



Wildfire Programs Advisory Council (WPAC) – Remote Meeting Available

Friday, April 17, 2026

9:00am - 11:15am

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

[WPAC: April 17 Meeting](#)

Webinar ID: 890 0758 8727

In Person Location: Sisters Fire Hall, 301 South Elm Street, Sisters Oregon

9:00 am **Welcome**

Chair Bayer, Vice Chair Browne

The meeting opened with roll call and recognizing the hosts (Western Fire Chiefs Association, Central OR Builders Association) and Guests (Representative Breese-Iverson, Senator Broadman, Mayor Letz, Matt Martin, Peter Gutowsky, Mariana Ruiz-Temple, Kacey KC, Todd Smith). Chair Bayer made acknowledgment that this meeting is the WPAC's first in-person meeting. Chair Bayer outlined the agenda, meeting objectives, and plan for the Flat Fire tour at 11:15 am. Rolls were called and members introduced themselves. New members were welcomed and gave more in-depth introductions of themselves. 2026 January meeting summary and minutes were approved unanimously, with acknowledgment that they are posted on the Council website. Chair Bayer confirmed that everyone received the SB 83 (2025) mandatory agency reports and ensured preparedness for the July Council meeting. The Council discussed the subgroup assignment plan for the July meeting in preparation for the annual WPAC report. Vice Chair Browne outlined the subgroup topics currently planned: Under protected Lands, Utility Policy, Public Health and Wildfire Mitigation. Chair Bayer gave an opportunity for Representative and Senator to introduce themselves and speak.

9:25 am **Director's Report**

Doug Grafe

Fire Season Readiness, US Wildland Fire Service update, 2026 Legislative Session

Snowpack is a concern for the upcoming wildfire season as it will drive drought conditions. Relative to the national fire protections system, the nation is restructuring fire protection in the US, aligning under one organization: the US Wildland Fire Service. The State of Oregon is staying close to how the Agriculture and Interior Department's plan to merge, with emphasis that we cannot lose any momentum or progress the state and nation have made in wildfire mitigation. 2026 Short Legislative session completed with the legislature's continued advancement of Wildfire Programs across Oregon. SB 1551 made advancements in supporting home hardening to increase the survivability of homes during wildfire and HB 4134 increased Oregon's existing and durable wildfire mitigation funding into Oregon Conservation Corps Fund to support youth programs who reduce hazardous fuels around our communities.

WPAC members expressed concern on the consolidation and the US Forest Service's ability to use fire as a tool to mitigate wildfire risk. Director Grafe emphasized that the USFS wildfire organization will not be transitioned this fire season and there is much to consider in this transition. The Director emphasized Oregon's desire to be a national leader in wildfire mitigation.

State-wide Code Status

- **Home Hardening Code: Todd Smith – Administrator, Building Code Division:**

Discussion on home hardening codes which are residential home hardening codes referred to as RS327 for the code section they are housed in. Consists of exterior materials and design elements. When adapted, cost increases were estimated to be between 2-11% depending on the design details.

Since it is in the state building code, local jurisdictions through local process would need to adopt local ordinances based on standards that apply in their area. If a city doesn't have a delegated inspection program, Counties can adopt standards and provide opt-in mechanisms for local jurisdictions. This process has been proven to be effective. BCD also provides lots of information on this topic on the website and BCD staff are available for support as well.

- **Defensible Space Code: Mariana Ruiz-Temple, OSFM:**

Discussion on defensible space code and history of the code. On April 29th the voluntary code will be in place following work from rulemaking advisory committees. Copies of the code were also brought for the members at the meeting. The code details what is defensible space and how to apply the standards. The defensible space code has already been adopted in various counties and jurisdictions – the primary goal now is to assist local adoption and implementation of the code. OSFM will also be training other organizations in the new code to further education in the state.

Regarding funding wildfire mitigation, the agency is committed to furthering the work of community wildfire risk reduction. OSFM hosted seven listening and understanding sessions regarding the dedicated mitigation funds, engaging with over 300 individuals to inform how the agency may allocate the dollars.

Local Code Adoption and Considerations

- **City of Sisters: Mayor Letz and Matt Martin – Principal City Planner:**

Mayor Letz welcomed the WPAC to Sisters and gave a brief history of wildfire issues the City Council has been addressing. The City Council established their fire goals and directed Staff to draft defensible space code in the development code because they didn't like the pace of state code development which was tied up in the state's hazard map issues. The next step was to adopt a home hardening code with a final step being the municipal code. At the same time, SB 762 gave a funding opportunity to local fire district to hire a mitigation position.

Matt Martin, principal planner, gave the background on drafting the fire code. The goal is to build a culture of collaboration and understanding of importance of fire mitigation and opportunities for resilience.

Ashland had completed this process before Sisters and provided support when needed. Many workshops with city council planning commission were necessary to establish foundational understanding of the code and what Sisters was trying to achieve. One of the barriers was the ever-changing understanding of fire behavior and mitigation needs, as well as the existing competing interests (tree canopy, fire and fuel breaks, etc.). The goal was to find a middle ground on these competing interests and both adoptions ultimately proceeded smoothly. Both codes are just being rolled out: Defensible Space Code last summer and R327 last November. As with any new code, there is a learning curve, but the community seems to be receptive.

Final thoughts from Mayor Letz: This process of code drafting was very rewarding but very difficult. Any way we can make this process easier for smaller jurisdictions is welcome. The municipal code step will be the toughest hurdle as well and the solution must be methodical.

- **Deschutes County: Peter Gutowsky – Community Development Director:**

Peter Gutowsky introduced himself and the community development department, specifically the building safety division, where they provide construction plan review and inspections not only for unincorporated areas but also for Sisters and La Pine. Peter Gutowsky then discussed SB 391 (2021) and SB 644 (2023) that allowed rural ADUs to be cited in certain areas in unincorporated areas of a county. Deschutes County in 2023 was the first to adopt this permissive regulation. One of the responsibilities is that these rural ADUs is that they had to be fire hardened (R327) – therefore, plans examiners and building inspectors have been administering R327 for rural ADUs.

Following City of Sisters momentum in late Fall of 2025, the board of county commissioners directed community development to adopt R327. Since it wasn't a land use decision, the board of county commissioners were able to adopt the fire hardening provisions of R327 quickly on Jan 28, 2026. This process mirrored the City of Sisters in that it was done intentionally to have both become effective April 1, 2026.

Discussed Assistant Chief Hawkins' presentation about the permissive model code (effective April 29). This conversation was robust and the Board of county commissioners remains very interested on this topic of defensible space/resiliency. Introduced concerns on expectations for defensible space, and concerns on how the department will be tasked with providing examples of implemented defensible space in different jurisdictions. Emphasis of central Oregon's robust public-private partnership and how it furthers a collaborative spirit to this process.

Analogy of how this can be seen as a 3-legged stool:

1. The Legal Aspect: How do you Implement Defensible Space? How do you enforce noncompliance? How do you address new or existing development? Due Process?
2. The Financial Aspect: How do you pay to implement the program in perpetuity?
3. The Operational Aspect: What staff do you need, what kind of resources are needed?

WPAC discussion following presentations addressed the following and can be found in the recordings:

- What is the applicability and the enforcement for new constructions, remodels, etc.
- Building Division is for both Sisters and La Pine, will La Pine want to follow suit? Have you heard of anything from the larger communities?
- Are you using a methodology for identifying more important areas for 100% compliance vs. others?
- Interest in experience with adoption of the code and response at the community level: Acceptance, Adoption, Implementation – what kind of lessons do you have from the process?
- Communication Channels or lessons learned?

10:45 am **Public Comment**

Chair Bayer, Vice Chair Browne

No emails and no one online to provide public comment. One in person comment as follows.

Garret Moser of Central OR Builders Association: Appreciates WPAC coming to Sisters for meeting and allowing him to speak. Commented on adoption of R327 and COBA is in support of these efforts to protect homes and communities from wildfire. They want to share some lessons gained from experience with local adoption:

1. Recommend that this council encourage local jurisdictions to adopt home hardening code along with regular equipment code updates on April 1st. Builders prepare and anticipate for changes, so creating that consistency and predictability is essential.
2. Education Assistance for local jurisdiction to identify potential conflicts between wildfire codes and other local codes. Education assistance to identify these conflicts prior to adoption will

make the transition more seamless.

3. Help connect jurisdictions with resources and people that can help, especially when not all jurisdictions are able to set aside the dollars and resources themselves.

Garret thanked the WPAC and fire service. He appreciated the opportunity to speak and welcomed council questions.

WPAC Questions:

- **What was the actual cost of implementing R327 and how does it compare to 2-11% estimation.** Difference in costs is based on how they used to build as well as the building volumes of the region. No single answer but every answer does fall in the 2-11% range outlined by BCD.
- **Building unanimity from builder development community on R327?** There is a scale of acceptance but it's also important to consider where the purchasers are aligned. Market seems to be moving in that direction, and builders are following the market, COBA supports it.

11:00 pm

Transition to Field Tour

Travis Medema OSFM, Kyle Williams ODF

2025 Flat Fire Orientation and overview of Field Tour prior to going out to the buses. The Flat Fire tour will highlight landscape treatments. Tour will show Oregon's response framework and end with critical work of fire adapted communities. Tour will also go through the timeline of the August 21, 2025 fire and the resulting response.

Committee members grabbed lunches and history materials before boarding the buses for the Flat Fire Tour. Committee also thanked all for their attendance and efforts to keep Oregonians safe.

11:15 pm

Wrap Up

Chair Bayer, Vice Chair Browne

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- 2026 WPAC Dates: July 17, October 16

