

ODF Fire Program Review Committee

Wildfire Policy Working Group

Options to mitigate increasingly complex wildfire conditions in Oregon

Several significant factors contribute to complex wildfire conditions in Oregon. These factors exacerbate changing climatic conditions and year-to-year drought that already present significant challenges during annual fire seasons. A third objective of ODFs Fire Program Review committee is to develop policy recommendations to mitigate these conditions. Based on discussion and ideas generated at the initial Steering Committee meeting, key areas for recommendation have been grouped into the following:

- 1) Hazardous Fuel Conditions and Landscape Resilience
- 2) Wildland Urban Interface, and
- 3) Prevention and Regulated Use

I. Hazardous Fuel Conditions and Landscape Resilience

DRAFT Opportunity Statement

Sixty percent of Oregon's forests are managed by the US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. A significant management legacy, including checkerboard ownership, fire suppression policies, and timber harvesting, impact current options for management. Recent analysis shows 42% of forests – including both public and private lands – in eastern and southwest Oregon exhibit different forest structures than historical records and that intentional management actions are necessary to restore landscape patterns (Haugo et al 2015). Private land managers have fewer market opportunities for small diameter trees, particularly in eastern Oregon, to pay for necessary management actions.

Current Efforts and Tools

Forest Management

Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 2016-01: In December 2015, the WGA adopted a policy resolution on "National Forest and Rangeland Management." The resolution states that Western Governors believe in sustainable forest management that creates an equitable mix of uses to meet many ecological, social, and economic needs. Among other ideas, the WGA resolution calls for an end to fire borrowing and fund fire suppression off-budget, encourages federal agencies to fully implement the tools provided in the 2014 Farm Bill, and to develop and help fund new technologies and wood based markets for some non-traditional products. Montana Governor Bullock is expected to champion federal forest management work as his focus initiative as the presumptive next Chair of the WGA. <http://westgov.org/policies/306-land-management/1079-national-forest-and-rangeland-management>

Board of Forestry, Federal Forest Subcommittee: In January 2013, Board Chair Imeson asked Nils Christoffersen to Chair a subcommittee to focus on issues of federal forest policy and to help the Board connect with the Governor's Office, the Congressional Delegation, and the Oregon Legislature on this critical topic. This subcommittee is current and is currently developing its 2016 work plan.

Oregon's Federal Forest Working Group (FFWG): The FFWG is an outgrowth of the 2009 Federal Forest Advisory Committee commissioned by the Board of Forestry. Since 2011, the FFWG has been convened by the Governor's Natural Resource Office and includes diverse stakeholders (including state and federal agencies) with the purpose of providing a statewide, neutral forum regarding the need for increased restoration of Oregon's federal forests. Among other accomplishments, a subcommittee of the FFWG initially scoped out the funding request for the FFH program (below).

ODF Federal Forest Health Program (FFH): The state legislature initiated the FFH program with an investment of \$2.8 million in the 2013-2015 biennium with program implementation focused on collaborative efforts in the dry forests of NE and SW Oregon. The state's investment leveraged an additional \$10 million of federal funds to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration efforts that produce jobs, forest products, and ecological resilience benefits in the Blue Mountains. Together, these investments resulted in 137K acres of US Forest Service decisions supported by local forest collaboratives, which in turn produced a 16% increase in jobs across eastern Oregon and increased federal timber sold by 13%. The Legislature increased the state's investment in the FFH to \$5 million for the 2015-2017 biennium, also expanding the scope of the program to statewide.

USFS Accelerated Restoration Strategy: The USFS-PNW Region has acknowledged the need to significantly accelerate restoration of fire prone forests in eastern Oregon. To address this, they staffed a dedicated environmental planning team (ie. NEPA team), charged with exploring new and innovative ways of planning very large projects on a compressed timeline. The team's initial project, on the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest, is 100K acres; planning was completed in 18 months, or half the usual time. The team's second project spans three National Forests, proposes treatment of over 500K acres to create a system of strategically located stand treatments to provide a safe place from which to manage fires and better protect highly valued assets (infrastructure, homes, and private forestland).

Farm Bill Tools: Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) and Insect-Disease Designations (IDD): The 2014 Farm Bill included several provisions to expand the toolbox of federal land managers. Most notably, Congress authorized the GNA which allows state agencies to function as an agent of the federal government to implement management actions. Oregon expects to sign a GNA Master Agreement with the Forest Service by the end of February 2016. The Farm Bill also allowed Governor's to request designation of areas infected or at-risk of insects and disease. Upon Oregon's request, the Secretary of Agriculture designated 5.7 million acres. ODF is working with the Forest Service and local collaborative groups to employ new streamlined analysis tools for projects within these areas.

Use of Planned Fire

Smoke Management: The Smoke Management Plan has been used to regulate prescribed burning since 1972. The objective of the Plan is to provide maximum opportunity for essential forestland burning while minimizing smoke emissions and avoiding smoke being carried into and accumulating into Smoke Sensitive Receptor Areas and other areas sensitive to smoke. While Oregon Department of Forestry administers the program, it works jointly with Department of Environmental Quality to guide and update its regulations. ODF employs meteorologists that with landowners and land managers to maximize burning for hazard reduction, forest health, and ability to replant new trees while limiting the impact of smoke to communities. Recognizing the need to increase prescribed burning, the Western Forestry Leadership Coalition has prioritized smoke management issue for work over the next year.

Market Development

SB 752 (2015): The State Legislature passed SB 752 in the 2015 Session to effectively declare biomass carbon-neutral. Technically, the bill exempts carbon dioxide emissions from combustion or decomposition of biomass from regulation under certain air pollution laws.

<https://olis.leg.state.or.us/liz/2015R1/Measures/Overview/SB752>

ODF Biomass Program: ODF's biomass program aims to build markets for small diameter timber in order to reduce fire risk and support local economies. The current effort focuses on both energy (thermal, liquid fuels) and non-energy markets (biochar, cross-laminated timber). ODF leverages partnerships with state and federal agencies to coordinate and provide targeted technical assistance to support biomass enterprise development. The agency supports three collaborative market development efforts: Northeast Oregon Cohesive Wildfire Strategy, the Oregon Statewide Wood Energy Team, and the Western Juniper Alliance.

Policy Starter List

- Fund FFH and place into ODF base budget and include increased spending limitation for Good Neighbor Authority projects.
 - Using state and federal funds, apply fire-ice model with Dept of Corrections and private contractors
- Maintain Board of Forestry's Federal Forest Subcommittee to raise voice on need for increased pace and scale; and encourage Congress to fix fire borrowing
- Encourage BLM to use local collaboratives to build social license
- Ask SMAC to develop solutions to maximize burn days (ie. funding field-based Fuels Coordinator)
- Develop data re: shared boundary between federal and private lands
- ??Landowner liability re: prescribed fire??
- ??Unprotected lands??
- ??Data needs??

II. Wildland Urban Interface Lands

DRAFT Opportunity Statement

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is a zone where human development and communities are interspersed with forests and wildland fuels. Suppression costs increase significantly in the WUI and the health and business interruption impacts of smoke are more pronounced. Approximately 615,000 acres in Oregon shifted from wildland to low-density residential density or urban over the past 35 years and the average number of structures per square mile of nonfederal wildland forest more than doubled from 1974-2009. Wildfire in the WUI amplifies safety concerns for firefighters, requires additional expertise to defend structures, and can have significant impact on Oregon families and entire communities. During the 2015 fire season, 135 structures were lost to wildland fires, 60 of which were homes. To date, federal funds have been exclusively used to create defensible space around residences.

Current Efforts and Tools

Northeast Oregon Cohesive Strategy Pilot: The Cohesive Strategy vision is “To safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire”; and has three main goals: 1) Restore and Maintain Landscapes, 2) Create Fire-adapted Communities, and 3) Wildfire Response. The Northern Blue Mountain pilot project area includes nearly 3.5 million acres of US Forest Service lands covering two national forests, 2 million acres of private land protected by ODF and Washington Department of Natural Resource, and 2 million acres managed or protected by a variety of entities including the BLM, BIA, and RFPDs.

Senate Bill 360: The Oregon Forestland Urban Interface Protection Act of 1997 (SB 360) requires that Forest Urban Interface residents implement fuel treatments in accordance with their risk levels. Forest landowners are required to self-certify that they have met these standards, or they could be liable for up to \$100,000 in suppression costs for fires that start on their property. To date, SB 360 is being implemented in 17 counties.

Forest, Farms, and People Report: To examine possible consequences of future population growth, ODF has developed a simple GIS-based deterministic model to run alternative growth scenarios in five year intervals for each county out to 2065. The results of that analysis are published in the Forest, Farms and People Report. The most recent version was published in March 2014.

USFS State & Private Funds and Firewise Program: ODF is awarded an average of \$1.5- \$2 million each year in competitive National Fire Plan (NFP) grants available through the USFS State & Private Forestry Program to support fuels reduction and prevention education activities in the WUI. These funds enable ODF accomplish an estimated 3-4 thousand acres of fuels treatments annually. No State Funds are used for fuels reduction. Oregon also hosts a robust Firewise Communities USA program (93 communities), which recognizes homeowners that have taken steps to reduce fire hazards at the community-scale. NFP and Secure Rural Schools and Self Determination Act dollars (in counties with large tracts of public land) support Firewise activities.

Policy Starter List

- Structural fire response (mentioned by State Fire Marshall)
- Conflagration Act – *funding?*
- Land use, zoning, building codes
- Funding for Firewise (State and/or Federal)
- *??Data needs??*

III. Prevention and Regulated Use

DRAFT Opportunity Statement

Smokey Bear still remains an iconic ally for wildfire prevention and both state and federal outreach efforts have been effective. In Oregon, the trend of human-caused fires starts has remained flat over the past 50 years, although there have been significant annual variations. Prescribed fire is a critical tool for forest managers and is a significant component of an increased pace and scale of restoration on federal forests. Given human health concerns with smoke, forest managers must maximize potential burn days when conditions are favorable. A recent analysis by ODF showed that more prescribed burning could have occurred in the past few seasons. In favorable stand and weather conditions, forest managers can

also utilize natural ignitions to accomplish resource objectives. Post-fire assessment from the 2015 Canyon Creek Complex revealed that less than 25% of basal area was consumed on 44% of the wildfire's acres.

Current Efforts and Tools

Prevention

Keep Oregon Green: Founded in 1941, Keep Oregon Green has been a critical part of Oregon's complete and coordinate system to protect Oregon forests from wildfire. KOGs is a non-profit corporation with a mission to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires in Oregon through awareness and education. KOG is contracted by ODF to conduct fire prevention activities through cooperative partnerships with the private sector and other public fire prevention agencies. KOG is funded by ½ cent per acre of assessments through ODF Protection Districts and matched with general fund dollars; and private donations from members, and other grant funds, including Oregon's forest landowners.

Industrial Fire Precaution Levels & Regulated Use: Fire Protection Districts (FPDSs) in Oregon monitor conditions throughout fire season. In western Oregon, FPDs implement a 4-level Industrial Fire Precaution system to reduce the risk of wildfire starts during tough conditions. For the general public, regulated-use closures usually go into effect as soon as wildfire season starts and typically increase as wildfire danger increases. Regulated Use does not affect what people can do, not where they can go. Areas under Regulated Use will often be marked with signs with instructions and prevention reminders.

Policy Starter List

- ??Increase fee for criminal arson violations – ODF currently doesn't get money??
- ??Data needs??

RECOMMENDED READING

[Abrams et al 2015](#). *Re-envisioning community-wildfire relations in the U.S. West as adaptive governance*. Ecology and Society.

[Haugo et al 2015](#). *A new approach to evaluate forest structure restoration needs across Oregon and Washington, USA*. Forest Ecology and Management.