



Wildfire Programs Advisory Council – Meeting

Friday December 18, 2023

The complete Wildfire Programs Advisory Council can be viewed at the following website and serves as the official public meeting record: <https://www.oregon.gov/gov/policies/Pages/wildfire-programs-council.aspx>

Welcome

Chair Hunnicutt

Chair Hunnicutt welcomed the council to the meeting. Senator Steiner gave the council some background on the development of the funding proposal that Director Grafe would be going into more detail about.

Wildfire Programs Advisory Council – Discussion

Doug Grafe, All

Director Grafe gave the council an review of a sustainable funding proposal for wildfire mitigation and response ([presentation](#)). The director gave the council an overview of the background of Oregon’s wildfire response system stating that Oregon has a high functioning response system but that the impacts of catastrophic wildfire is growing. Director Grafe went into detail on the different areas of responsibility for fire protection across the state before focusing on the specific areas that the Department of Forestry is responsible for. He then explained how ODF assessed fees to covered acreage to pay for the fire protection that ODF provides and how these fees have not kept pace with he increasing cost of fire protection. Director Grafe then explained the changes in the proposed funding model that would bring funding for wildfire protection more in line with the current cost levels.

The council discussed the proposed funding model. Members Browne, McCauley, and Yocum all expressed concerns that the increased fees to property owners would impact local jurisdictions and fire districts to raise funds either through bonds or use of the property tax system. Senators Steiner and Golden stressed the need to secure an evergreen source of funding for wildfire response and mitigation. Senator Steiner further stated that there may be ways of mitigating the risk of impacting the ability of local jurisdictions and fire districts to raise funds.

Public Comment

All

Bob Hart commented that Oregonians are already struggling with inflation and that additional fees will only exacerbate that struggle. He acknowledged the importance of wildfire protection but indicated that he would have preferred to see it paid for by cutting spending elsewhere.

Carolyn suggested that a new statewide fee may be more palatable if it were progressive so that those more able to pay, would pay more. Senator Steiner stated that they were concerned that a progressive system may result in compression of other revenue sources.

Debi Lorence, council member, said that with increased insurance premiums being assessed, it may be difficult for property owners to also absorb additional fees. She also commended communities that choose to implement firewise mitigation standards. Finally, she stated that it would be important to message out to folks where the money was going.

Wrap Up

Chair Hunnicutt

Chair Hunnicutt thanked the council and the speakers as well as the members of the public that provided comment and adjourned the meeting.