



Wildland Fire Leadership Council Meeting
March 16, 2023, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Pacific Time
Klamath Falls, OR

Running Y Ranch, 5500 Running Y Rd, Klamath Falls, OR 97601

Meeting Minutes

MEETING INTENT AND GOALS: To view, understand and build from on-the-ground challenges and successes to support WFLC priorities and implementation of the Cohesive Strategy; to discuss leaders' intent and build opportunities to encourage additional successes; to further WFLC priorities; and give strategic direction to the Regions, and agency and organizational leadership.

ATTENDEES:

Council Members or Alternates: Joan Mooney (DOI), Meryl Harrell (USDA), Mike Nedd (BLM), Paul Steblein (USGS), Erika Sasser (EPA), Aitor Bidaburu (FEMA-USFA), Bill Tripp (ITC), Jennifer Flynn (NPS), Rich Elliot (IAFC), George Geissler (NASF), Clint Cross (USFS), Matt Kinglsey (NACo), Brett Lacey (NLC), Johnna Blackhair (BIA), Cynthia Martinez (FWS), Erik Svendson (CDC), Mike Zupko (WFLC Executive Director)

RSC representatives, senior staff and other interested participants were also in attendance.

MEETING SUMMARY

OPENING REMARKS AND INTRODUCTIONS

- Welcome and local overview was provided by Governor Kotek, Doug Grafe, Oregon Fire Marshal Mariana Ruiz-Temple and Chief Horton from the Western Fire Chiefs Association.
- DOI Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Joan Mooney and WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko welcomed participants to the meeting and provided remarks about the meeting intent including discussions on enhancing smoke management and air quality, implementation of all-lands approach to landscape resilience, community risk reduction and creation of fire adapted communities.
- Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

AGENDA REVIEW AND ADMINISTRATION

- WFLC Executive Director Mike Zupko reviewed the meeting agenda, intentions, and goals.
- The November 29, 2022, minutes from Washington DC were unanimously approved.

Tour Reflections and Take Aways

Members noted how the shift of the tour from in the field to virtual due to weather was well executed, likely due to the group being accustomed to recalibrating based on changing conditions on the ground to still achieve the mission in wildfire. They further discussed the common themes referenced in the virtual tour that align with the work of the Wildfire Commission, workforce issues, including capacity and the need to support the wellness of employees, policy issues that may not align with reality, and the high level of investment needed to meet the scale needed for this problem. The aerial views during the tour provided perspective on how interconnected jurisdictions are within landscapes, emphasizing the importance of cross-boundary cooperation.

Smoke and Public Health

Objective: To provide localized insights and perspective into WFLC’s Smoke Management and Air Quality as well as Use of Proactive Fire strategic priorities. To understand the trade-off between public health and ecological management needs across the landscape. To further identify methods to minimize air quality impacts from wildland fire and increase the health and safety of communities, firefighters and the public. To explore and understand research and policy needs to further identify and inform decision making on the proactive use of fire to reduce public health impacts long-term.

Mitigations to air quality challenges – a local perspective

- Sarah Worthington, Deschutes County Public Health, discussed the community response plan approved in 2019, which must be in place for an exemption. She shared the media campaign and [resources](#) developed to educate the community about smoke and fire readiness, and the evacuation materials made available to the public. Valeree Lane from Klamath County Public Health described how you need to deliver simple messaging repeatedly for the public to absorb that message. She emphasized meeting people where they are and acknowledging the needs and conditions within a community.

ATTACHMENT I AND II

Challenges to achieving current and future PM 2.5 standards and prescribed fire goals.

- Michael Orman from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality provided a high-level overview of the Clean Air Act, National Ambient Air Quality Standards, and the exceptional events rule process, removing wildfire data from regulatory consideration under specific circumstances. The 2020 wildfire season showed significant levels of smoke that impacted the measurement tools utilized. Orman indicated the exceptional events rule has been used for wildfires in Oregon, but the process has not been done for prescribed fire smoke.

ATTACHMENT III

Research collaboration and proposals – balancing air quality and prescribed fire goals

- Cass Moseley, Ph.D. from the University of Oregon described the Center for Wildfire Smoke Research and Practice funded through congressionally directed spending. The focus is on community and household planning and preparation, smoke communication, emergency response, planning, and communication effectiveness. Moseley outlined research areas, including emissions during prescribed burns, barriers beyond smoke, and the efficacy of community smoke response plans, in-home air filtration and public clean air spaces. Several criteria were described for the pilot selection, such as prescribed burn readiness and capacity, affected communities with smoke mitigation measures implemented, and support from the forest supervisor, FMO, community, and local officials.

Dialogue:

- The group discussed the need for baseline understanding of how smoke has impacted communities in order to test the efficacy of these populations. An EPA study looking at the correlation of smoke and the increased use of emergency room visits was referenced.
- There is a need to assess the impact of these interventions and whether they are properly addressing needs of underserved populations. There is also the opportunity to look at different communities, like those not experiencing wildfire but still experiencing the impacts of smoke.
- Members discussed the methodology of removing wildfire smoke from maps through the data collected by departments of environmental quality.
- There is a need to look further into these issues at scale as there is a forthcoming publication on indoor air quality potentially being worse.
- Balancing needs of the community and mitigation against smoke impacts, such as using wood stoves to heat homes which removes wood from forest floors.
- There is great importance in resourcing the communication work, utilizing concise and clear language, and delivered by local messengers. A hurdle is getting communities to care even when there is not smoke in the air.
- A conceptual pilot project was discussed to study a much larger scale use of prescribed fire in this landscape to fully understand implications and mitigation measures. This community is willing to serve in that pilot project role and multiple players in Oregon are interested in helping to facilitate.

Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of the trade-off between public health and ecologically supported management methods to reduce impacts in the future.
- Further identification of joint messaging opportunities across WFLC members and partners to minimize the impact of smoke on communities and individuals.
- Building investment opportunities that address the ecological use of fire, public health, safety and community economic impacts at the local level to support communities that are prepared to receive wildland fire smoke throughout the year.

Potential Next Steps:

- WFLC members to reflect on the pilot proposal and look at ways they may want to individually or collectively pursue opportunities. There was general agreement that WFLC should pursue helping to frame out the pilot and determine how it may proceed.
- JFSP- smoke science plan- funded the implementation of the social science aspect. Priority identified- smoke impacts and mental wellness on FF- Potential avenue to for some funding or further development.
- Several expressed willingness to be part of a pilot project.

Landscape Resiliency and Post Fire Restoration

Objective: To provide localized insight into WFLC's Large-Landscape, Cross-Boundary and Post Fire impacts strategic priorities. To understand creative approaches to overcoming landscape scale resiliency challenges across boundaries with multiple partners. To understand the differences in approach and ability to leverage unique partnerships for an all-lands approach in Oregon. To consider gaps and challenges of access to and implementation of current programs at all levels.

Private Forestland and Wood Products in Fire-Prone Landscapes

- Trent Seager, PhD from Sustainable Northwest opened the conversation by describing barriers for large private landowners in applying for federal funding which led to looking into how to assist private landowners. Galen Smith, Collins Co. discussed the industry impacts after the Cougar Fire. There is a need for large acres to be burned on private lands that private landowners may not be able to do on their own. Policy fixes could help achieve those acres not just exclusively on a shared boundary.

Tribal stewardship of lands – ecological, spiritual and cultural values in resiliency

- Steve Rondeau from the Klamath Tribe described the historical role of fire on the landscape. He noted the difficulties of navigating various funding sources available and the differing requirements and eligibilities and reapplying could all be effort better spent getting work done on the ground.

All-lands approach in Oregon: Investing in creative partnerships to achieve landscape resiliency goals

- Judd Lehman, Fremont-Winema National Forest described the previous conditions for accomplishing work. Now a movement to match the intent with prescription with what is actually happening on the land and facing the challenge of getting together with partners to help them understand the flexibility, as well as getting them the data and monitoring needed for an adaptive approach.
- The Treating Tribes and Counties as Good Neighbors Act and Farm Bill efforts may eventually allow Tribes this opportunity to retain receipts from GNA agreements to allow more work to get done like we are currently seeing success in states

SLIDES ATTACHMENT IV

Outcomes:

- Shared understanding of the various roles, benefits, and approaches to reach landscape level resiliency.
- Identification of gaps that WFLC principals can identify and works towards overcoming.

Potential Next Steps:

- USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife should be highlighted as an opportunity for private landowners that may not be otherwise available through other federal programs. Members should look for ways to expand and/or use as a best practice.
- Understand potential future opportunities for tribes if authority existed to put timber receipts into an endowment or through the ability to retain timber receipts for GNA agreement work.

Action Items:

- Continue to coordinate with the IWG on post fire actions to overcome barriers.
- Consider ways to roll up best practices for awareness and use in other landscapes.

Community Risk Reduction

Objective: Develop an understanding and engagement opportunities within WFLC member agencies and organizations to better address the challenges and needs of communities at the local level to reduce their risk.

- Mariana Ruiz-Temple, Oregon State Fire Marshal, facilitated a panelist-led conversation with Phil Chang, Deschutes County Commissioner, Chris Chambers, Ashland Fire, and Ron Graham, Oregon Department of Forestry.

“Fire fatigue’ perspectives from local government

- Phil Chang described the Project Wildfire Committee’s work in providing assistance to thousands of landowners, including managing seven unique CWPPs within Deschutes County, facilitating updates on five-year cycles, providing opportunities for landowners to drop off yard debris at landfills, and assisting in the implementation of defensible space around properties. Due to multiple fires in the 90s, the social license was built to accomplish this work. Over time, the urgency is not the same and communities grow fatigued and frustrated by trail closures, resistance to home hardening and defensible space requirements, etc. The challenge is to maintain focus without the crisis of fire.

Advancing community protections

- Chris Chambers detailed the Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project which combined multiple funding sources. A text alert system was utilized to inform communities when burns would occur and it was an extremely successful campaign.

Evolving FEMA fire programs to support rural America

- Ron Graham detailed the FEMA Fire Management Assistance Grant program and Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, as well as the Community Wildfire Defense Grant.

Outcomes:

- Increase understanding of the challenges faced by local government to work with their citizens to address risk reduction.
- Identify linkages to existing programs and more efficiently deliver a suite of opportunities for communities and citizens to efficiently access.
- Identify strategies across federal, state, Tribal and local organizations to better address the needs of communities.

Potential Next Steps:

- Explore modifications to the FEMA HMGP program to better fit it to wildfire disasters.
- Consider what role WFLC members may have in helping to create more efficient evacuations in coordination with local governments.

Leadership Direction on Cohesive Strategy Refresh Implementation Challenges

Objective: To explore the Implementation Challenges as discussed in the recently approved Cohesive Strategy Addendum Update and to set WFLC priorities.

- Annie Schmidt and Mike Zupko facilitated a conversation to discuss and prioritize the challenges outlined in the addendum to begin the development of WFLC engagement and strategy on the selected strategies. WFLC members were tasked to identify the greatest challenge with short-term opportunity and the most impactful/necessary challenge to overcome.

Implementation Challenges:

Education, Communications & Marketing on Implementation

- Zupko & Lighthall described the marketing and communications challenges across the nation, particularly with only one staff member in each region. Some potential actions for this challenge include branding, logos, marketing and communications, developing a long-term strategy and additional materials for the Cohesive Strategy Addendum, and engaging a professional who understands the social science/human dimensions

Proactive Use of Fire

- Harrell outlined potential actions for the implementation challenges around the proactive use of fire, including sharing success stories that could translate to other places, elevating the public health component, co-investment strategy for smoke, supporting and highlighting opportunities such as OWF for burning on private lands, classifying cultural burning as a tribal program, and to develop agreed upon WFLC messaging that can be amplified by the individuals (e.g. fire year messaging).

Science, Data and Technology

- Steblein detailed potential WFLC actions such as establishing a forum for fire/science/management coordination/collaboration through a workgroup and/or position

paper and defining a long-term outlook on the desired future condition with metrics to measure progress towards that outcome.

Challenges Utilizing Biomass – fuels treatments

- Geissler outlined the challenge, which was called out as a major barrier to the Cohesive Strategy, and described some potential actions like a toolbox of resources, external and internal partnerships (e.g. industry), identifying common funding, policy and issues, assist in a baseline understanding of what agencies can do to mitigate risks, and put the information into a context that will actually cross all agencies.

Wildland Fire Management System – W-WFLC

- Lighthall and Geissler described that the system as a whole (not just response) is not keeping pace with rapidly changing environment and the interconnection between the goals of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Opportunity for WFLC as a group of leaders in this space to engage an outside entity to develop a deep dive study of the whole of the wildland fire and build on work of IWG and Commission to look at what to do to address these challenges and to look down the road of what can we do to plan and prepare for that long-term, likely through an outside perspective.

After discussion, agreement was reached for WFLC to work on the following priorities for the next 6-12 months:

- Proactive use of fire
 - Consider vegetation management addition or and other methodology*
- Education, Communications & Marketing on Implementation
 - Consider partnership*
- Science, Data and Technology

*can be added to the communications that go out but not the actual document

Communications (consistency in messaging and speaking with one voice) was identified as a key piece of each of the challenges and will be an integral component as the proposed next steps are built out.

Put a pause on what WFLC is actively pursuing on the Wildland Fire Management System and Biomass Utilization challenges for now until the Commission report release in mid-September, but all of the challenges are still going to be worked on in the future. There is an opportunity to build out from the work of the Commission through their findings and recommendations that fit well within the implementation challenges as well as the critical emphasis areas.

Outcomes:

- Collective understanding and expansion of the implementation challenges
- Prioritization of WFLC/Region approach to show leadership in addressing the challenges.

- Early formation of strategy development WFLC can collectively and individually take to overcome the challenge(s).

Action Items:

- Next steps for the three priorities is to work on a concept paper with members and staff on what this could look like going forward and what resources will be necessary to accomplish the work.
- The Cohesive Strategy Addendum is planned for release the following week to Congress, regions, and partners prior to a formal rollout at the end of the April, early May, with a broader integration strategy that will be developed for each WFLC member as well as partners, to further align programs and organizational offerings with the Cohesive Strategy, including what has been identified in the addendum.

Intersection with Wildland Fire Mitigation and Management Commission and Interagency Wildfire Resilience Working Group

Annie Schmidt and Tyson Bertone-Riggs, Wildfire Commission and Jenna Knobloch, IWG Commission provided an overview of the work being done by the IWG and the Wildland Fire Commission. The aviation report has been released and the final report is due in September. 180 days post the release of the report the Commission will cease to exist per the Infrastructure Law. This work will need to be transmitted in a meaningful way to effectuate the changes desired. While congressionally action focused, the report can also include administrative direction suggestions. The IWG is focusing on smoke impacts and post-fire, particularly around the navigator concept for communities during the time sensitive post-fire period.

Misc. Items

- WFLC Cohesive Strategy Addendum
 - Zupko reported the soft rollout of the Cohesive Strategy Addendum would occur this month with the formal release at the end of April.
- Upcoming WFLC meetings
 - WFLC will meet in Washington, DC the week of June 6th – potentially at the Hall of States
 - WFLC is also slated to hold a field meeting early/mid-September in Yosemite looking at the success story of the Washburn fire- pending hotel availability
- Closeout
 - Zupko expressed his appreciation for engagement on the range of issues WFLC addresses.
 - Joan Mooney and Meryl Harrell closed by acknowledging the need for perseverance to continue the work needed to meet the challenge, and to take a holistic approach. With thank yous to the members, Zupko, Lighthall, and all the local Oregon staff that supported the meeting.