

Forest Health Advisory Committee

Quarterly Meeting

May 10, 2022

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Remote meeting on Zoom

Participant List

Terra Rentz, Jen Watkins, Mike Kuttel Jr, Matt Comisky, Travis Dutton, Ashley Blazina, Garrett Meigs, Sam Steinshouer, Michael Norris, Shana Joy, Brittany Montano, Paul Jewell, Tiana Luke, Josh Anderson, Janene Ritchie, Tony Craven, David Cass, Derek Churchill, Jerry Bonagofsky, Tia Beavert, Chad Davis, Dave Werntz, Cynthia Wilkerson, George Geissler, Andrew Spaeth

Agenda / Meeting Summary

Call to Order and committee member roll call led by Committee Chair Terra Rentz

Open business

FHAC Charter

The charter for the committee has been finalized and signed by Commissioner of Public Lands. A copy of the charter can be found here: https://www.dnr.wa.gov/publications/final_fhac_charter_2022.pdf

Members are encouraged to review the charter if you haven't already. In addition to formalizing the "norms" of the group, we identify a number of interests that we anticipate consider adding to the committee membership over time.

Forest Health Advisory Committee – Monitoring Sub-Committee Report Out

The committee identified a handful of topics that will serve as the focus of our work in 2022. The topics are described in a tasking memo that was developed in partnership with the sub-committee and shared with the full group.

Annie Smith, DNR Forest Health Scientist, provided an overview of regional change detection monitoring that she is leading. The primary question is how treatments and natural disturbances are changing forest conditions? The method of detection is satellite data that indicates change in "greenness" to identify change and then attribute that change to a particular type of disturbance. There is also DAP, a LiDar like product, that can help detect change in structure classes. LiDar coverage is required to process the structure data. There is currently data dating back to 2015. The resolution is helpful at the scale of eastern Washington to support regional level monitoring goals. A more detailed presentation and overview will be shared in summer and fall as the work becomes more complete. See attached PPT slides and tasking memo for more information.

Environmental Justice Work Group Report Out

Ashley Blazina, Environmental Planner, provided an update on the status of the work group focused on environmental justice. The work group was established in 2022 to provide recommendations about how to integrate environmental justice into the work of the Forest Resilience Division and the criteria that will be used to evaluate investments made through the new account established in HB 1168.

The work group is framing the question in terms of, “what makes a just forest?” The group started by reviewing the physical factors that informed the analysis and identification of priority landscapes in eastern and western Washington. The work group identified additional data sets that can help support integration of culturally important plant species, influence of climate change, fire as a management tool, priority habitat and species data for culturally important first foods. Maps are only as good as the data available, and those data are often not perfect. Locally focused dialogue and discussions are helpful in filling in gaps, clarifying local priorities and needs, and fostering stronger partnerships and engagement. There are a number of social and economic dimensions available to help identify disparities and opportunities to foster more intentional work and engagement in this space.

Janene Ritchie, Executive Director of Pinchot Partners, shared a local example from east Lewis County, an area historically reliant on economic activity on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Janene shared challenges associated with housing affordability, access to healthcare, unemployment, and related socioeconomic challenges that may be helpful to inform local priorities related to environmental and social justice in that community.

The work group will report back in June with a formal recommendation to the Forest Health Advisory Committee.

Federal Funding Updates

George Geissler provided an update on the implementation of the infrastructure bill. Washington State partners will be receiving funding. State and Private Forestry funds support priorities in the Forest Action Plan. DNR is anticipated to receive \$1.382M in funding for Forest Stewardship/Service Forestry, Urban and Community Forestry, Forest Health/Pathologist, and State Fire Assistance. The State Fire Assistance is primarily supporting prescribed fire training. There are also additional dollars supporting Volunteer Fire Assistance.

Community Wildfire Defense grants were funded at \$1B over five years. Guidelines are currently being developed. The grant program will focus on implementing Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Grant activities must be directly related to the CWPP. If an interested community does not have an updated CWPP, they may be eligible to receive funding to help update the local CWPP. Washington DNR will provide technical assistance and administer the sub-grants to community partners once the program is established. Suppression equipment is not an eligible expense. Eligibility includes at-risk and underserved communities, communities with an active CWPP that is less than ten years old, and numerous entities such as local governments, Tribes, and non-profit organizations, among others. At Washington DNR, the program will be administered through the new Community Resilience Section within the Wildfire Division. A national advisory group is helping to inform the final eligibility criteria.

DNR is continuing to engage with the leadership at USDA Forest Service to inform the prioritization of funds through the infrastructure bill that are tied to National Forest System management, including the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. If you have questions please reach out to Terra Rentz and Jen Watkins.

An update on federal Disaster Relief Funds was shared at the last quarterly meeting by Chad Davis, Forest Service Regional Office. Jen Watkins shared that DNR submitted a \$9M request focused on

wildfire recovery efforts in the state. The attached document provides a more detailed overview of the proposed project.

New Business

DNR Forest Resilience Division Updates

Alex Smith, Deputy Supervisor, provided a brief update on the status of HB1168 implementation and the build out of the Forest Resilience Division. The team has been busy hiring new staff and creating the new programs that will lead implementation of the historic legislation.

Jen Watkins, Acting Division Manager, provided an update on some of the key activities:

- State Lands implemented prescribed fire activities in eastern Washington in partnership with sister state agency, WDFW, and others. You can see social media posts about the burn at this link: https://twitter.com/waDNR_Forests
- Service Forestry Program is increasing capacity and staffing, especially in western Washington where DNR is building out technical assistance capacity and a cost-share program available to support private landowners.
- Urban Community Forest Community Forestry Assistance grant awards announced for 21 projects across the state totaling \$549,318 with \$208,950 awarded to environmental justice projects. This is the largest amount of grant funding available in program history. DNR scientists released the first ever Work of Wildfire Assessment for the 2021 wildfire season, summarizing a pilot effort to use data, field visits, and interviews in an attempt to:
 - Evaluate the effects of wildfires on planning areas to update our landscape evaluations that state the need for forest health and risk reduction treatments
 - Summarize and evaluate relationships between wildfires and past treatments
 - Evaluate how fire managers utilized treatments to establish control lines during wildfires and applications to Potential Control Lines (PCLs) and Potential Operational Delineations (PODs)
 - Synthesize key lessons from the 2021 fire season with partners, advancing a shared stewardship culture and process of learning to inform adaptive management
 - The report is available at this link:
https://www.dnr.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/rp_workofwildfire2021_march_2022.pdf
- The 2022 RCW 76.06.200 biennial legislative report will be submitted by December 1, 2022. As part of the process DNR staff is reviewing our current 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington priority landscapes and identifying additional priority landscapes to incorporate into our planning activities for the next two years. Chuck Hersey will be leading that effort. FHAC members will be asked to provide input on the priorities. The map of current priority landscapes in eastern Washington can be found at this link:
<https://wadnr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=51777b1ac0344b24bbb6621d3f633bdb>
- DNR will be updating our forest health treatment tracking across all-landownerships at the end of May with updated treatment numbers from DNR and partners implementing forest health

treatments across the state. We will utilize this information to update our Forest Health Tracker online at this link: <https://foresthealthtracker.dnr.wa.gov/>

Please reach out to Jen Watkins if you have any questions about these updates or other activities occurring in the Forest Resilience Division.

DNR Post-Fire Recovery Program

Michael Norris, Assistant Division Manger for Cross Boundary Restoration Section of the Forest Resilience Division, provided an overview presentation (see attached slides). The team is currently assessing partners who currently work in the post-fire recovery space. The team plans to hire a Program Manager this summer. Funding made available through HB1168 will support mapping of hazards, such as alluvial fans, that may be negatively impacted by wildfires and pose a risk to communities or infrastructure. The team is also involved nationally in providing input on new post-fire grant recovery efforts.

The Washington Conservation Commission is working with a several local Conservation Districts (CDs) in Stevens, Okanogan, and Asotin Counties to provide input to DNR in the development and establishment of the DNR post-fire recovery program. Shana Joy is serving as a lead in helping to coordinate that work with Mike Norris and local CDs.

Question & answer and discussion:

- A member of the group asked if Federal Land Managers are included in the post-fire recovery program. There was interest expressed in coordinating post-fire recovery activities across ownership boundaries. DNR staff clarified that the work will be cross-boundary and include National Forest System lands. There is a recognition that Forest Service assessments following wildfires are helpful, and that there is a need to utilize that information as well as connecting that work with adjacent private landowners.
- A member of the group asked if the program is only focused on forest ecosystems or if it also includes shrub-steppe ecosystems? DNR staff shared that they are thinking about this issue and trying to determine how to best include all interested and relevant partners. The landscape is dynamic and wildfires are burning across a mix of forested and non-forest systems. It seems important to evaluate and consider how to consider the links between sage steppe and forest.
- A member of the group expressed interest in making sure DNR Wildfire Division and other relevant suppression organizations are included in the discussion. Suppression repair, such as fixing damaged infrastructure and hydrologic stabilization, are required following fire. There are numerous other activities that may be required to recover the site, but it's not always clear who is responsible and how to fund and implement post-fire activities.
- A member of the group expressed interest in DNR creating a "toolbox" that could help provide online resources, contact information, and tools to support recovery planning. That could be supplemented with a training program made available to practitioners and partners. It is safe to assume that more communities will be impacted by wildfire in the future, so creating these resources now will be really important to be better prepared.
- A member of the group shared that more help is needed to support private landowners. Pass through funding may be the best way to achieve this need.

- A member of the group shared that coordination with local government is critical to success of the program.
- Members of the group expressed support for the DNR approach to building out the program. If it is helpful to establish a FHAC work group to get into the details DNR is happy to entertain that. If you have additional questions, comments, or input please contact Jen Watkins and Mike Norris.

Utilization of Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account

HB1168 established the new account and identified the Forest Health Advisory Committee as a key partner in informing the use of the account. The bill includes a number of activities that are eligible for funding through the account including to *“monitor, track, and implement....activities to restore and improve forest health and reduce vulnerability to drought, insect infestation, disease, and other threats to healthy forests including, but not limited to, silvicultural treatments, seedling development, thinning and prescribed fire, and post-fire recovery activities to stabilize and prevent unacceptable degradation to natural and cultural resources and minimize threats to life and property resulting from the effects of a wildfire. Funding priority under this subsection must be given to programs, activities, or projects aligned with the 20-year forest health strategic plan, the wildland fire protection 10-year strategic plan, and the 2020 forest action plan across any combination of local, state, federal, tribal, and private ownerships.”*

DNR staff prepared remarks about what we currently know about the account and the intent of the legislation. The legislation expressed an intent to fund the account at \$125M a biennium, and within this total will be a carryforward amount for DNR. For the accounts utilization each biennium, a minimum 25% must be spent on forest restoration and 15% on community resilience. Forest health work on State Lands is included.

Discussion: DNR is interested in defining the FHAC approach to advising on future utilization of the Wildfire Response, Forest Restoration, and Community Resilience Account established by House Bill 1168 to meet legislative intent relevant to forest health. This includes addressing the following questions: What does advising on future utilization mean? What is the role of the FHAC in advising DNR on the use of the account? What needs exist in the communities you work? How can those funds be directed to be most helpful at achieving our collective forest health, wildfire risk reduction, and community resilience goals?

- Members expressed interest in being involved in providing input to DNR about the use of funds and prioritization of projects. FHAC members have a diverse set of perspectives and skills that can help identify and advance priorities.
- There are areas of the 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan: Eastern Washington that may need more focus and attention, including the non-commercial components of forest restoration projects, prescribed burning, and aquatic restoration.
- Incorporation of environmental justice is part of the process that FHAC members are providing input on programmatically as well.
- DNR staff shared that there are some sideboards on FHAC engagement. DNR is not interested in having FHAC score individual projects. Rather, DNR staff are interested in sharing information about potential investments and projects, and gathering input on whether or not those funding opportunities align with our strategic plan goals and the intent of enabling legislation.

- A member of the group asked if there is an explanation of the limitations of the account available for FHAC to review. Terra shared that DNR can make something available.
- A member of the group shared an interest in helping to review and identify the types of programmatic activities that may be important to prioritize and fund through the account.
- It was suggested that a follow up conversation about contracting may be helpful. It would be unlikely that DNR would have capacity to administer all of the new contracts associated with the implementation of this work. What other partners can assist in helping to administer and provide contract management support?
- There was interest in clarity on the funding source to support HB1168. The budget notes that HB1168 would come from general funds in the future. DNR is working with OFM to confirm that is there assumption for the FY23-25 budget.
- In the short-term DNR will follow up this discussion with a Tasking Memo to form a short-term workgroup of the FHAC over the summer. The work will include organizing a “show and tell” meeting to highlight forest health and resilience needs for the HB 1168 account, including but not limited to what DNR’s utilization of existing funds have been and what agency plans for the carryforward level are. Terra invited FHAC members to help work with DNR to provide input on what to include in this discussion. DNR staff will schedule a special meeting with FHAC for this purpose likely to occur in in late June or July. There was not strong interest in virtual versus in-person, although virtual may lead to more participation.

The next meeting is September 13, 2022. If you have new business that you would like to see included on the agenda please let Terra Rentz know. She can be reached at terra.rentz@dnr.wa.gov.

The meeting ended at 11:40 AM.