

## Forestland Classification Review

### Frequently asked questions

**Q: What is the purpose of forestland classification?**

**A:** The system being reviewed by the Forestland Classification Steering Committee identifies various land uses for the purpose of coordinating wildland and structural fire protection. Several systems of classifying forestland are used by the Oregon Department of Forestry and its partner agencies, but the system that is the subject of this review was established solely for the purpose of fire protection.

**Q: What is the role of the Forestland Classification Steering Committee?**

**A:** The department formed the committee to review the forestland classification system and recommend needed revisions and improvements. The committee's authority derives from Oregon statutes and administrative rules.

**Q: Why is the Department of Forestry seeking changes to the existing forestland classification system?**

**A:** Oregon's forestland classification system consists of statutes, rules and policy that have not been comprehensively reviewed since it was created more than 40 years ago. While it has served well to classify timber and grazing land for purposes of equitable fire protection cost assessment, the system does not fit the growing wildland-urban interface situation in Oregon well or the associated fire protection challenges faced by the wildland and structural protection agencies: thus, the need for a review of classification rationale and process. The protection environment in which wildland and structural fire agencies operate has changed and continues to evolve. In light of these changes, a specific aim of this review is to improve the accuracy of the Fire Patrol Assessment to ensure the appropriate acreages are being assessed at the appropriate rate.

**Q: What is the Fire Patrol Assessment?**

**A:** The Department of Forestry provides fire protection to private forest and rangeland within department Fire Protection District boundaries. This service is funded by a combination of an assessment on lands within the districts and the state General Fund. The landowner contribution is termed "Fire Patrol Assessment." Currently, the General Fund and the Fire Patrol Assessment each contribute approximately 50 percent of the total funding.

**Q: What does forestland classification entail?**

**A:** A map must be produced identifying timberland and grazing land that meet the definitions set forth in Oregon laws and administrative rules. "Timberland" is defined as all forestland primarily suitable for joint use of timber production and the grazing of livestock. "Grazing land" is defined as all forestland that is primarily suitable for grazing or other agricultural uses.

**Q: If the review prompts the inclusion of additional lands under department fire protection, how will this affect the department's budget?**

**A:** If more lands are included, that will spread the costs across more acres and thus reduce the rate all landowners pay (assuming the level of protection remains the same).

**Q: Is there a timeline for the Forestland Classification Steering Committee to complete its work?**

**A:** The goal for full completion of recommendations for Oregon's forestland classification system is Jan. 1, 2008. This completion date will give the Board of Forestry adequate time to consider proposed legislative concepts for the 2009 legislative session.

**Q: Who is on the committee?**

**A:** The 29-member committee includes representatives of a broad cross-section of private and public organizations that share an interest in protecting the forest resource and the expanding wildland-urban interface from fire.

**Q: What are the specific "deliverables" you've asked the committee to produce?**

**A:** The department has given the committee five tasks:

1. Define the wildland-urban interface and develop statewide criteria to assist the forest protection districts and county classification committees in determining where the Oregon Department of Forestry has a role in protecting forestland *in the interface*, and just as importantly, where the department does *not* have a role.
2. Develop statewide criteria for determining where the department has a role in protecting *wildland* adjacent to protected forestland, as a buffer to minimize damage to higher value resources.
3. Ensure consistency statewide in the district and county processes, criteria and rationale for forestland classification and assessment for forestland protection, while at the same time recognizing regional differences in fuels, fire danger, weather, topography and level of protection.
4. Develop recommendations for potential changes in statutes, administrative rules, policies and procedures to achieve Nos. 1 and 3 above.
5. Develop tools and processes for department field staff to administer Oregon's forestland classification system.

**Q: Who oversees the committee?**

**A:** The Forestland Classification Steering Committee co-chairs report to the assistant state forester for fire protection, Paul Bell. New legislation may be needed to implement some of the steering committee's recommendations. To that end, Bell will form a legislative oversight committee that will coordinate with the steering committee.

**Q: Was any work done prior to formation of the steering committee in December 2006?**

**A:** Yes. Committee co-chair Dan Shults and Travis Medema, Central Oregon District Forester, led two separate efforts over the past year to lay groundwork and provide a starting point for the steering committee. Their activities included the following:

- With staff assistance, Shults conducted a review of existing statutes and administrative rules and identified some needed changes.
- With a small Department of Forestry-fire association task group, Medema canvassed the forest protection districts around the state to:
  - assess current processes used by all districts regarding forestland classification, as well as the issues they perceive with the system;
  - query a cross-section of county assessors and rural fire districts within forest protection districts to assess the current administration of forestland classification and identify classification challenges in the wildland-urban interface.
- The co-chairs and staff drew on the results of these efforts in developing the steering committee charter.

## **Additional FAQs**

### **Q: What is a Minimum Assessment?**

**A:** The owner of each lot of record must pay a minimum Fire Patrol Assessment of \$18. This helps defray some of the additional administrative and operational costs of providing wildfire protection to small land parcels on which, based on acreage, the assessment for forest protection would not reach \$18.

### **Q: What is Dual Assessment?**

**A:** This is an assessment from two different entities on the same parcel of land. Example: The Department of Forestry may place an assessment for wildfire protection on the forestlands encompassed by a parcel, while a Rural Fire Protection District may also place an assessment on the value of structures on the parcel for the purpose of structural fire protection.

### **Q: Does the Assessment determine which firefighting agency will respond to a fire?**

**A:** Yes. Once the assessment is finalized, it identifies those lands on which the Department of Forestry has responsibility to put out wildfires for the purpose of minimizing forest resource loss or damage. In the case of a dual assessment on a land parcel by the department and a rural fire district (RFD), the RFD would also respond to protect structures on the property.

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