Wildland Fire Advisory Committee

Meeting minutes June 26th, 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 June 26th, 2025.

b. I would like to introduce Robyn Whitney as the new Strategic Advisor to the State Forester, taking over from Loren Torgerson. I would like to also introduce Kari Otto as the Assistant Deputy to the State Forester and Wildland Fire Management.

i. Robyn Whitney – Great to meet you all, excited to be part of the team and work with you as the Strategic Advisor to the State Forester. I'm also the new chair for the utility wildland fire prevention advisory committee along with a few other working groups established by the legislature. I am originally from Washington, lived here for 25 years, and for the last 7 years working in Washington D.C. with the National Association of State Foresters and most recently with the Forest Service in the Southwest region as legislative affairs for it.

ii. Kari Otto – I'm glad to be here, very new in it started 3 weeks ago. I came over from Forest Service and am excited to work for this organization. Where I worked in Northern California with the Shasta Trinity National Forest, working with our natural resources and wildfire crews.

III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Previous Business

a. Committee Chair Allen Lebovitz entertains motion to review and approve minutes from May 15th. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt motions to approve minutes, Cody Desautel seconds. All members vote yea and there are no abstains.

IV. Public Comment

a. There was no public comment.

V. Account Joint Work Group Tasking Update

a. Allen Lebovitz, Chair DNR – The work group has come up with a resolution that we want to present to the committee. We were tasked, along with the Forest Health Advisory Committee, to provide recommendations for the Wildfire Response Forest Resiliency Account. Volunteers from both committees formed the work group. With the passed budget we were able to make a final decision on how to proceed. George and Katie decided to cancel the tasking given the nature of the final budget and the difficulty of providing a recommendation within the requested timeline. The significant reduction in funding changes the decision process now. Next steps are to get an understanding of where we are for funding carry forward. Then prioritize work with the remaining funds. The work group recommends doing analysis of how we got to this position, the

legislative process that came to that result. Going to schedule an After-Action Review with the work group to better understand what happened and how we can best mitigate it, find alternative funds.

i. Katie Fields – My understanding was that a document was going to come by the end of the month, what is the status with that? A – That was my understanding as well, I have not seen anything yet though from George, so it likely won't happen by end of month. I would recommend we make that recommendation ourselves as a committee.

ii. Cody Desautel – What is the timeline for supplemental budget recommendations, is it the same as the biennium? What is the agencies thought process on how it's going to spend, e.g. spend more and hope the supplemental ask is successful? A – Decision packages are due by September to Governor's office and then to the State Legislature by December; it's an appropriate time now to start lobbying though. We can be better at directly communicating with members of the legislature. The original HB 1168 champions are not in the legislature anymore so identifying western Washington legislature to make the case too is important. We are moving forward as spending as normal till told otherwise, George would have to answer in further detail. Going into the season we are better prepared than we have been given all the work and funding we have put in with HB 1168 past funding so the effects will be felt longer term.

iii. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Concerns over the low moisture levels going into the summer, fires may make the case for us. My understanding of reductions of the budget primarily affects the longer-term resilience and health areas vs suppression and response. How to the climate recovery act play into this? A – Climate commitment act funding is available and is being used to plug some of the gaps, but it also isn't at the level it was expected to be at. We don't quite know yet, we will have a better idea in July. We already have hired on for the season so it's unlikely to dramatically affect suppression efforts and personnel this year. Going forward is where it will be uncertain.

iv. Melissa Gannie – With the funding allocation, was there any prescriptive directives in how the money can be allocated, which buckets can be used? There is the disaster response account is another bucket. The State Patrol was not made whole though for mobilizations happening from May till now. HB 1498 has been very helpful along with 1168, any input we can provide let me know. A – I don't believe the disaster account has been reduced from DNR's perspective, when we respond and need to be reimbursed. The allocations in the account do take into account the 15% and 25% funding thresholds for community resilience and forest restoration. We don't have guidance beyond that currently.

b. Allen Lebovitz, Chair DNR – I would like to see if the committee would agree to move forward with working with forest health advisory committee to advise decisions on working with the current budget, the supplemental ask, and the next biennium request. Goal is to have something to work with by the July meeting.

i. Melanie Bacon – I support this and continuing to work with the Forest Health Advisory Committee on this issue.

ii. Katie Fields – Would this continue as the joint work group, or would we work on this in our separate committees and come together? Will this conflict with a tasking order if it does come out? A – If a tasking is presented, we will definitely bring that before the Committee. We can make the recommendation either way though I envisioned it continuing to work under the joint work group. I will need to confirm with the Forest Health Advisory Committee that they wish to do the same.

iii. Cody Desautel – Does it make sense to come back in July when you have more information and make a formal decision then? A – Yes, we can do that. I'll coordinate with the Forest Health Advisory Committee, and we'll see what budget updates we receive along with a potential tasking from George.

iv. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – I think it makes sense to continue working on this and utilize the work group as the avenue of doing so. Some sort of documentation for the rationale will be crucial for justifying the spend ask, given they'll go through it with a fine-tooth comb.

v. Tony Craven – Want to add that as part of this assigning who has ownership will be important.

VI. Round Table

a. Robyn Whitney – Working on the 1539 working group Wildfire Mitigation and Resiliency Standards, a Commissioner of Public Lands and Insurance Commissioner led work group to work on wildfire-related insurance issues. Tasks the State with aligning their property mitigation standards with nationally recognized standards. The goal is to create transparency for consumers for wildfire hazards and risk, a grant program for residential property mitigation, and data sharing with the insurance industry. Charged with a report to the legislature by December 1st. The Office of the Insurance Commissioner has retained Loren Torgerson to help staff the work group. There are 5 meetings scheduled in July, with the goal of hammering out recommendations and breaking in August and September for peak fire season and giving time for staff to go over the recommendations. Reconvene in October with the goal of having a draft interagency review ready by November.

i. https://www.insurance.wa.gov/laws-rules/legislation-and-rulemaking/legislative-committees-and-work-groups/wildfire-mitigation-and-resiliency-standards-work-group

ii. Melissa Gannie – We have some funding though the fire prevention and safety grant, looking to put together a similar group. We should collaborate and work together to use the dollars we have and come up with good recommendations for the State. Not all jurisdictions are created equal from the code enforcement side.

I'm looking at it from the community risk reduction side, from emergency response, economic incentives, education. I want to prevent silos occurring.

iii. Tony Craven – The big goals I see out of this is moving away from the standards in Firewise and moving to the mitigation standards that make the difference.

b. Cody Desautel – Looking at executive order on one federal fire service would be good to go over.

c. Melissa Gannie – From the last Emergency Management Council meeting, had a representative from the insurance industry come talk about perimeter policies. Something that can be drawn up when we have some foreknowledge and data, such as we have lighting strikes. Can draw up a policy for that area and if a fire happens it can be used for coverage. We must address how to be strategic with treatments and how it can play into insurance coverage, people are already losing coverage. We discussed that many of these areas are also underinsured or have no insurance at all. Especially problematic if you are looking at doing fuels treatments.

d. Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – Great to see the insurance work group, it's an issue that has needed to be addressed for a long time. Insurance companies must be a part of the process to see success.

e. Katie Fields – Regarding reporting human caused wildfire starts, are there updated stats on the 2024 season? George identified the priorities over the next 12 months, and can we get an update on where we are on that? Any updates on 6120 hazard mapping? Updates on recruitment on committee vacancies? A – The annual report would have that and if you need more Angie Lane can help provide additional info. I will ask George for an update on priorities for the Committee. There have been no updates on the 6120 project since our last meeting. Tara Humphries is the new federal position representative, but the two others are still open and have been a challenge to fill.

VII. Adjourn

a. Meeting is adjourned at 2:36 pm.

VIII. 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.