

Virtual Meeting of the

# Oregon Prescribed Fire Council

March 17, 2020, 9am-12pm

Photo: Cheryl Barth

## Meeting Summary

Full Meeting Recording Available Here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zSuR5zDUr4Y&t=1625s>

Audio starts at 0:1:10

### Prescribed Fire Updates

#### ***Governor's Wildfire Council & Legislative Update***

Chris Chambers, City of Ashland, [Chris.Chambers@ashland.or.us](mailto:Chris.Chambers@ashland.or.us)

The Governor's Wildfire Council met for just over a year, and some of the recommendations were translated into a series of bills, which is really encouraging. There was an omnibus Bill from the Governor's office to carry forward many of the Council recommendations. Some of the proposed activities in the bills included:

- Defensible space mapping under Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) and the State Fire Marshal's Office.
- Resources for mitigating smoke exposure.
- Funding for the implementation of 15 forest restoration demonstration projects around the state.
- Direction to ODF to study prescribed fire incentives and barriers.

While these bills stalled during the walkout, they were being considered for the special session until COVID-19 situation started unfolding. The important takeaway is that there was a lot of movement.

#### ***Oregon State University's Fire Extension Program***

Carrie Berger, Oregon State University, [Carrie.Berger@oregonstate.edu](mailto:Carrie.Berger@oregonstate.edu)

In 2019 the Oregon Legislature funded the creation of a new Forestry & Natural Resources Extension Fire Program at Oregon State University. This includes the creation of six new extension fire specialist positions (with one position focused on rangeland in SE Oregon), a state fire specialist, and a program manager. This program is being rolled out in three phases: Phase one included Service Area Designation, which delineates six areas of the state for the extension positions based on fire behavior attributes (climate, topography, vegetation), fire history, social and organizational assessments, and other important factors. Phase two analysis drills down into each service area to assess needs and priorities at that scale. Phase three analysis drills down even further to the local level and will ultimately facilitate work done on the ground. With fire extension specialists on the ground in each service area, the program will support the project development and implementation, as well as educational opportunities like "Learn and Burn" events. Fire extension job postings might be delayed due to the COVID-19 situation.

## ***Blue Mountain Chapter Update***

Steve Hawkins, USDA Forest Service, [steven.hawkins@usda.gov](mailto:steven.hawkins@usda.gov)

The Forest Service has created [an interactive map](#) for all active, planned, and completed (as of fall 2019) prescribed fire units across the Malheur, Umatilla, and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests. We included pile burning and broadcast burning. Once we start burning daily, we can show what's planned and what's been completed. We are also working on an agreement with Amanda Rau (The Nature Conservancy) and the Wallowa-Whitman NF for ease of bringing on people for burns and cross-training staff on burns. Last fall we burned about 5,000 acres on each of the Blue Mountain forests, under burning and pile burning.

## ***Southern Oregon Update***

Jack Shipley, the representative from the Southern Oregon Chapter, could not make the OPFC meeting but several participants from southwest Oregon shared prescribed fire updates from the region. Implementation has begun on the [Focused Investment Partnership](#), which involves a significant amount of prescribed fire. There was a 7-acre broadcast burn being planned on March 29<sup>th</sup>, followed by a barbeque. Community members, local firefighters, Oregon Department of Forestry, and others planned to attend. Yurok Cultural Fire Management Council were an inspiration for this burn and Margo Robbins and Rick O'Rourke plan to come up for the burn and barbeque and Rick has been helping guide the planning.

For more information about the burn and barbeque event, contact Tim Sexauer, [museecologypodcast@gmail.com](mailto:museecologypodcast@gmail.com)

## ***Klamath Lake Update***

Amy Markus, USDA Forest Service, [amy.markus@usda.gov](mailto:amy.markus@usda.gov)

Kendal Martel, Oregon State University, [kendal.martel@oregonstate.edu](mailto:kendal.martel@oregonstate.edu)

- Projects: We are still hard at work planning and implementing our landscape level projects in Klamath county. First one is North Warner, second is Chiloquin, third is Thomas Creek. We are also doing extensive outreach with landowners, such as hosting a pile burning workshop. These project have large NEPA ready projects on Forest Service land alongside private land, allowing for cross boundary planning and implementation.
- Potential Operational Delineations (PODs) on the Fremont-Winema National Forest: We are using those PODs and the associated information to inform fire suppression to the best of our ability. We are also using PODs to help inform project planning: priority pods will become our priorities for restoration. On some ranger districts we have been exploring a two tiered approach to strategic fire planning, delineating smaller PODs within larger PODs. The 3-5k acre in size sub-PODS, a scale which would support aerial ignitions and larger scale prescribed fire. Eventually get these areas into a condition to consider managed natural ignitions.
- We have been trying to do at least one large scale burn every season. Last fall we did the Boundary prescribed fire, in three days we burned 9-10k acres using aerial ignition.
- Community Response Plan: Lake County has received a grant from Oregon DEQ for the Forest Stewards Guild to complete a Community Response Plan under the new smoke management rules.
- Seasonal Fire Outreach: KLFHP working with the OSU Fire Extension program is developing an outreach program that is based on the calendar year. The first iteration includes an FAQ document for landowners focused on pile burning.

Oregon-wide:

*As folks are getting ready to burn larger units (>1000 acres or >2000 tons), Oregon Department of Forestry would love to have early communications so the forecasters can begin looking at the best weather patterns for burn bosses. You can email Christina Clemons at [Christina.t.clemons@oregon.gov](mailto:Christina.t.clemons@oregon.gov) or text 971-707-0866.*

### **Liability and Certification**

Megan Matonis, Forest Stewards Guild, [megan@forestguild.org](mailto:megan@forestguild.org)

The recent publication "[Insights and Suggestions for Prescribed Burn Manager Programs](#)" unpacks existing Burn Manager Certification programs in other states to provide guidance for certification development in state of Washington. This detailed report and presentation covers topics such as:

- Wide range of program design across states. For example, different prerequisites and requirements of burn experience, coursework topics, and other aspects.
- Direct benefits of programs: Some states offer limited liability protection, longer burn windows for certified burners, etc.
- Tradeoffs between accessible and stringent requirements.
- Logistical challenges related to requiring live burn demonstrations.

Kendal Martel, Oregon State University, [kendal.martel@oregonstate.edu](mailto:kendal.martel@oregonstate.edu)

- In addition to working with Forest Stewards Guild and OSU Extension, I am working on my Master of Forestry.
- My Master's project is the understand and contextualize prescribed fire liability laws in Oregon and how it compares in other states.
- Some of the research questions that we have developed so far:
  - For states that have gross negligence, is this directly resulting in more acres burned on the landscape?
  - How does liability interact with the insurance market?
  - Outcome of this literature: a literature review, legislative review, and a case study review.
  - Down the line this could inform a white paper, fact sheets, and recommendations.
  - Next step: Call with Liability Working Group.

### **Community Response Plans**

Ed Keith, Deschutes County, [ed.keith@deschutes.org](mailto:ed.keith@deschutes.org)

The Deschutes County Community Response Plan (CRP) is the first approved plan in the state under the new Smoke Management Rules. Before the rules were formally changed, we hired a neutral facilitator to facilitate previously disconnected organizations, coordinating messaging about prescribed fire health and smoke, conduct community surveys, and other important steps. Once the smoke management rules changed were able to use this information and network of people to build our CRP. OHA, DEQ and ODF requested more information after we submitted the first iteration of our plan. We revised it, and the CRP was approved in December 2019 and is now in effect. The key question for implementing the plan is: Are we reaching vulnerable communities? Are the messages working for them? Messaging will need continual improvements as we move into spring. You can contact Ed Keith at or 541-322-7117 for questions about CRPs. 2:00:45

The unified fire website is here: <http://www.centraloregonfire.org/>

Nick Yonker, Oregon Department of Forestry, Nick.J.YONKER@oregon.gov:

As the Smoke Management Program Manager, I am highly involved with the Community Response Plan process. The Deschutes Forest Collaborative worked with three key agencies on the CRP approval to get an exemption from short-term (hourly) smoke intrusions: Department of Environmental Quality, Oregon Health Authority, and Oregon Department of Forestry. They developed the CRP according to updated smoke management rules.

- CRPs don't require an exemption process. Any community concerned about smoke management can develop one. Oregon Administrative Rule [629-48-0180](#) outlines the process.
- There needs to be a focal point to lead the process. In our rule it's the local public health agency. However, we don't want to put all the pressure on the health agency to do that work. A city administration, forest collaborative, or other entity with the capacity to facilitate can start the CRP process. It's helpful to have funding for this capacity.
- CRPs are not a mandate, but highly encouraged for smoke vulnerable Smoke Sensitive Receptor Areas (SSRAs).
- In the next couple years we will work with Tier 1 priority areas to develop CRPs. They include: Bend (completed), Ashland, Lakeview, Baker City, Medford, Eugene/Springfield, Cottage Grove, Roseburg, John Day, and Klamath Falls.
- We are looking to develop more grants through DEQ or ODF in the future to support CRP development.

Peter Brewer, Department of Environmental Quality, Peter.Brewer@state.or.us

It is very important to work with local health authorities when developing CRPs. The Deschutes CRP used demographic information about of vulnerable populations as a starting point. Next it worked on the questions: How do you do reach these populations? Who/which entities are sharing the messages? Key considerations:

- Include clinics, health action networks, and others are important local institutions for making sure communication is reaching specific vulnerable populations.
- Sharing successes across the state: New ways of saying a message that gets response from people. New protective idea from health community, etc.
- Identify strategy for when things go wrong: If you have a burn that doesn't go so well how do you communicate then?
- Gaining trust through communication is critical.

Margaret Miller, Department of Environmental Quality, Margaret.Miller@state.or.us

I am a new staff person for DEQ Smoke Management Team. I work closely with ODF and OHA to work in this area. Communities recently awarded funding from DEQ to develop CRPs include City of Ashland, City of Oakridge, Baker County, Lake County (focused on Lakeview), and Wallowa County. I developed scopes of work for these communities. There was a range in level of specificity in the proposals. A priority for the CRP Planning process is to include meaningful input from both vulnerable populations and the community at large. One of the take-aways from developing the scopes of work is the need to establish a regular task force around communication planning across agencies and vulnerable communities. It is vital to test the outreach methods to make sure community-wide there is preparedness.

## **Prescribed Fire Workforce**

Dave Hannibal, Grayback Forestry, dhannibal2011@gmail.com

While there is steady stream of seasonal employees, retention is difficult. Despite the growing recognition of the need for prescribed fire, we burn less per year from it than we did in the 1990's and

2000's. We would like to be able to create more opportunities for upward mobility to retain talent. We are a big advocate for full service contracts. With full service contracts, you bring in suite of technical skills, different holding times and responsibility times. The contractor writes the burn plan and implements from start to finish. In contrast, with module contracts you only hiring people to move across an area landscape for a burn.

#### Discussion:

- The Forest Service needs to look at fatigue (mental and physical health issues) and lack of upward mobility.
- It will take less risk adverse Fire Management Officers and District Rangers to experiment with different kinds of contracts.
- Workforce can be better supported with more burn days, which will require more work with smoke management.
- Full service contracts are important, but it is also important to consider how other contract types allow for more (for example, credentialed volunteers at TNC Burns).
- How does liability work on full service contracts?
  - Burn boss, contractor is required to be bonded.
  - They are responsible for the burn for a certain period of time.
  - In the long run it's the Forest Service that has the liability.
  - No one is off the hook- landowners and burn bosses will both be taken to court. There needs to be shared liability. It's a percentage of liability question, not either or.
  - Prescribed Fire Insurance is cost-prohibitive. OPFC work on Liability and prescribed burn manager will hopefully help to change that.
- Another workforce issue: Providing wildfire opportunities for prescribed burners? NWCG is barrier for those without a wildland fire background.
- How does working with unplanned ignitions impact workforce considerations:
  - What are the needed skillsets? How do they overlap with prescribed fire and wildland fire workforces?
  - Expanding the footprint of fire: Should another category of crew type be considered for managed wildfire?

#### Concluding Remarks

Thank you to everyone for being flexible, it is not easy to convert a 2 day meeting into a three hour virtual meeting. Interested in getting involved with the Oregon Prescribed Fire Council? [Click here to join the OPFC listserv.](#)

Meeting Summary by Jenna Knobloch, Oregon Prescribed Fire Council Administrative Coordinator  
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