

MEETING SUMMARY

Approved June 18, 2024

Attendees

Committee members present: Josh Anderson, Kevin Arneson, Darcy Batura, Josh Berkowitz, Jerry Bonagofsky, Matt Comisky, Darin Cramer, Chad Davis, Travis Dutton, Rebecca Hunt, Tiana Luke, Jay McLaughlin, Oak Rankin, Janene Ritchie, Ryan Sanchez, Mark Smith, Tim Walls (WDFW representative), Bob Shindelay,

DNR staff present: Mike Norris (staff meeting Chair), Katie Allen (Executive Committee support), Jen Watkins (Committee Staff support), Lori Reynaud (Committee Secretary), Alex Smith, Chuck Hersey, Trevor McConchie, Kate Williams.

Meeting Summary

Mike Norris opened the meeting with a welcome to all new and returning members and an official call to order.

Introductions & committee overview:

Jen Watkins, Forest Resilience Division Manager updated the group on the Committee Appointment letters that were mailed on Friday. Last year, this Committee got through the process of updating the Charter which was critical so that our agency could be compliant with the HEAL Act as well as improve our committee functions.

She provided an overview of the purpose of this committee and noted that the updated charter allows term limits, a routine application for public to apply, & a new structure to ensure we had a member chair addressing priority issues and agendas. She noted the committee has up to 25 seats, all of which are appointed by the Commissioner of Public Lands except for five seats for standing agencies/organizations that can designate their representative. Today's meeting represents our newly appointed and re-appointed committee following our winter applications, and our first committee operating under our newly revised charter.

We did recognize there were some bumps in the application process that everyone went through, including feedback on how to improve the online application itself. We have provided the information to our Boards and Commissions team who manages the common application process to all agency boards and commissions.

Committee members introduced themselves, which was utilized in lieu of roll-call for this meeting.

We reviewed the current suite of appointments as well as 3 vacancies that remain for recruitment and appointment later in 2024, which include seats representing Large Private Industrial Landowner and Academic Institution. Additionally one seat remains to be appointed by the Commissioner, as deemed appropriate.

Darin Cramer representing Washington Forest Protection Association and large industrial landowners noted that while he is currently a committee member, he is in discussions with several member organizations that he feels may better represent the large private industrial landowner interest for this committee with their direct experience. He offered he would remain engaged, but has put forward names of individuals for consideration for appointment who also were in attendance at the meeting and introduced themselves: Mike Mackelwich (Rayonier) and Brian Vrablick (American Forest Management). Mike and Brian have submitted applications,

and Darin has notified DNR of this and we hope to address any changes in membership during the open spring application period and recruitment.

Utilizing the charter as a guide, the operations of the committee were covered as well as introducing DNR staff support to the committee.

Past Meeting Minutes

The committee then reviewed the December 19, 2023 meeting minutes and a motion was made for approval which was seconded. In discussion it was noted that there were grammatical errors in the portion of the minutes regarding the Forest Legacy presentation, which was identified to be a reliance on the Microsoft Teams transcripts. Committee support staff agreed that we would send minutes out in the future to members during drafting to try to correct errors earlier. A motion was made to approve the minutes with these grammatical errors addressed, which was seconded and passed with one member abstaining from voting.

DNR Executive and Forest Resilience Updates

Alex Smith, Deputy Supervisor for Forest Regulation, Forest Resilience and Aquatics shared her appreciation to the committee for everyone leaning in on the HB 1168 funding during legislative session. Alex provided an update on where funding levels looked currently were in legislative proposals, and that we'll be keeping a close eye on this through session as a high agency priority. She also shared that on a personal note, she will be leaving DNR as she is taking a new role with the Port of Olympia. She announced that Katie Allen will be the Acting Deputy Supervisor after she leaves.

Katie Allen said hello and reiterated she is here to support the really good work of this advisory committee.

Jen Watkins, Forest Resilience Division Manager shared that our state forester will be at our spring meeting from the Executive level as well as Katie Allen. She also shared that today is a huge day with historic funding being announced including significant contributions from US Forest Service, in that we'll be deciding by the end of day on nearly \$8 million in grants for Urban and Community Forestry projects in Washington communities. These grants were made possible with federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act, as well as State Climate Commitment Act funds given to us from the Legislature last session. DNR received over \$21 million in requests from communities across WA with a total of 120 applications. As we make this announcement, the one risk to be clear that we may be talking about in a future committee meeting regards the state funds that went into these grants from the Climate Commitment Act. There is an initiative to repeal the Climate Commitment Act that will go to voters this November, and if it passes any state funds that were obligated into a contract will be at risk. We are notifying grantees as we make the awards.

Alex Smith shared that DNR, OFM, and all state agencies are tracking the potential situation around the initiative to repeal the Climate Commitment Act. Many programs have been receiving climate commitment act funds at DNR. At our committee meeting this fall, it may be worthwhile to discuss the suite of programs and any unspent funding that would be at risk as well as what projects unspent funding is tied to. We could discuss what the strategy looks like across state agencies if the initiative passes and how we work with the legislature on any outstanding obligations.

Roundtable: Open opportunity for committee member updates and information sharing

Tim Walls shared that WDFW has traditionally filled their seat on this committee with either the Director of Conservation or their designee. WDFW's new Director of Conservation is Margen Carlson. Tim provided updates on active agency budget requests to the legislature as well a proviso they have been working towards with other state agencies for managing impacts from recreation on state managed lands which includes forest lands.

Mark Smith Weyerhaeuser 3 by 30 sustainability plan they are putting out this year and second they have a new THRIVE program which provides grants to rural communities through their private company. Information on these programs is on their website including information on granting for healthy forests, sustainable homes, and rural communities.

Tiana Luke shared that the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative is looking to hire a new coordinator potentially with facilitation experience. It's a part time position we have been looking for a while without luck. Please spread the word to your networks.

Darcy Batura shared some news from late last year, where The Nature Conservancy has helped to provide and stand up fire crews in coordination with the Forest Service focused on confronting the wildfire crisis in the west. We are working with those crews up to Washington in the spring – combing local and national experience in prescribed fire so they can work on getting priority areas burned and increase wildfire and create wildfire resilience. They are primarily burning on Forest Service lands; primarily in the Central Washington Initiative landscape but if there's other priorities that are ready to go we can switch the funding source and address those.

Katie Allen shared that DNR submitted comments to the Forest Service on the Northwest Forest Plan Amendment process. The agency supported the five areas that the Forest Service is looking at to focus the revisions on and really highlighted our perspective that state agencies including DNR should be considered a cooperating agency through this process. Chuck Hersey with DNR built upon this with some details key themes raised in DNR's letter.

Jay McLaughlin flagged recent conversations around the Western gray squirrel as it pertained to forest health, especially where there are real concerns regarding the implications for timing restrictions and the kind of work that needs to be done. Jay noted some members in the room on the Forest Practices Board may have more updates.

Brandon Austin with WDFW noted that after the gray squirrel uplisting, WDFW made a recommendation to DNR asking they request the Forest Practices Board to form a working group related to this topic. He noted they want to look at how effective current measures are, are there other options or conservation initiatives to encourage landowners and compensate them. If none of these recommendations look adequate would be to consider what a rule might look like, rulemaking is not off the table but not the primary focus or objective to forming the working group. The board approved and passed a motion for WDFW to form that working group. Looking for participation from all effective groups small and large private landowners, other agencies, conservation entities, and tribes. The work group will be led from WDFW's Habitat Program.

Matt Comisky shared that since the first of the year, we've seen 3 announcements for mill closures in Western Oregon, one of the primary heavy drivers of that is log supply. As we think about a potential Western WA forest health plan we continue to discuss and look at how Eastern WA is going to play out. A few examples are the impact from the Oregon 2020 Labor Day fires, the Oregon Private Forest Accord which will reduce volume, WA State DNR currently undertaking sustainable harvest calculation planning for both Eastern and Western WA. Western WA is continuing to see dropping harvest volumes over the last 15 to 20 years. This is the infrastructure needed to do this work and if we continue to lose the capabilities of Jerry's members and my members, the ability to do a lot of this work will go away. We need to look at the larger picture of where is our wood going to come from, the expected demand worldwide is going to quadruple over the next 20 years. The more we lose to conversion from non-active management is going to be more challenging and we are in a critical time and place and there is a sense of urgency within the industry.

Chad Davis shared staff updates from US Forest Service including a new permanent regional forester is Jacque Buchanan, bringing a lot of fire experience and line officer experience. One serious issue going on in Region 6 is in Oregon where an employee was arrested and now indicted as an outcome of performing duties on the job

in a prescribed fire activity on behalf of the Agency when the fire moved to private land. It is a legal proceeding and Jacque is pulling full support behind the employee and it is all the way up to the Secretary. A significant amount of time in Regional Leadership team meeting to talk about that situation and how to best support the employees in those situations. Also an announcement is being made from the Administration today about on additional funds going into the wildfire crisis strategy work with \$400 million targeted to 21 identified landscapes, in which WA has two 2 landscapes, and then and \$100 million going toward an internal competitive process.

Josh Anderson shared there has been some cynicism in the past about the metrics used to quantify accomplishments and the Forest Service has had this “acres treated” sort of count can be unreliable. If an acre is burned or piled and burned and logged, it can be counted three times and that is not the way most people would be reporting. It is important to flag, and if we can avoid it that’d be great for transparency. There is a recognition that there is an emergency we need to focus on, but also there has been direction to evaluate and define mature old growth trees around the whole country and that has resulted in the direction to revise every forest plan in the whole country – it’s recognizably hard for staff on the forest to do both.

Mike Norris shared a prescribed fire update from DNR, noting recent training courses held.

Kate Williams shared that you can expect to see DNR’s annual Forest Action Plan Highlights Report posted in the next few weeks. DFW has an update in that report on the western gray squirrel. We also have our first annual monitoring report for the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan out for committee members to read.

Darcy Batura made a formal request that in addition to capturing the roundtable discussion in our meeting minutes, that we put on our next committee meeting agenda a dedicated conversation to build on the themes that emerged today around economics, the amount of funding that we have available, the leadership that is transitioning, and they way we need to get this work done while considering the issues raised around mill closures. Interest was noted, and anyone interested to help plan for this topic at our spring meeting was asked to notify Jen Watkins.

Public Comment:

No members of the public signed up to provide public comment.

Committee member Mark Smith provided comment on an issue he has heard from people in his area that he’s spoken with wanted to raise for this committee. He shared that there is a problem in his area with homelessness moving into the DNR lands and camping, desecrating and just not being good stewards of the forest. The experience has been when we have identified this law enforcement has allowed it. DNR law enforcement communicated they were not instructed to move them, while local law enforcement says it's DNR. So there is a communication problems with protecting lands with this vandalism that's going on and he wanted to bring to the attention with this group.

Subcommittee Reports:

Derek Churchill, a Forest Health Scientist with DNR provided background on and an update from the **Monitoring Subcommittee**. Monitoring is one of the five major components of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan, and we have been able to devote considerable resources to setting up and building a robust monitoring program to support. We did have some social science and economic monitoring early in the process of the plan. There is a Monitoring Subcommittee of the Forest Health Advisory Committee, which has been extraordinarily helpful with developing, implementing, and refining the monitoring framework for the 20-year plan. We are just getting to a point five years into plan implementation where we’re able to really start seeing some things and doing some monitoring. Our first comprehensive monitoring report on the plan will be released in about a week. In our last legislative report last December we had a major section over 100 pages, so this time

our idea was to make the monitoring report a standalone which we'll release on the off year of our legislative reports, so it gives monitoring its own focus. New developments and highlights:

- First time we integrated our treatment tracking with change detection into our monitoring led by Annie Smith. Annie has been working several years on satellite-based change detection using the forest service landscape satellites to detect where there's been major significant change in forest cover and the overstory picking up thinning and generation fire, anything that changes the canopy. She developed a model to help us predict, if that change was from thinning, insects, or broadcast burning wildfire. This allows us to pick up change that isn't reported in the treatment tracking and we can use both to cross reference and combine. Wildfire and insects are treating a lot more acres than thinning. We use the NAIP imagery and digital area photogrammetry giving us detailed information.
- We focused on three priority planning areas, digging into the structural forest change that is happening
- We hired Jessica Walston who focuses on that treatment monitoring on the ground, developing and helping implement a multi-party monitoring strategy for on site monitoring.
- We have the Forest Health Tracker we've developed where different partners report their treatments and it gets folded into this database where we have spatial information for all our treatments that have been reported by our partners across Eastern WA.

Jen Watkins (DNR), Tim Walls, and Matt Comisky provided an update from the **Western WA Subcommittee**. The Tasking Memo that formed this committee was in the pre-meeting packet, which outlined that DNR asked the Advisory Committee to share with us what they see as the problem statement for forest health and resilience in western Washington - what is it we're trying to address, is there a problem in western WA for forest health and resilience the committee can define and articulate? If so, what is the socioeconomic and cultural context for stepping into forest health and resilience issues in western Washington. DNR wanted advice on what some of the context we should be mindful of before we step into any further forest health and resilience planning including, what is the ecological context in western WA for forest health and resilience to inform how we think about a forest health assessment, The same RCW that applies to eastern WA says we should have an assessment and treatment framework for western WA, DNR wants to get advice from this committee on how we build that assessment. The DNR Tasking Memo asked the committee for a vision statement - what does it look like in western WA for forest resilience if we are successful together in address risks?

As the Western WA Subcommittee has met, Tim noted the conversation has touched on several things, including in western Washington there is a much more complex political socioeconomic landscape which presents challenges to tackle issues at a landscape scale. It will take a good coalition of people to do this, and building of trust to tackle at the landscape scale. Matt added that we have a different ecotype when it comes to fire in western WA compared to eastern WA, with more population density - so there's other factors driving forest health and impacts to Western WA than Eastern WA.

The subcommittee was established to develop recommendations in response to this tasking memo to bring forward to the full committee, which are being finalized. These will be sent to the full committee before the spring meeting, so the committee can review and decide on approval and/or additional work needed. Also at the spring meeting we will want the committee to hear about the pilot forest health assessments conducted for western Washington, to inform and provide feedback.

2024 Committee Chair Election

The committee charter outlines a member chair election process. The member chair shall be elected from the committee by majority vote at the Winter Committee meeting of each year. The candidates for the member chair will be nominated at the Fall Committee meeting and will assume the role and duties immediately following the winter meeting. We are off schedule a little because of the timing of our committee appointments this year.

Today we will take nominations for the committee chair, and ask all committee members to vote in person or online during or after the meeting today. This voting will select the 2024 committee chair, who will be announced following this meeting after a tally of the votes and serve the remainder of the year. Committee members Darcy Batura and Mark Smith both volunteered to be considered for this position.

Spring and fall committee meetings

Earlier this winter, the committee expressed interest in having place-based meetings to highlight areas we are investing in forest health work and allow for field trips in addition to the business meeting of the committee. Meeting discussion focused on selecting possible field location priority topics for the upcoming meetings. Members noted an opportunity to tour the Cle Elum Priority landscape that has come up in previous discussions on Forest Legacy, treatments implementation, and to dig into findings from the monitoring report for this landscape that Derek mentioned earlier. Darcy noted that TNC and local partners could help to host this meeting. With topics noted for this landscape, it was noted we can follow up if this is a good joint meeting to hold with the Wildfire Advisory Committee. It was suggested that we also consider western Washington, potentially looking at areas where the recent western Washington forest health assessment was piloted to inform discussions – so middle Snohomish or Packwood area. Janene Ritchie volunteered to assist planning if we decide a field tour in Packwood. The next meetings two meetings are June 18th, September 10th. The committee will have a hybrid meeting with the in-person option in Olympia for our December 10th meeting.

Post-Fire Recovery

Collin Haffey, Post-Fire Recovery Program Manager with DNR introduced a panel to discuss the coordinated effort happening in Washington to address post-fire recovery. Key points from his presentation and panelists from partner agencies were:

- **Fire severity on the rise**
 - In recent years, there has been a concerning increase in the severity of wildfires, which can be attributed to factors such as climate change and forest management practices.
 - This rise in severity has led to more extensive post-fire impacts, necessitating a comprehensive approach to recovery and mitigation efforts.
- **Post-fire impacts**
 - After a wildfire, communities often face challenges such as soil erosion, loss of wildlife habitat, and increased risk of flooding.
 - These impacts highlight the critical need for effective post-fire assessment and response strategies, which the Wildfire-Associated Landslide Emergency Response Team (WALERT) addresses through its hazard assessments.
- **WALERT team – hazard assessments**
 - The Wildfire-Associated Landslide Emergency Response Team (WALERT) is crucial in conducting detailed hazard assessments post-fire.
 - Their assessments help identify potential risks such as unstable slopes, debris flows, and water quality concerns, informing decision-making for short- and long-term recovery efforts.
- **Needs for cross-boundary coordination**
 - Effective post-fire recovery requires coordination across jurisdictional boundaries involving local, state, tribal, and federal agencies.
 - Cross-boundary coordination helps ensure a unified and efficient response to address the diverse needs of impacted communities.
- **Short and long-term needs**
 - In the aftermath of a wildfire, communities require immediate support for emergency response, including shelter, food, and medical assistance.
 - Long-term needs focus on rebuilding infrastructure, restoring ecosystems, and implementing mitigation measures to reduce future fire risks.

- **Transitions**
 - As the immediate response phase transitions to recovery, there is a shift towards rebuilding and restoring affected areas.
 - Effective transitions require clear communication channels and stakeholder collaboration to ensure continuity in support and resources.

WA Emergency Management Division

- **Role of EMD during a response**
 - Emergency Management Departments (EMDs) are central in coordinating response efforts, mobilizing resources, and providing critical information to the public.
 - Their expertise in disaster management helps facilitate a swift and organized response to wildfires and other emergencies.
- **PA and FMAG**
 - Public Assistance (PA) and Fire Management Assistance Grants (FMAG) are vital resources FEMA provides to support recovery efforts.
 - PA helps repair, replacements, or restore public infrastructure, while FMAG assists with firefighting costs during large-scale incidents.
- **FEMA IA/PA**
 - FEMA's Individual Assistance (IA) and Public Assistance (PA) programs offer crucial support to disaster-affected individuals and communities.
 - IA directly assists individuals with housing, medical, and other disaster-related needs, while PA helps recover public infrastructure.
- **Short-term recovery coordination**
 - EMD coordinates short-term recovery efforts, focusing on immediate needs such as removal of debris and temporary housing.
 - Rapid coordination ensures that essential services are restored swiftly, mitigating further disruptions to affected communities.
- **Long-term recovery groups – Ongoing technical support**
 - Long-term recovery groups, often formed after major disasters, provide ongoing technical support and resources for rebuilding efforts.
 - These groups collaborate with local stakeholders and agencies to develop comprehensive recovery plans that address immediate and long-term recovery needs.

USFS

- **Post-fire process and limitations**
 - The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) manages vast forested lands and faces challenges in post-fire recovery due to limited resources and competing priorities.
 - Despite these limitations, the USFS is critical in assessing post-fire conditions, implementing mitigation measures, and restoring forest ecosystems.
- **Needs/Gaps**
 - The USFS identifies needs and gaps in post-fire recovery, including funding for restoration projects, hazard mitigation equipment, and ecosystem restoration expertise.
 - Addressing these needs requires collaboration with partners and stakeholders to leverage resources and expertise.
- **Plans for 2024 coordination**
 - Looking ahead to 2024, the USFS is developing coordinated strategies to enhance post-fire recovery efforts and reduce future fire risks.
 - These plans involve working closely with local communities, agencies, and organizations to implement effective mitigation and restoration projects.

WA State Conservation Commission

- **Support for landowners through conservation districts**
 - The WA State Conservation Commission (SCC) supports landowners affected by wildfires through the state's Conservation Districts (CDs).

- CDs offer land management and conservation expertise, guiding landowners on erosion control, reforestation, and sustainable land use practices.
- **Coordination with other landowner support agencies (NRCS/FSA)**
 - WSCC collaborates with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) to provide a holistic approach to landowner support.
 - This collaboration ensures landowners access to federal programs for financial assistance, technical expertise, and recovery planning.
- **Explanation of Disaster Assistance Program**
 - The Disaster Assistance Program administered by WSCC provides financial assistance to eligible landowners for wildfire recovery.
 - This program assists with costs related to debris removal, erosion control, and reseeded efforts to restore land impacted by wildfires.
- **Other funding needs**
 - In addition to federal assistance programs, WSCC identifies other funding needs for wildfire recovery, such as grants for habitat restoration and watershed protection.
 - Securing diverse funding sources is crucial for implementing comprehensive recovery plans and supporting sustainable land management practices.

Summary

- **Post-Fire coordination initiatives and goals**
 - In summary, effective post-fire coordination initiatives focus on assessing hazards, coordinating resources, and supporting communities throughout recovery.
 - The overarching goal is to promote resilience, restore ecosystems, and enhance preparedness for future wildfire events.

Meeting was ended with a reminder for all members to vote for the committee member chair by end of day.