predictions have gotten worse over the last three months. It starts to have the feeling of 2021, unlike last year where Oregon was the focus, and the rest didn't get it so bad. I'm seeing fires all over so it's concerning, it does look like it's going to be spread out. Readiness is good, despite the budget. The big unknown is where our federal partners are going to be. We are still at 7 CIMTs despite all the cuts and hopefully that remains. We are going through our normal battle rhythm getting ready for season. For state and local partners, we are ready and capable of fighting fire, probably at higher staffing since COVID. The volume of lightning is always a wildcard, but we are seeing the setup for it to be potentially bad. Starting the DNR briefings soon, June 9th at the latest.

VII. '25 Legislative Session Update

a. Allen Lebovitz, Chair – SHB 1271, State Fire Service Deployment bill, provides for chief of state patrol to mobilize jurisdictions under the Washington State Fire Service's mobilization plan, codifies what has been in practice the last few years. SHB 1473 Wildfire Appropriations bill allowed funding for paying for costs incurred last year. ESHB 1522, Utility Wildfire Mitigation bill, creates a process for approving and enforcing the utility wildfire mitigation plans that were previously voluntary. SHB 1539, Wildfire Protection Bill, establishes a workgroup chaired by the Office of the Insurance Commissioner and Commissioner of Public Lands tasked with developing science-based mitigation standards to assist insurance companies in setting rates. E2SHB 1563,

Prescribed fire claims fund bill passed, implementation will start in July once the budget is funded. ZHSB 1628, Fire Service Policy Board reestablished, deals with topics around training, support, and State mobilization coordination. Bill that included the smokey bear license plate did pass. Four bills that did not pass; SHB 1048 Rangeland Fire Pilot bill, SHB 1254 Wildland Urban Interface bill, HB 1861 Smoke Impacts on DNR Burns, SB 5763 Law Enforcement Aviation Support bill.

VIII. Round Table

a. Allen Lebovitz – The Account Joint Workgroup progress update; Katie, Carlene, Tony, and Bill have all been at the meetings. Participants had an opportunity to share their opinion on priorities for spending funds. We went through the list the same as the original workgroup did. At the last meeting we received the word on the actual budget and will be making recommendations at future meetings based on the known budget. Next meeting is June 10th. We will be updating the timeline as we have blown past the original timeline. One thing we've recommended is an AAR and how it can be applied to the supplemental process and next biennium. The legislature tasked us with creating a hazard and risk map, at this point we established a steering committee for the project. We have met 4 times getting briefings from DNR SMEs. We have been talking about different ways of mapping hazards, and data output. We should start seeing products from that workgroup soon.

   i. Katie Fields – A big piece of the puzzle is relationships with legislators, there were discussion in the Joint Working Group meetings around setting up some field tours. Getting legislative advocates to support more funding of welfare in the future is crucial.

   ii. Russ Lane – Part of the art here is that we are limited, we can certainly be educational from the agency side and help educate those legislators. Our main advocate though is the Commissioner and is to chart where he can be the most effective.

   iii. Carlene Anders – I met with the Commissioner and recommended he sets up an informational meeting with key community members to educate on the history around those wildfires, particularly on the westside.

b. Chris Martin – Wrapping the last year of full funding from DNR, we did a prescribed fire academy, about 40 people attended and did a prescribed fire on the Cle Elum ridge successfully. Shifted the tune a bit, while it was a prescribed fir training there was still a heavy emphasis on suppression included in the training.

c. Katie Fields – Has there been any updates on hiring strategic advisor to George? On prescribed fire claims fund bill what is the timeline? A: Yes, Robyn Whitney has been selected to take the position and is starting tomorrow, comes to us from the Forest Service and did significant amount of policy work in D.C. before that.

d. Tom Smith – Disappointed to see all the cuts, conservation districts taking a huge hit and they do a lot of work. Hopefully we can get through this summer ok.

e. K.C. Whitehouse – One thing I would like to highlight is work through how long it takes for someone to get through the red card qualification system. DNR has made good progress on getting qualifications, and we can message on how an impact these cuts can be on interrupting that workforce pipeline.

f. Tony Craven – When we designed the original strategic plan, we need to have that lead time and support that workforce pipeline to have the qualified people we need. You can't instabake a wildfire response team. The WFFA had its annual meeting in Vancouver, had a demonstration of the flame cap kiln, which may not be suitable for large scale slash removal, but an option for smaller landowners. Going to try and use them in Kittitas County and see how we can use them.

g. Bill Slosson – For the 1271, we did a pilot project on this for 2 biennia, and this was a codification of that. Of the $8 million of my appropriation, they took $500 thousand and put that for it only preposition despite our advice. Given that we always blow past our budget and need supplemental the overall effect will be minimal. They did not appropriate for June so hoping no mobilizations are needed for June. The Fire Service Advisory Board was ended in 2009 during attempts to save money, in hindsight stakeholders would have fought harder to prevent that. We did get some FTE in the budget, it was a carryover from Governor Inslee's budget, for emerging technologies for firefighter safety, we are looking at how that will shape out. Working hard to get ready for what we anticipate will be a busy season.

    i. Chris Martin – I hear the numbers for preposition, so how many fire fighters are deployed at any given time by that mechanism. A: That depends on a lot, but at max capacity about 16 strike teams. Unlike some other states we don't have a compulsory mobilization requirement for local resources so it can be difficult to know what we have on a given day.

IX. Adjourn

a. Meeting is adjourned at 2:46 pm.

X. 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.