



# Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

August 16, 2023

1:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Meeting Venue: Rm 172, Natural Resources Building

- I. Attendance**
  - a. Quorum met see attached for meeting attendance.
- II. Call to Order**
  - a. Committee Chair Loren Torgerson called meeting to order at 1:03 pm on August 16, 2023.
- III. Meeting Minutes Approval & Introductions**
  - a. Committee chair Loren Torgerson entertains motion to review and approve minutes from February 15, 2023. Jim Smith motions to approve February minutes, Jason Callahan seconds. Evlyn Andrade abstains, all other members vote yeah.
  - b. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair – Committee member Dave James past away, I will be sending condolences on behalf of the committee.
  - c. From January – August 2023, 50% more fires occurred than in 2022. Regions on west side of the State experiencing fires at a higher rate, especially the northwest region. 16,663 acres burned on DNR jurisdiction. We are 225% up for lightening ignitions. 92% of fires suppressed at less than 10 acres on DNR jurisdiction, 95% is the goal. Debris burns caused 25%, human ignition caused 50% (260% increase year over year).
  - d. Gary Rosman, Rural Electric Cooperative Committee Member – fire response with air attack has been excellent this year, new aircraft have made a difference in response times and effects.
- IV. Previous Utility Task Force Business – Request for Qualifications Progress Update**
  - a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – Process began in 2019, requirements emerged from RCW 76.04.780. List of qualified experts will be published on DNR website. Prebid conference occurred on March 27, 2023, very few came forward and process was extended to June 26, 2023. 12 bidders received, 3 were selected based on qualifications. Chloeta, EFI global, and Guidehouse were selected to be put on the roster, to be refreshed in 2 years.
  - b. Gary Rosman, Rural Electric Cooperative Committee Member – Were you surprised in the low number? A: There are not a lot of companies that have this expertise, so not completely surprised it was low, though was expecting to be a bit more to apply.
  - c. Presentation attached



## V. Quantitative Wildfire Risk Assessment

- a. Ana Barros, Natural Resources Scientist, Forest Health & Resiliency Division, DNR – The QWRA is an all lands, comprehensive, risk assessment. First was done in 2018, the 2023 update will account for changes in the landscape and improved risk analysis methods. There was concern agriculture and range lands were not included properly. The weighting scheme of each HVRA has not changed dramatically throughout the process. Fire modeling began in 2022, the final report and products to be ready by October. HVRAs include People & Property, Recreation, Critical Infrastructure, Timber, Drinking Water, Wildlife, Ecological Integrity, and Agriculture. Ways the committee can engage; feedback on quality of data, data that tells us what materials poles are made out of, data on the height of transmission lines.
- b. Wildfire Risk and Transmission – When looking at a risk map, we are looking at risk to each pixel. Transmission is where do ignitions start and then spread to pose danger. Tries to look at source of risk. It matters in what you are trying to do, can manage to prevent getting to high risk areas. Can help identify cross agency areas that need to be worked on and the organizations involved.
- c. Eli King, Department of Commerce Committee Member – We have protected data due to the risk to energy infrastructure that we could provide. As long as data is still able to be protected we can assist with access for adding to the QWRA and making more accurate and granular. Legislation is not the only thing to be paying attention to, for example we have new risk analysis that we are required to do, that comes from Federal requirements.
- d. Jason Callahan, Large Forest Landowner Committee Member – Is this related to recently passed bills in WA and Oregon? A: The Oregon plan is specific to homes, and the proposed Washington one is not required to use the QWRA, but products from the QWRA can be used for both.
- e. Jim Smith, Public Utility District Committee Member – The more effort we can make to drive the granularity and quality of one product the better. We don't want legislation that tasks production of divergent products that end up with more products of less quality.
- f. Brett Conrad, Investor Owned Committee member – Is this model going to be available for the upcoming wildfire mitigation plan? There is a lot of modeling going on, there is value in making this available to smaller utilities. However don't want to be pushed into using one modeling though that may not have the granularity of one developed specifically for utilities.
- g. David Bayard, Municipal Utility Committee Member – There are three components, likelihood, risk to utility assets, relative risk to communities and ability to recover.
- h. Presentation attached.



## **VI. Legislative Analysis**

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair – HB 1032; the bulk of the bill talked about catching up from the work of the Task Force till about two years ago. We are complete on the vegetation management license and the list of qualified experts. Only item left is creating a formal communication plan. The rest of the bill talked about developing the mitigation plan template.
- b. Vegetation Management “License” is new terminology by DNR replacing the “model vegetation management agreement” found in the statute.
- c. HB 1032 attached
- d. Report to legislature attached

## **VII. RFQ for Mitigation Plan Template**

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – The department shall develop the plan by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Draft made available to utilities by Jan 1 2024. Same process for both investor owned and publicly owned utilities. By October 2024 each consumer owned utility must complete and revise its mitigation plans. We want committee input on what operational procedures entail. It became clear during the RFQQ process, the three companies have experience in developing mitigation plans. Made the decision to go that route given the short time for the development of the plans, going through the normal process we would not have a consultant selected before October. Our contracting personnel think mid-September at the latest should have one selected.
- b. Brett Conrad, Investor Owned Committee Member – Do we know is the consultant going to take feedback during the process, or is it going to publish its draft and then take feedback? A: There are a number of consultations that have to take place when the consultant comes on. After Jan 1 it will go out to the utilities and others for feedback.
- c. Jim Smith, Public Utility District Committee Member – Consultant works with Commerce and DNR, how does the advisory committee involve in this process? A: Plan is that the committee gets a chance to be involved in giving feedback on the next committee meeting.
- d. Gary Rosman, Rural Electric Cooperative Committee Member – Some committees have already submitted, has there been any comparison to those the templates that we are trying to develop? Is there any chance that these plans create more liability? A: We have not gotten to that point.
- e. Colin Willenbrock, Public Utility District Committee Member – Curious DNR position on operational approaches that have universal approval in the utility community but maybe not in others. How will the comments coming out of this committee be weighted compared to others if there is disagreement with groups outside of the utility community?



A: The goal is not to develop a prescriptive plan, and that the comments of the committee will be fairly weighted.

### **VIII. Task Force Accomplishment Statement**

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – Is a more formal “report” to the commissioner on the completion of the original task force’s objectives, as well as an annual report on the completion of tasks and goals for the committee desired?
- b. David Bayard – I welcome the more intentional advisory approach, but it is difficult given the cadence of the meetings. Perhaps creating a subcommittee for those able to meet more often. We can provide a forum and advice for things that are beyond DNR’s reach and can provide solutions.
- c. Jim Smith – As we have completed the directed tasks, moving toward an advisory role is an important shift. We still have to work on the communications plan. For example we have post fire assessments of trees, have been unable to get DNR to come out to provide assistance and expertise. We can advise the commissioner on this issue to propose solutions, as an example.
- d. Jason Callahan – We should plan this around the office of the commissioner, not around a specific commissioner who is in office.

### **IX. Committee Work Plan**

- a. Loren Torgerson, Committee Chair, DNR – We have an annual report to the legislature that would be valuable to the committee. We have the mitigation plan template as the primary objective, with discussions of interagency cooperation improvements. I’ve convened a meeting with staff at DNR to begin reaching out and make sure we are completing that.
- b. Eli King – We have a post wildfire season meeting with utilities scheduled in October, if DNR can come out that would allow to knock off the wildfire season review off the meeting agenda as utilities will be in attendance.

### **X. Closing Comments**

- a. Committee Members –
  - i. Eli King – Appreciate being here and a member, hope to close the gaps between our agencies and greater cooperation between us.
- b. Committee Chair – Appreciate all who attended. We’ve gotten a lot of important work done and have more to do.

### **XI. Public Comment**



- a. Jason Dibble – Will the three selected service providers be utilized by DNR for investigations when the listed thresholds are met or expected? Or will region investigators continue with those? A: That would be a decision each organizations could make at the time of the investigation. DNR will conduct the initial investigation, if needed will utilize qualified experts. The thresholds provide guidance on when to start considering the need for that assistance.
- b. Nicolas Garcia – One of the aspects of 1032 was the recognition that utilities are going to be in different situations depending on all factors. Utilities need to be able to make decisions based on their need. Would not be helpful to become mandates. Public involvement, feel the spirit of the statute may not be met that implies a proactive approach where the process feels that public involvement happens at the end almost.
- c. Dave Warren – This group started in 2019 to share the expertise of DNR and Utilities as partners to reduce the risk of fires. This group has been given a lot more work, but the partnership aspect should not be forgotten. How do we get more bandwidth?

**XII. Adjourned**

- a. Meeting is adjourned at 3:52 pm

**XIII. Appendices**

- a. Attendance
- b. HB 1032
- c. QWRA Presentation
- d. Report to Legislature

Draft minutes submitted by Bryan Perrenod, approved by Chairman Loren Torgerson. Formal action to be taken to approve the minutes at the next general meeting.