

Agenda Item No.:	C
Title and # of Issue:	Administrative Work Plan 0, IBI 1 Administrative Processes <u>Ash Butte Rangeland Protection Association Formation</u>
Date of Presentation:	March 4, 2009
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SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to obtain Board approval to proceed with formation of an Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association, in portions of eastern Jefferson County.

CONTEXT

Rangeland fire protection associations are non-profit, locally governed groups of landowners which have been organized to provide fire protection to rangeland in portions of eastern Oregon. These organizations are formed under the authority of the Board and with assistance from the Department.

Currently, there are 11 Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPA) that have previously been approved by the Board of Forestry. These RFPA's protect a total of approximately 2,849,361 acres of private land and 437,877 acres of state owned lands. Rangeland Fire Protection Association boundaries cover, including federally owned land, a total of approximately 9,517,843 acres.

Letters from landowners in eastern Jefferson County, dated May 24, 2008, requested the formation of a rangeland fire protection association. On September 3, 2008, the Board authorized a public hearing on the formation request, pursuant to ORS 477.320. A hearing was held in Ashwood on December 15, 2008.

At the hearing, strong support for the formation of an association was evident in the immediate area. Opposition from landowners in the Antelope and southern Wasco County area was also expressed, because of a conservative approach to government assistance. They also stated, they are already well equipped with equipment used for fire suppression, and will be willing to help landowners in the Ash Butte area fight fires if needed, however they are not currently interested in any formal type of wild land fire protection. The landowners in the Ash Butte area stated they will be willing to help in the Antelope and southern Wasco County areas if requested. The proposed boundary was changed to meet these landowners' wishes.

Testimony presented during the hearing indicated a need for organized fire protection and revealed that landowners in the area have already taken initial organizational steps, including: an interim board of directors has been established and a person has been acting as secretary, a set of by-laws is being established, corporate legal status has been applied for and received, a bank account has been established, some funds have been raised, and commitments of time and equipment have been received. Approximately 75 landowners will be served by the proposed RFPA.

Testimony presented at the hearing also revealed that landowners and residents of the area are increasingly worried about the incidence of rangeland fire. The past several years have produced numerous, very large, rangeland fires. This is due in part, to the rapidly increasing population of the urbanized portions of central Oregon that recreates on and near rangelands in the Ashwood area.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends the Board take the following action when it meets on March 4, 2009:

Approve the inclusion of rangeland in portions of eastern Jefferson County into a rangeland fire protection association and direct the Department to assist with the formation of the Ash Butte Rangeland Fire Protection Association, pursuant to ORS 477.320.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will work with local landowners in the area to form the Ash Butte Rangeland Protection Association. This will include; developing mutual aid agreements, provide training as requested, offer FEPP equipment as available and any other assistance as requested and feasible.

ATTACHMENTS

- (1) Map of area of consideration
- (2) December 15, 2008 Hearings Report