

Forestland Classification Steering Committee Charter

January 2007

Objective

Review Oregon's forestland classification system and recommend revision and improvement where needed.

Background

Oregon's forestland classification system was developed, more or less, on a district-by-district and county-by-county basis. While some central coordination and direction was provided, differences exist and have evolved over time around the state. Some of the differences make sense and reflect local conditions and protection needs. Other differences appear less ordered. None is "wrong." The system lacks consistency and a review of rationale and process is needed. In addition, the fire protection environment in which the Oregon Department of Forestry and its partners operate has changed and continues to change.

On one end of the spectrum, the rural-forest interface continues to expand, often into what had been protected commercial forestland. This expansion, generally but not universally, has been accompanied by well-equipped rural fire protection districts adequately staffed, qualified and funded to provide for successful initial attack of most wildland fires, particularly when working in concert with the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF).

However, these rural fire protection districts are neither staffed nor funded to effectively manage and suppress extended-attack and project-size fires in the interface. Furthermore, they have no mechanism to access and pay for outside state and federal resources needed to effectively manage and suppress large fires.

In some instances, interface expansion develops to the point that density of structures, streets and sidewalks, along with growth of infrastructure and protection capability, make forestland protection unnecessary. There is no clear definition in the continuum as the environment changes from wildland through interface to suburbia.

In 1997, the Oregon Legislature adopted the Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act. This set of statutes recognizes the unique fire protection challenge in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and the need for a complete and coordinated fire protection system to address the challenge. While the Act clearly recognizes that ODF has a key role, fundamental questions about where and how ODF will participate in protection of the interface, and where that protection is no longer needed, should be asked and answered.

On the other end of the spectrum, fires on unprotected lands have become problematic - threatening and burning onto protected forestland resulting in large, costly fires and, not infrequently, Conflagration Act mobilizations. Consistent with the findings of ODF's Fire Program Review Protection Coverage Work Group, the need for protection of wildland

that poses a threat to adjacent forestland should be reviewed and some of those lands potentially assessed to assure that threats to forestland are mitigated.

Oregon's forestland classification system consists of statutes, rules and policy that have not been comprehensively revisited and reviewed in more than 40 years. In the meantime, as noted above, the operating environment has changed. A comprehensive review is needed. Such a review is the object of this effort.

Deliverables

1. Define the wildland-urban interface and develop reasonable criteria to be applied statewide in assisting districts and county classification committees to determine where the Oregon Department of Forestry has a role in protecting forestland in the WUI, and where it does not have a role.
2. Develop reasonable criteria that can be applied statewide to assist districts and county classification committees in determining where ODF has a role in protecting wildland adjacent to protected forestland as a reasonable protection buffer to minimize damage to higher value resources at a reasonable cost to landowners.
3. Assure that district and county processes, criteria and rationale for forestland classification and assessment for forestland protection are consistent statewide, while recognizing regional differences in fuels, fire danger, weather, topography, and level of protection.
4. Develop recommendations for potential statutory, administrative rule, policy and procedural changes to achieve objectives 1-3 above.
5. Develop tools and processes for field staff to administer Oregon's forestland classification system.

Participation/Steering Committee

- Co-chairs - Dan Shults, Southern Oregon Area Director, and John Buckman, Northeast Oregon District Forester
- Field personnel - three ODF representatives (one per area), and one fire association representative. These include: Mike Totey, Northwest Oregon Area (NWOA); Greg Alexander, Southern Oregon Area (SOA); George Ponte, Eastern Oregon Area (EOA); and Melvin Thornton, Douglas Forest Protective Association
- Salem Protection from Fire Program staff - Rick Gibson and Teresa Vonn
- Three industrial forest landowners (one per area) – Dan Fink, NWOA; Milt Moran, SOA; and Lee Fledderjohan, EOA
- Three non-industrial forest landowners (one per area) – Paul Nys, NWOA; Paul Zollezi, SOA; and Mark Copeland, EOA
- Two grazing landowners (one each from southern and eastern Oregon) – Paul Zollezi, SOA; [vacant] (EOA)
- Rural-forest interface resident (Homeowner Association President) – Alan Nichols
- Emergency Fire Cost Committee (EFCC) – Barte Starker, chair
- Farm Bureau/Oregon Cattlemen's Assoc./OFS
- Oregon Forest Industries Council - Mike Dykzeul
- Oregon Small Woodlands Association – John Rounds

- Oregon State Fire Marshal's Office – Randy Simpson, Deputy State Fire Marshal
- Oregon Fire Chiefs Association representatives – Kevin Kreitman (Westside), Jim Stearns (Eastside)
- Fire District Directors Association –
- Association of Oregon Counties – Gil Riddell
- Association of County Assessors – Scot Langton (Deschutes County), Dan Ross (Jackson County)
- Bureau of Land Management (Westside fire protection contract district) – Mark Johnson (Coos Bay)
- Keep Oregon Green Association – Mary Ellen Holly

Oversight

The Steering Committee co-chairs will report to Paul Bell, Assistant State Forester for Fire Protection.

A Legislative Oversight Committee will be established by Bell. He and the co-chairs will work with the Steering Committee to keep the Legislative Oversight Committee informed of the effort and progress, and aware of any evolving issues for which legislative action may be requested in the 2009 Legislature. The Legislative Oversight Committee will provide feedback to the effort, as needed, during the process and provide critical feedback when recommendations are drafted. Legislative Oversight Committee members will be invited to Steering Committee meetings.

2006 scoping efforts

- The co-chairs lead two separate efforts over the last year to provide grounding and a starting point for the Steering Committee:
 - Dan Shults, with staff assistance, has conducted a review of existing statutes and administrative rules and identified some needed changes.
 - Travis Medema, with a small ODF/Association task group, has canvassed the 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 sampling of county assessors and rural fire districts in forest protection districts to assess current administration of forestland classification and identify forestland classification challenges in the WUI.
- The co-chairs and staff have utilized results from these efforts in developing this Charter.
- The Steering Committee will meet in February 2007 to kick off the work of the Statewide Forestland Classification Review.

Process

- The Steering Committee will provide general guidance and oversight to the project, assure consistency with the review objective, resolve issues of “overlap,” assure deliverables are accomplished within the established timeline, and coordinate development of the final report.

- Four “themes” for the review were identified during scoping. They include:
 1. Investigate WUI definition and classification.
 - What are appropriate wildfire protection roles and responsibilities for ODF, rural fire districts and counties in the WUI?
 - Is a separate classification for WUI needed? If so, define.
 2. What is the appropriate role for ODF on “non-forest” cover lands?
 - ODF role in protecting grazing land and other wildland adjacent to protected forestland.
 3. Develop a consistent process, methodology and guidance for district/county forestland classification and assessment. Appropriate roles and responsibilities? Minimize difference among districts. Dual assessment methodology and exemptions around protected structures varies among districts. Is central archiving of classification information needed?
 4. Investigate the current location of statutory reference to forestland classification in statute. Recommend, as needed, a reorganization of existing classification statutes that better consolidates the legislative direction.
- A subcommittee co-chaired by an ODF member and non-ODF member of the Steering Committee with appropriate expertise in the particular theme identified will be assigned responsibility for reviewing an assigned theme in depth and developing recommendations in a final report. Additional members of the Steering Committee - or others, as determined and recruited by the co-chairs - will staff each subcommittee.
- The first two Steering Committee meetings will provide background on forestland classification, achieve consensus on the issues and themes to be resolved, achieve consensus on process and timeline and assign a subcommittee to work on each theme. Subsequent meetings will focus on reports from the subcommittee chairs, discussion and resolution of policy and overlap issues that come up, review and resolution of any resource needs of the subcommittees and will include a review of the timeline. Final meetings will have the objective of reviewing draft final reports from the subcommittees and development and review of a final report for the overall effort.

Timeline

The goal for full completion of recommendations for Oregon’s forestland classification system is January 1, 2008. This completion date provides for timely consideration of proposed legislative concepts by the Board of Forestry for the 2009 Legislature.

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