

Deschutes County Forestland Classification

November 21, 2014 – 12 PM
Minutes

Committee Members Present:

Ed Keith, Deschutes County Forester
Kristin Dodd, ODF, Assistant District Forester
Jeremy Ast, Sisters-Camp Sherman Fire
Bill Swarts, Timber Representative
Matt Cyrus, Grazing Representative
Nicole Strong, Deschutes County OSU-Extension Agent

Committee Members Absent:

None

Guests:

George Ponte, ODF, District Forester
Scot Langton, Deschutes County Assessor
Boone Zimmerlee, ODF
Gordon Foster, ODF
Ben Duda, ODF
4 members of the public

Meeting called to order at 12:07 pm by Ed Keith

Review & approve Minutes from 11/5/14 meeting

Bill Swarts made a motion to approve the minutes and Jeremy Ast seconded the motion. The committee approved the minutes unanimously.

Public Comment Period

No public comments

Old Business

No old business was added by the committee members.

New Business

County Assessors Department Discussion

Scot Langton wanted to share with the committee how the forest patrol assessment is processed by the Deschutes County Assessor's office. The property tax system is used as the vehicle for any special assessments, which is the category the forest patrol assessment falls under. Assessing the taxes for each property is really two different processes under the same umbrella. Where school and county taxes are based on the assessed value for the property, the forestland protection assessment is a fixed value, essentially based on acres.

Scot encouraged the committee to use the Assessor's office as a resource during and after this process. Keeping the lines of communication open and transparent during the Forestland

Classification Process will only help both parties at the end of the process. Scott added that since this process has not been completed in many years there would be many small changes by the Assessor's Office to fix any inconsistencies this committee may find. Both ODF and the Rural Fire Protection Districts (RFPD's) will see the largest impacts. There are different accounts for each property for different fire protection. The accounts that have both RFPD & ODF protection have to parse out during the assessment process by the assessor's office. Scot mentioned that he would be happy to model what the process is in the assessor's office for special assessments like the ODF assessment for the committee.

Kristin Dodd noted that the Classification process could take up to 2 years but this will depend on the committee members and fire seasons. The committee will keep Scot up to date with an accurate schedule as often as the can to maintain a transparent process for all parties involved.

Formal Establishment of Public Comment Process

Kristin Dodd asked the committee what the public comment period & process should look like?

Ed Keith mentioned that the by-laws define a time frame and opportunity for public comment period at each meeting. Currently, the public comment period takes place at the beginning of each meeting. Is this a time frame the group is comfortable with?

Jeremy Ast suggested having a public comment period at the beginning and end of the meeting would provide ample time for public input or to add a good of the order agenda item that the committee can use for public comments, if need be.

Nicole Strong added to Jeremy's point, mentioning that this would give the public opportunity to ask any questions that might arise from the committee discussion. Nicole also suggested that the group give each public member 5-minutes for their input.

George Ponte mentioned that a sign-in sheet for any comments could be useful for the committee meetings in the future.

The committee determined that a public comment period would take place at the beginning of the meetings for the time being. If the comment period begins to take up too much time, they will re-visit the topic at a later meeting to discuss extending or adding comment periods.

Classifying Federal Lands

Even though federal lands is not a topic paper, the group will need to determine if they are planning on classifying federal lands that lie within the ODF boundary. **George Ponte** noted that currently federal lands are exempt from a forest patrol assessment and there is not requirement that the committee classifies federally owned lands. ODF does mutual aide but does not provide exclusive fire protection to the federal lands. Especially in the Sisters area the landscape has a patchwork ownership that could prove difficult to only classify private lands. Due to potential land exchanges, classifying federal lands in the event they become privately owned in the future makes the assessment and classification easier in the future.

Matt Cyrus suggested that if the federal agencies have determined what the production capabilities on their lands are it could help the committee classify the federal lands.

Boone Zimmerlee noted that he would contact the federal agencies to see if they have layers he can add to the GIS data for the group.

Ed Keith added that he believes having the lands classified will help in future planning and classification processes.

The committee agreed that any federal lands within the ODF protection boundary would be classified during the classification process.

Review Issue Papers

First issue paper: Who will accomplish the initial mapping for the committee? The options are choosing someone from the committee to produce maps or enlist Boone Zimmerlee, ODF, to aide in GIS work for the committee? **Kristin Dodd** suggested that if committee members to work on the GIS for this classification process, it could add substantial time to this process. ODF already has the required layers for the classification process. The committee will give Boone the guidelines for the GIS data during the process. The committee decided to enlist Boone Zimmerlee, ODF, to help with the GIS data during the process.

Second issue paper: What are the mapping standards the committee would like to set for the classification process? What is the smallest polygon size the map work should focus on? Some options could be 1, 5, or 10 acre polygons as the minimum that would blend into the surrounding designation. The smaller the polygons, the longer the mapping process could take. The group agreed that 5-acre parcels would give the best accuracy without causing too much detail work for the mapping. If the 5-acre parcel proves to be too broad in some places the committee will re-visit the mapping standards.

Third issue paper: How detailed will the polygon edges be on the map? **Boone Zimmerlee** shared an example map with the committee to show the difference in borderlines. Smoother polygon edges would still follow the border of the classification types, whereas very detailed polygon edges is doable but very time consuming with little accuracy benefit. The group agreed to use smoother polygon edges to show different classification areas.

Fourth issue paper: Will the committee classify right of ways by the productivity of the lands immediately adjacent to the right of way or classify the land within the right of way based on the vegetation present at the time of classification process? Specifically will the committee address natural gas lines, power lines, or utility lines; major roadways or highways are not typically assessed. **Ed Keith** mentioned in other areas ODOT has been assessed for their right of way. **George Ponte** explained that in some areas in Oregon, the right of way extends quite a way from the actual roadside, which is not the case in Deschutes County. **Scot Langton** reminded the committee that the utility companies won't be assessed it will be the landowners of the right of ways. The group determined that they would classify right of ways according to the classification of the adjacent lands, either class 2 or 3. **Boone Zimmerlee** will follow-up with the utility companies for a layer of the right of ways.

Fifth issue paper: This issue paper lists three options for the committee to discuss: continue with current approach of having paying & non-paying lands within a Forest Protection Boundary, Classify and assess all lands within ODF's Forest Protection District Boundary, or Recommend realignment of the ODF Forest Protection District Boundary to exclude non-paying lands. The committee agreed that the first option in this issue paper is not an option for them because residents within the ODF protection boundary should be assessed for fire protection by state statute. The committee agreed to address all the lands within the district boundary and classify those lands that meet the definition of forestland. The committee will also address if the district protection boundary is appropriate in its current location and make any recommendations to the District to make changes to the boundary where the committee finds a change is necessary. In identifying potential boundary locations, consideration should be given to locations that are identifiable and defensible on the ground such as roadways or other natural features (river) rather than arbitrary lines such as township or section lines.

Sixth issue paper: Does the committee recommend continued classification of lands within Rural Fire Protection District boundaries or not? There is a special consideration in the

Cloverdale Fire District; the classification process could have significant impacts in their fire district. **Ed Keith** noted that he couldn't see the committee deciding to not assess completely in all fire districts. That would mean a considerable amount of land that would no longer be protected from wildland fires by ODF. **Kristin Dodd** added that much of the land the committee is considering is already dual assessed. **Ed Keith** mentioned that there is potential for significant impacts for Cloverdale Rural Fire Protection District and Deschutes County Rural Fire Protection District #2 (DCFPD#2). **Kristin Dodd** explained to the committee if there are lands that are currently dual assessed and the determination is made that ODF protection is no longer needed, the revenues for that Fire District will increase. If there are lands that are only protected by an RFPD currently and the committee classifies them for ODF protection, the local RFPD budget will decrease.

Matt Cyrus asked what is east of the ODF boundary and who fights the wildland fires in that area?

Ed Keith explained that there is quite a bit of that land is unprotected in the east side of Deschutes County, there has been the formation of a fire district in Alfalfa but most cases landowners defend their own or neighbor's property. BLM, Bend Fire & Deschutes RFPD #2 also provides some protection in this area as well.

Matt Cyrus offered the idea of classifying and moving the boundary to the Deschutes County line. It would alleviate the Commissioner's concerns about unprotected lands.

George Ponte clarified that even if the committee made that recommendation, ODF most likely would not move the district boundary to the eastern boundary of Deschutes County. There are many large landowners that would be significantly impacted financially by moving the boundary.

Ed Keith explained that even if the boundary were to move to protect all of Deschutes County, there still would unfortunately be gaps in protection, since there are unprotected lands in Crook County as well.

George Ponte did ask if the committee decided to classify the entire County, please be clear to residents that it will only be lands within the ODF District Boundary that will be assessed.

Ultimately, the committee determined that they will continue to classify within RFPD boundaries and will carefully examine the boundary lines to make sure they are appropriate. The committee will not classify the entire county for the time being.

Seventh issue paper: Will the committee classify juniper dominant stands as Class 2 forestland or classify Juniper dominant stands as Class 3 grazing lands. If the committee decides to classify juniper as Class 2, it would be subject to the higher timber assessment. At this time, no other counties have classified juniper as Class 2. Class 3 lands do not yield product for the landowner. Even though juniper stand fires can be complex, the low site productivity and lack of property management income make it difficult to go with a Class 2 designation. The group determined that any juniper dominant stands would be classified as Class 3.

Eighth issue paper: Will all agricultural lands that are annually cropped be exempt or only those lands that are irrigated be exempt. **Matt Cyrus** noted that if the committee agrees with alternative 2 that would pertain to all the agricultural lands in Deschutes County. There are not dry land crops in Deschutes County that would fall under the first option. Typically CRP lands are not found in Deschutes County. These are agricultural lands that were rented to the federal government that have been allowed to grow as non-agricultural vegetation. Boone will have a layer for any CRP lands in Deschutes County hopefully by next meeting so the committee can see these lands.

Nicole Strong asked the group if lands that are part of NRCS projects are exempt from classification? **Kristin Dodd** explained that those lands would be classified.

The committee agreed that any agricultural lands that are irrigated to prevent fire spread will be exempt from assessment.

Calendar Planning – Meeting Schedule

Currently, the next meeting is scheduled for December 17th beginning at noon and another on January 7th beginning at 11am. **Kristin Dodd** suggested that the committee should determine how they would be moving through the lands in Deschutes County. Should they start in the northwest corner of the County and move south or the opposite? The committee determined they would begin in the northwest to accomplish the most difficult area first. The committee will look at the ODF district boundary when they are classifying lands. **Boone Zimmerlee** will be offering GIS support to the committee and he agreed a 3-week window between meetings should be enough time to label preliminary classifications in the GIS system. Boone will capture input from the committee and address changes at the beginning of each subsequent meeting before the group moves forward to new areas on the map.

Adjourned at 1:58 pm

Next meeting: December 17th, 12-2 pm in the DeArmond Room at the Deschutes County Administration Building; located at 1300 Wall St, Bend, OR 97701.