

**WILDLAND FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES**

March 18, 2021

Zoom Meeting

Committee Members Present:

Allen Lebovitz – Wildland Fire Liaison, Chair
Tony Craven – Small Forest Landowner
Cody Desautel – Tribal Nations Representative
Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt – State Land Trust Beneficiary
J.D. Marshall – Industry Landowner (Timber)
Melissa Gannie – Assistant Fire Marshal
KC Whitehouse - Washington State Council of Fire Fighters
Reese Lolley – Statewide Environmental Representative
Erick Walker – USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor
Randy Johnson – Fire Chief (Eastside)
Lee Hemmer – Industry Landowner (Range)

Committee Members Absent:

Vacant – Cowlitz County Commissioner
Dave LaFave – Fire Chief (Westside)
Jim DeTro – County Commissioner (Eastside)
Vacant – Fire District Commissioner

Guests/Other Attendees:

George Geissler – State Forester & Deputy Supervisor for Wildfire & Forest Health
Loren Torgerson – Wildfire Policy Advisor
Angie Lane – Assistant Division Manager for Wildfire, Plans and Information
Kristine Reeves – DNR Legislative Director
Shelly Goodwin – WFAC Coordinator
Mark Teske – WA State Department of Fish & Wildlife
Mark Doumit
Jason Callahan
Chuck Hersey – FHRD Planning Section Manager
Tom Bugert – Deputy Chief of Staff
Carrie Ulvestad – Wildfire Ready Neighbors Project Manager
Ceci Rozendaal – Wildfire Proviso Senior Project Manager

I. Opening, Roll Call

The meeting of the Wildland Fire Advisory Committee was called to order at 1:01 p.m. on March 18, by Zoom. Roll was taken, 11 members were present by Zoom and 4 members were excused, constituting a quorum.

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the February 18, 2021 council meeting were presented in draft and reviewed. Motion to approve draft minutes made by Committee member Reese Lolley, seconded by Committee member Lee Hemmer. Motion carried unanimously.

III. Chairman's Report

Chairman Lebovitz had a written report. Report attached

IV. Agency Updates

- a. George Geissler, State Forester & Deputy Supervisor for Wildfire & Forest Health – We have the go ahead to work with the County Dept. of Health where we do have large groupings of firefighters and arrange for doing it in group. National level – National Fire Plan 2.0 that is by the US Forest service, it is not moving forward at this point in time. It is something that will be openly discussed within the Wildland Fire Leadership Council once all the Biden appointments to that council are made. Executive order over a sub-cabinet level that was signed by Trump, that is on hold as the current administration determines how they view it, how they want to utilize it. There is discussion in Boise, Federal and State levels now regarding PPE for firefighters. L&E here recently came out with a more stringent requirement and we are evaluating that right now. It could make it to where we have to go to KN95 or N95 respirators. Federal OSHA is putting out new regulations that are strict also. Anyone working on a federal fire there is a federal mask mandate. Rumor control – Proviso and volume 2 report there was an action plan that DNR was taking. Looking at a reorganization of the Forest Health and Wildfire programs with the idea that it would be in place by the end of this fiscal year. Reviewing right now, potential for some movement of programs between Wildfire or Forest Health, it's not a reduction in force, it's looking at the programs and their best fit within our organization. That is still on going and making sure the organizational structure reflects how work needs to happen on the ground.
- b. Melissa Gannie, Assistant Fire Marshal – Report attached
- c. Erick Walker, USFS Deputy Forest Supervisor – Region 6 for the Forest Service & BLM has a shared leadership, the director for Fire Aviation Management John Giller retired and we hired a new director, Alex Robertson. Alex has been in place for about a month now. Jeff Fabreezy is the State FMO for BLM. Just a little change in that organizational structure. We are going about our prescribed fire, fuels work, and wildland fire response, very similar to what we did last year. There won't be a pause on spring burning this year but we will keep COVID mitigations at the forefront for both our staff and our communities. Put a lot of dollars in to our mechanical treatments last year, this year we will be able to bring back the prescribed fire aspect of it. Getting our folks that are willing and wanting under the First Responder aspect of the states phasing program taken care of. Just finished our temp hiring, finding that filling those are problematic, don't know if people are just not interested in firefighting or if it's just knowing federal pay level has not increased.

- d. Tony Craven, Small Forest Landowner - running into an insurance company that has been dinning me, calling in FPA standards. Having somebody with I am assuming no fire experience, go out and do the inspections and following the rules to a T which ends up with the homeowner not being able to get their insurance canceled or not being able to get insurance to buy the home. Examples: All of our driveways are 12 feet wide which is smaller than FPA standards, on the other hand it is 50 feet from the house to the road. No normal structure or wildland firefighter would park their engine in the road next to the house but instead would be parked on the house. Mitigated that one. Another is no trees within 30 feet, actually with this one it was 100 feet with crown spacing. Basically following guidelines without factoring in any other factors. If everybody owned an acre or two these standards could be followed. A lot of eastern Washington has communities that are much more urban. So in talking to the Fire Chief and Fire Marshal, they are going to reach out to the County Commissioner and they will probably set a meeting with Hilary or a designee for her, the Insurance Commissioner, and the State Fire Marshal Office. Everybody agrees with the intent of what they are trying to do, the implementation is proving to be very problematic.
- e. Randy Johnson, Fire Chief (Eastside) – Currently State Mob in place supporting COVID, fire services is engaged in that as much as possible. Continuing to collaborate through the State Chiefs with DNR in supporting legislative efforts as they go forward in session.

V. New Business

- a. **Legislative Update** – Kristine Reeves, DNR Legislative Director
HB 1423 – Smoke management civil enforcement – this bill came about because as Ecology and DNR were working through the EPA regulations on smoke management and updating the smoke management plan at the federal level it was determined that EPA was not confident that without this civil enforcement piece that we would be able to administer the smoke management plan the way that they would like to see us do that. Currently it is up for a hearing in Senator Carlisle’s committee this week. We are anticipating that it will go well and move to Rules because there is no fiscal note on that. SB 5158 – Electric Utility Task Force – good little bill, moving through the process. It’s been scheduled for Exec and we are anticipating that it will be amended in the Rdan committee around some board membership criteria. HB 1168 Wildfire Forest Health Community Resiliency Bill – Currently scheduled for a hearing in Agner, came out of the House on floor cutoff day, almost a unanimous vote. Very strong bipartisan support for this legislation moving over to the Senate. Scheduled for hearing in Senator Vandaway’s committee on Tuesday, on the Exec schedule on Thursday, and cutoff is Friday. The real question at this point is how we are going to pay for it. The department is funding agnostic on this bill, meaning we believe all money is green just like trees and we want to keep it that way so we have not

put forward a preferred funding model. Revenue Forecast press conference Senator Ralfaz mentioned on two separate occasions that she anticipates including this in her budget as a priority. We have heard that she is anticipating using budget stabilization account money, which Senator Doumit has been encouraging. Looks like that may be the funding vehicle.

- b. **DNR Wildfire Proviso Phase 2 Update**– Ceci Rozendaal & Tom Bugert– Culmination of project in both the phases. Report submitted in December, primarily a lot of the background information on the Wildfire program, budgeting and accounting and zero based budget. Did an RFP and selected Steller and Associates. They were charged with performance review in the Wildfire program and then DNRs accounting and budgeting process and set up for the agency. Worked fast and diligently interviewing many employees across the agency and getting feedback from other agencies. They went ahead and submitted a report and we added additional information as far as the action plan and next steps. Steller did a lot of work. We went through and assessed those recommendations and came up with an action plan. Key findings – compared too many agencies of similar size and similar complexity to DNR, DNR is significantly under resourced in terms of our central administrative and financial functions compared to those other agencies. As a result we are not as responsive as key stakeholders would like us to be. A proviso that was put in place in 2004 by the legislature and the operating budget, it prohibits DNR from using any wildfire suppression dollars on administrative expenses, basically what that does is that other programs are asked or forced to subsidized to a limited extent those administrative capacities and it puts our central wildfire in a tough place when they are asked to come off of ever increasing wildfire seasons that are increasing in length and complexity in response to ongoing legislative and budget requests. We have an ask out this year to have that provision removed, also removed in the Governor's budget that he put forward at the end of last year and we are hopeful that that will be continued to be carried forward through the legislative process. The second area of investment is spending more resources in key administrative capacities. We have a short term decision package to accelerate a number of those deliverables and make sure we get those under way. Long term we expect to see more asks from DNR as we move into the 2022 legislative session asking for funding. The final area is we are undertaking a full service delivery review of all of the services provided through our federal office accounting including work on the ground it's called methods of delivery It's the zero based budget equivalent of how do we deliver services. Setting up a regular reporting with the legislature, in June and December of each year, progress report update and how it is going to impact our budget work. Let us know the extent this committee wants to be involved in that work.
- c. **Wildfire Ready Neighbors** – Carrie Ulvestad – PowerPoint attached – Originally created to launch in 2020 in select communities, due to COVID it was put on hold, it was reactivated this year and the scope has changed a

little bit and instead of just a few communities we are actually targeting three counties, We are targeting Chelan, Okanogan, and Spokane counties and within those counties we are targeting high risk areas that were identified in the 20 year strategic plan. The project is sponsored by DNR, we paid an outside agency to do the marketing and branding of the program, that is how we came up with the name and blue gold branding concept. They are also doing all the social media associated with it. DNR and our partners will be doing the work on the ground. This a piolet not a full blown launch but the intent from the Commissioner is that we will expand it Statewide. Allen has been doing a lot of work on this as a liaison. There will be an after action report in June summarizing the lessons learned, the effectiveness of the programs, what audiences did we hit, did we get to the high risk areas, so we can use that information and take it to the next level.

- d. **HB 1784 PODs Pilot** – Chuck Hersey – PowerPoint attached – Prioritizing for dual benefit of Forest Health and Wildfire response. It’s about melding the two worlds of Forest Health and Wildfire operations to achieve mutual benefit and goals. Melding Emergency Management and long term Stewardship.

VI. Questions, Comments and Chat

- a. Allen - All Fire staff is now eligible for COVID vaccines.
- b. Chuck Hersey – How is Capitol budget looking? The decision package. It’s important to get both because they fund different components. Answer - Yet to be determined. We are running parallel paths on that funding stream and seeing how legislatures respond on Operating vs. Capitol dollars. Figuring out which budget funds it at what level.
- c. Reese – Any potential for amendments? Yes, the chairman is anticipating submitting an amendment. We have not seen language, we do not know how he is proposing an amendment, we believe it is going to come in a striker and we have heard rumblings about what the amendment is and all I can say is we are not super excited about the amendment, but it’s also not something we are going to kill the bill over. This is the farthest this bill has been.
- d. Allen – Any expectations on what we think the funding amount might be? Top 3 to 5 senate priorities and heard from multiple stakeholders that the minimum they are looking at 125 and max 500.
- e. Allen – the Wildfire Ready Neighbors is a bilingual effort on integrating. We are doing targeted advertising and outreach to specific communities, and in particular at risk communities. Communities that haven’t been helped in the past or not well connected with these resources or type of information in the past.
- f. Reese – Will info put on form be public? Survey 123 - Folks aren’t going to want to provide some of this information, we are sensitive to that and there has got to be some flexibility with what data we collect and from who. Database is designed to be shared with partners, plan to keep data at DNR but it is public domain so it is available.

- g. Russ – Have you look at doing at least one pilot on the Westside? The framework we are operating in right now is the 20 year Forest Health Strategic Plan which is focused on Eastern Washington and from that we had that Bill that said to assess the forest health treatment needs in fire prone lands across all lands. The analysis talked about, we only have plans in Eastern Washington because that is how we are interpreting it, because of capacity and the fire dynamics. Suppression needs to be key and Eastern Washington has been wrestling with these issues for years.
- h. Reese – How do we engage land owners? Good buy in and support in general.
- i. Allen - This group has a lot to offer to this next step. Think about how we might want to continue to discuss this project in the context of using it to help us implement some of the key objectives identified in the 10 year strategic plan.
- j. JD – If implemented what is the plan to assess the effectiveness? There is many different scales of monitoring. One scale is the treatment targets we set of 30 – 40 percent of the watershed, that’s based on sort of a forest structure and we can get that through remote sensing. We do have a stand level treatment effectiveness monitoring protocol that is field based sort of Survey 123 app that is in the beta phase. There is also a fire happens and it intersects a treatment, what happened there is a story there

VII. Committee roundtable – Public Comment

- a. Erick – I really appreciate Chuck’s presentation and the work his team has been doing in support of work on National Forests in Washington.
- b. Reese – Meeting with partners about looking at this spring on prescribed fire training exchange moving forward. Working with multiple partners in moving that forward in the NE. Because of COVID look at moving us more to a model of a 4 to 6 week window of people come together and coordinating those efforts where a landowner or agency would host a burn and then doing a training on that burn. People would go home or to hotels at night.
- c. Russ – COVID vaccination – School district has had excellent success running our own clinic and by tomorrow we will have all of our employees who are willing be done with at least their first shot. If we hadn’t done our own clinic they would still be trying to get their own appointments.

VIII. Adjournment and Next Meeting

Meeting adjourned at 4:03 pm. The next general meeting is scheduled for April 18, 2021 from 1 – 4 pm, by Zoom.

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