

Agenda Item No.:	E
Work Plan:	Fire Protection Work Plan
Topic:	Ongoing Topic; Rangeland Protection Association Formation
Presentation Title:	Approval to Form WC Ranches Rangeland Protection Association
Date of Presentation:	September 9, 2015
Contact Information:	Robert Young Fire Prevention & Policy Mgr. ryoung@odf.state.or.us

SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda item is to obtain Board approval to proceed with bringing a specific area of Wheeler County, into the Oregon Protection System.

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 19 Rangeland Protection Associations (RPA) that have previously been approved by the Board of Forestry. These RPA’s protect a total of over 4 million acres of private land and 545,427 acres of state-owned lands. These lands, including federally owned land, combine to encompass a total of approximately 15,283,910 acres. (See Attachment 1)

In a letter dated in March of 2015, several owners of rangeland located in Wheeler County requested the Board hold a public hearing on the subject of providing protection from fire for rangelands in the vicinity of Central Wheeler County, Oregon. The Board, on June 3, 2015, authorized a public hearing on the formation request, pursuant to ORS 477.320. The hearing was held at the Spray Grange in Spray, Oregon on July 21, 2015. (See Attachment 2)

At the hearing, strong support for the formation of an association was evident in the immediate area. 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: a board of directors has been established and a person has been acting as secretary, a set of by-laws has been established, corporate legal status has been applied for and received, a bank account has been established, some funds have been raised along with yearly dues, and commitments of time and equipment have been received from local ranches.

Testimony presented at the hearing also revealed that landowners and residents of the area are increasingly worried about the incidence of rangeland fire and lengthy response times from other protection agencies adjacent to their lands. The past several years have

produced numerous, very large, rangeland fires. These landowners want a way to protect their private property and actively take part in the protection of their lands. The increased level of protection for this area can be achieved by bringing it into the Oregon protection system and forming a rangeland protection association.

RECOMMENDATION

The Department recommends the Board take the following action when it meets on September 9, 2015:

Approve the inclusion of rangeland in portions of central Wheeler County into a rangeland protection association and direct the Department to assist with the formation of the WC Ranches Rangeland Protection Association, pursuant to ORS 477.320.

NEXT STEPS

The Department will work with local landowners in the area to form the WC Ranches Rangeland Protection Association. This will include developing mutual aid agreements, providing training as requested, offering FEPP equipment as available, and any other assistance as requested and feasible.

ATTACHMENTS

- (1) Rangeland Protection Association Vicinity Map
- (2) Hearings Officer Report