

EMERGENCY FIRE COST COMMITTEE

January 7, 2025

In accordance with the provisions of ORS 477.455, a meeting of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee (EFCC) was held in the Tillamook Room of the Oregon Department of Forestry Headquarters in Salem and via Zoom Video Conferencing on Tuesday, January 7, 2025.

Committee Members Present

Brennan Garrelts, Chair
Kathryn VanNatta
Erik Lease (via Zoom)
Chris Johnson (via Zoom)

Others Present (in person)

Nancy Hirsch, EFCC Administrator
Lorna Hobbs, EFCC Finance Coordinator
Chris Cline, Acting Protection Division Chief, ODF
Ron Graham, Deputy Chief, Fire Protection, ODF
Kyle Williams, Deputy Director, Fire Operations, ODF
Kiel Nairns, Cost Recovery Specialist, ODF
James Short, CFO, ODF
Chad Washington, OFIC

Others Present (via Zoom)

Alexis Webb, Incident Business Advisor, ODF
April Ehrlich, OPB
Blake Ellis, Fire Operations Manager, ODF
Carlos Duran
Dave Larson, Area Director, ODF
David Helmricks, Wildfire Investigator, ODF
Deanna Drinkwater, Incident Business Advisor, ODF
Debbie Queen, District Business Manager, ODF
Dominique Ray, District Business Manager, CFPA
Elisa Morgan, Administrative Specialist, ODF
Eric Kranzush, Roseburg Resources
Gina Miner, Assistant Area Director, ODF
Jake Barnett, Protection Unit Forester, ODF
Jamie Paul, Senior Planning Analyst, ODF
Jeff Bonebrake, Contractor
Jerilee Johnson, Area Accountant, ODF
Justin Lauer, District Forester, ODF
Kate Skinner, Acting Deputy State Forester, ODF
Kay Ringer, District Business Manager, ODF
Kelsey Ramos, Direct Bill Coordinator, ODF
Laura Wilkeson, Hampton Lumber
Lauren Kuenzi, Oregon Farm Bureau
Megan Frizzell, Administrative Specialist, ODF
Natalie Weber, Public Information Officer, ODF
Nathan Stewart, Wildland Fire Dispatcher, ODF
Peggy Lynch, LWVOR
Pat Skrip, District Forester, DFPA
Randy Hereford, Starker Forests Inc.
Rebecca Edmison, District Business Manager, ODF
Renaey Meyer, District Business Manager, ODF
Suzanne Como, District Business Manager, ODF
Sione Filimoehala, CFO, DAS
Stacy McCarter, Mitigation Program Manager, ODF
Stacy Savona, Interim Wildfire Prevention & Policy Manager, ODF
TJ Ramos, Assistant to the Area Director, ODF
Tyler McCarty, District Forester, CFPA
Tracy Wrolson, Protection Finance Unit Manager, ODF

ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER AND CHAIR COMMENTS

Chair Garrelts called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, January 7, 2025. He and committee member Kathryn VanNatta were present in the room. Committee member Erik Lease was present via Zoom video conference and there was a quorum. Committee member Chris Johnson was in the process of joining when the meeting was called to order, and joined at 10:01 a.m.

Chair Garrelts verified that all present were identified, and that all members had received meeting materials in advance. Finalized materials will be made available on the Board of Forestry website after any last minute documents are added and any amendments are made, following the conclusion of this meeting.

Chair Garrelts noted that there are upcoming EFCC membership vacancies- both Chris Johnson and Erik Lease. Chris Johnson has retired from his position but remains an Eastern Oregon area landowner, qualifying him to remain as a member. The committee is currently recruiting for his replacement. Eric Lease's term on the committee will be expiring September 30th, 2025, and so recruitment for his position has been initiated as well. Following the membership committee solicitation policy that was adopted last year, a notice has gone out to the required parties which he believes closes tomorrow, January 8th, 2025. He stated that if anyone is interested or knows of someone interested in applying for those positions, one must be specific to Eastern Oregon area and the other can be at large but needs to be a large landowner representative. He then clarified that at large meant across the state.

Chair Garrelts welcomed Kelsey Ramos to the Protection Finance Unit as the Direct Bill Coordinator, who will be supporting the EFCC and staff moving forward.

Chair Garrelts mentioned the ODF and OSFM workgroup, stating that they are nearing completion and that the agencies will report on the recommendations from that workgroup but Kyle Williams may elaborate more later if he is present.

ITEM 2: APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 3, AND NOVEMBER 6, 2024 MEETINGS *[Decision Item]*

Committee member Kathryn VanNatta stated that on the November 6th meeting minutes, there was a correction needed on page 3 agenda item 4. After the motion was made, it was amended and all were in favor, and as such the minutes should read "All were in favor, both motions carried unanimously."

With those changes, Kathryn VanNatta moved to adopt the minute of the November 6th Special Meeting of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee and also the minutes of the September 3rd Meeting of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee. Chris Johnson seconded the motion. All were in favor, and none opposed. The motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 3: FINANCIAL STATUS OF THE OREGON FOREST LAND PROTECTION FUND *[Information Item]*

The financial status of the Oregon Forestland Protection Fund was reported by Lorna Hobbs, EFCC Finance Coordinator and reviewed by the committee. The report covered the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund's actual revenue and expenditures through November 30, 2024, and projected revenues and expenditures through the end of the fiscal year. The beginning balance on July 1, 2024 was **\$10,811,138**.

Revenues for fiscal year 2025 (FY25)

- Item #1: Estimated assessment revenues were updated to reflect new data for FY25. This resulted in an increase of just over \$25,000. The current estimate for FY25 is \$9,463,512. To date, \$2,527,214 has been received.
- Item #2: Harvest tax revenues received as of November 30th total \$941,879.
- Item #3: Interest received to date is \$137,898. The interest rate dropped to 5.15% on October 2nd and again to 5% on October 23rd.

Current revenue received as of November 30th was \$3,606,991. Estimated total revenue for FY25 is \$11,883,608.

Expenditures for FY25

- Item #1: Estimated payroll and operating expenses remain at \$185,000 for FY25.
- Item #2: A payment of \$3,000,000 for the Fund's contribution to fire season 2024 severity costs was made in November.

2024 Fire Season Draft Claims

The current estimated net claim total for fiscal year 25 claims is **\$130,490,517**.

In September, \$4 million was advanced to the Douglas Forest Protective Association for the Dixon fire and an additional \$6,000,000 was paid to the Department of Forestry to pay for fire season expenses. Current expenditures are at \$13 million. Payroll and operating costs will be transferred to ODF in June.

The fund balance as of November 30, 2024, was \$1,418,130, with an estimated ending balance of \$9,509,746.

There were no questions from committee members. Chair Garrelts made a comment recognizing the fire seasons and cost of those fire seasons. EFCC is operating a fund that is a "just in time" money in, money out year over year and its very important to recognize that these are landowner dollars from all across the state. There is a fiduciary responsibility to manage those responsibly, and to take good care with those dollars. He expressed appreciation for how well that works through the audit process. With no additional comments or questions, Chair Garrelts closed Agenda Item 3.

ITEM 4: WEATHER UPDATE *[Information Item]*

Fire Program Analyst Teresa Alcock, preferred name TzA, provided a winter weather update.

Precipitation: We are sitting reasonably well in terms of the amount of precipitation that we've had - we had a lot less precipitation in the same time period last year so we are sitting in a better spot.

Soil Moisture: There is no reporting on soil moisture checks on the west side, but on the east side the precipitation received is still not enough to really affect soil moistures at 8 inches deep.

Snow-water Check: Except for the west coastal strip, snow is sitting pretty reasonably at above average. We had much less at this time last year.

Drought: Central Oregon is starting to see some moderate drought. Northeast Oregon and some areas there along that east side are abnormally dry. However, the state is sitting a lot better now than in the last three years and the good news is that the forecasts indicate that the drought areas will likely be relieved in the coming months.

Three Month Outlook: It is hopeful that Oregon will receive a real winter with temperatures below average for the next three months. Although we are currently in a weak/neutral ENSO, we are reaching the point of peak potential for La Nina. The seasonal temperature and precipitation outlooks show the potential for below average temperature and above average precipitation in most of Oregon.

There is a pattern change that meteorologists are looking at for later in January that has the potential for colder temperatures. We've been experiencing a high pressure system off the coast for the last couple of months that has made us a bit warmer than normal, and some of the models show that system moving up to the northwest and up into Alaska. The European model doesn't show as much of an arctic blast coming, but the GFS model does show that there is a potential for arctic air to come down and center over Idaho, Southern Montana, and Wyoming.

NIFC National Significant Wildland Fire Potential Outlook: There is basically normal fire potential for the Pacific Northwest. There are some areas in California with above normal potential, and they are experiencing Santa Ana winds right now. The usual areas in Texas and the Southeast Eastern seaboard have above normal potential as well.

Summary: La Nina conditions prompt forecasts to be relatively cooler and wetter than average in the Pacific Northwest, but we are still in a cool ENSO neutral. We are close to a weak La Nina but are not quite there yet. We are experiencing slightly warmer than normal temperatures for winter, but snowpack seems to be pretty good at higher elevations. Precipitation is reasonable but there is a potential pattern change in mid to late January with an opening for Arctic air to move south. The next few weeks are forecasted to be a bit warmer and drier than usual, and our current fire potential is normal for the Pacific Northwest.

Chair Garrelts thanked TzA for the thorough report and stated that it was always nice to see no potential for fire in the winter. There were no questions from the committee, and the committee moved on to the next item.

ITEM 5: UPDATE ON STATUS OF LARGE FIRE COST COLLECTION EFFORTS *[Information Item]*

Chair Garrelts asked Kiel Nairns to give a high-level overview of what type of fire may or may not qualify to get on the list for large fire cost collection to help the committee understand with some additional context why the list is relevant and how it relates to state law.

Kiel started by thanking Tim Holschbach for covering the update in September as Kiel was out on a fire. He then explained the criteria for the large fire cost collection report. Fires that qualify for cost recovery generally are in violation of ORS 477.068 or 477.085 for operators/landowners and the general public as well- anyone who causes a fire that's willful, malicious, or negligent in the origin or spread of the fire. That means that they can be held liable for not only starting the fire, but also for not doing their duty to prevent its spread. They can be held liable for the full suppression cost of the fire, both district and extra costs. ORS 477.120 is for limited liability for operators and landowners and provides a cap of \$300,000 of collectable extra costs regardless of the cost of the fire. He noted that this does not include district costs, only extra costs. Kiel stated that the report for the committee covered anything \$5,000 or more, had extra costs that may be collected, or would have investigation costs eligible for EFCC reimbursement.

Kiel confirmed there were no questions on that information and moved into the report.

Fire Cost Collection Claim Status – Claims Greater Than \$5000: Since the last meeting in September, there is a section at the top of the status report that lists 17 fires totaling **just over 15 million dollars that has been demanded**. They are working through those fires, and he believes that a few are close to being resolved. It is of note that one of the fires listed, the Neil Rock fire, was originally reported as payment being received. That was incorrect- they were told that payment was in the mail, but it did not materialize. Kiel offered to amend the previous report, which was not requested by the committee. The case is still being actively worked.

With fire season as it was, no new demands went out over the last quarter. A lot of work is hung up on the cost certification piece right now, and finance folks were swamped with fire season related work trying to get payments made and audits done. A few are very close, and he stated he received 4 or 5 over the last couple of weeks that they will be reviewing. He is hopeful that they will have new demands on the list for the next report.

Payment Plans for Fires Greater Than \$5,000: The next section of the report goes over fires with payment plans, there are 16 fire claims with payment plans. The type of payment is identified as restitution or payment plan. Payments collected through the court are distributed to all parties that were involved in that fire. ODF has seen just under \$3300 come in since last quarter. They are working on a few payment plans that are behind to get them back on track. One case was sent to the Department of Revenue as one of the final options for action. The Department of Revenue can hire collection agencies, where the Department of Forestry is no longer able to do so. They have started successfully collecting on that account, and he stated appreciation for their help. **In total, \$68,243.20 has been received from these claims.**

Closed Fire Cost Collection Claims Greater Than \$5,000: The third section of the report lists three fires. The Cougar Creek claim was paid in full by the responsible party. The Ponina claim was closed due to what was reasonably obtainable for the case while not being cost prohibitive. The Bull Springs claim was settled with interest, which helped to pay for some of the investigation funds that aren't normally able to be collected. **In total, \$370,643.77 was received from these claims.** **Kiel noted that in the last full calendar year, just under \$2.6 million total was received even with the busy fire season that occurred.**

Significant Fire Investigations in Progress or Under DOJ Review: For the final section of the report, Kiel referred to the second page that showed a list of 24 fire claims that are significant in nature. These fires had incident management teams deployed to them, held high public interest, or held another kind of significance that made them noteworthy. Being on the list does not guarantee they will go to cost collection, but it does provide a status update for the outlook on potential cost collection claims. These fires are under investigation or under DOJ review. **These fires have a total combined cost of \$118,730,000 and span from 2020 to 2024.** If a fire on this list reaches cost collection status, it will show up in the future as a new demand on the first section of the report.

Kiel opened the floor for questions, and Chair Garrelts noted he had two follow-up items. On the last section for fires under investigation, there are three awaiting federal report. He asked if there were additional fires also awaiting federal input. Kiel responded that he would double check, but that he believes it is just the ones noted. Chair Garrelts then stated that he noticed that two of the three are from the 2020 fire season, which was four plus seasons ago. Chair Garrelts asked how the process was working with our federal partners, and if it seemed as concerning to them or if it was a resource issue for them. Kiel stated that it depends on the fire, and that normally it does take them a little bit longer to wrap up their cases because they have to investigate criminally first before they would consider a civil case. ODF is strictly civil collection, as anything criminal would go through OSP or OSFM, so our process is a little simpler and more easily spelled out in law where theirs can be more convoluted which results in a delay in their reports compared to ours. ODF also has to go through a federal request process to get the report once it is complete. There is an MOU in place with the BLM to more

easily share fire investigation reports, and work is in progress to establish one with the Forest Service as well to quicken that process. Chair Garrelts pointed out the preponderance of fires coming off of federal land onto private land where ODF is the paying agent or running the team on the ground. He asked if there was a general idea of when the MOU with the Forest Service may be complete, and Kiel stated that the hope is before the next fire season. Chair Garrelts stated that the claim costs are a significant amount of money, and with them going back as far as 2020, he hopes that we can start working through those and that our federal partners recognize that we have some skin in the game and need that information sharing to be able to quickly move through our processes.

Chair Garrelts thanked Kiel for his work and opened the floor for any additional questions or comments from committee members. There were none. Kiel Nairns brought up a couple of follow-up items. He stated that there was a meeting with Nancy Hirsch, Lorna Hobbs, and some of ODF's finance folks to go over the cost distribution portion of ODF's policy that was updated just over a year ago and signed November 7th. They identified that there are some slight updates needed to be appropriate for what is in law and other policies regarding how funds are distributed when we get them back.

Kiel stated that the new EFCC policy that was recently adopted was also reviewed and may affect some of the fund distribution processes. He stated that he did not anticipate a significant change, but that it may require more of an investment from the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund up front to make sure that funds are being distributed appropriately and in an adequate priority order. There are a few obligations legally and through other agreements that have to be met before funds are distributed back to districts and possibly the fund.

Kiel stated that there has also been more emphasis put on the district assisting with cost recovery, and part of that was driven by a lot of smaller fires that don't make it to the report presented in this meeting because they are strictly district dollars and not extra cost. With district cost fires potentially going away due to the changes in the new EFCC policy, district involvement in cost collection may need to be scaled back a bit.

Lastly, Kiel requested that the committee consider if they would like the parameters for the report updated due to the changes in the EFCC policy and to get back to him on their thoughts. Chair Garrelts stated he would still like to see it following the current protocols but recognized that it may look a bit different with eligibility rule changes that were adopted in November. Chair Garrelts thanked Kiel for the updates, and there were no further questions or comments.

ITEM 6: SET DISTRICT DEDUCTIBLE RATES FOR FISCAL YEAR 26 *[Decision Item]*

Nancy Hirsch, EFCC Administrator, took a moment to highlight Kiel's report. She stated that it was an excellent report, that he has been really great to work with, and that his excellent tracking system with continued improvements has made their lives a lot easier.

As it relates to deductibles for fiscal year 26, there are no planned deductible increases in the Department of Forestry's 25-27 biennial budget and therefore no changes are recommended for the fiscal year 26 deductibles. Nancy recommended that the committee make a motion to leave rates at ten cents for timber and five cents an acre for grazing for FY26, which begins July 1, 2025, and runs to June 30, 2026.

Chair Garrelts asked if there were any questions, and there were none. He then asked for a motion. Kathryn VanNatta motioned that the deductible rates remain the same for FY26- ten cents an acre for timber, 5 cents an acre for grazing for FY26 running July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. Chris Johnson seconded the motion. All were in favor and none opposed, and the motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 7: FISCAL YEARS 24 AUDIT REPORTS *[Decision Item]*

Nancy Hirsch provided an overview of the audit report. FY24 was an average net cost year at 35 million dollars. Audits were conducted with a team effort between EFCC, and ODF Business Services staff with some assistance from the Tillamook district business manager.

FY24 audits included early spring fires that occurred in FY23.

The statewide total for reversal of charges (from EFCC eligibility back to the district or a vendor/provider) was \$62,143.85. Reversals were up from \$36.5K from the previous year, mostly due to North Cascade helicopter deductibles.

All districts except for Walker Range Forest Protective Association have claims for FY24. Audits were held in April and May of 2024 and followed on the heels of a tremendous correction effort that was necessary that resulted from transitioning payroll to the state's Workday payroll system. There were 78,000 lines of data to complete the corrections of the issues

found in Workday. The effort district front line along with centralized staff made must be commended. There were over nine million dollars of corrections made to make the Workday issues "right".

Fiscal Year 24:

- **931 total statistical fires that burned 18,229 acres** (15,510 timber and 1,950 grazing).
- 780 were human and 151 lightning caused.

The 10-year fiscal averages from July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2024 are:

- **1,024 statistical fires and 110,358 acres burned.**

Nancy stated that in the report, a strategic investment is highlighted. ODF's Multi-Mission Aircraft with night vision and infrared technology tallied 80 flight hours, 30 primary fire detections, 7 secondary detections, and 3 live-stream operational support missions.

During fire season 2023, 94% of fires were caught at 10 acres or less.

Nancy also noted that during the audits, there is an open discussion with district and association operational staff that includes talking about responsible party fire cost recovery fires, strategic investments and successful initial attack fires. These are highlighted in Attachment 1. Each of the successes outlined saved millions of dollars from being spent and highlighted tremendous success. Nancy read the story of the Priceboro fire on the South Cascade District and noted that it truly highlights the complete and coordinated system working efficiently on every aspect of it.

Nancy recommended that the EFCC approve the audits and consequently authorize payment of those claims, as needed, when they are finalized.

Chair Garrelts thanked her for the report and stated that he commended her and the hardworking team that do incredible work on the audits. He has sat in on a few audits and has seen the thorough work to turn over every stone. He noted that it can be easy for errors to happen on an incident due to fireline work and the magnitude of paperwork in the finance tent. He has seen the incredible work to get better over time and see fewer and fewer errors. He expressed appreciation on behalf of the landowners for the attention to detail.

He also stated that he appreciated the fire of the year nominations that were made. He was unaware of many of them, and very familiar with others. He expressed that he held a lot of positive emotions and felt that from audit to suppression to coordination there was great work being done.

Kathryn VanNatta stated that she would like to second what Chair Garrelts said. She has sat in on several audits and was amazed and proud of department staff. She noted the work itself, as well as the work it takes to prepare for an audit. She stated that the amount of money audited compared to the amount found is astounding, and that any accounting firm would be amazed because it was incredible. She also spoke of hearing the dedication as well as the stress in the stories that were told as department staff relived fires. Hearing them speak of improvement made her realize that the department is a hardworking unit and that the whole system really does work.

Chris Cline, acting Protection Division Chief and the South Cascade District Forester in 2023, thanked Nancy for highlighting the Priceboro fire. He expressed appreciation and gratitude for the complete and coordinated system that made that fire a success story. He stated that the fire had the potential to be a 30-50 million dollar fire, with multiple factors of complexity. He also stated that in the 37 years of his career, we have one of the best in the nation as far as fire protection and it takes our agency as well as the landowners who started it coordinating to be successful.

The comments of appreciation have been summarized for the minutes but can be found in full through the meeting recording or in the transcription upon request.

There were no additional questions or comments. Chair Garrelts asked for a motion to approve the audits. Kathryn VanNatta moved that the Emergency Fire Cost Committee approve the fiscal year 2024 audit report for the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund. The report is dated January 7th, 2025. Chris Johnson seconded the motion. All were in favor and none opposed, and the motion passed unanimously.

ITEM 8: BUSINESS SERVICES REPORT *[Information Items]*

Kyle Williams, Deputy Director Fire Operations, introduced Acting Deputy State Forester Kate Skinner to provide an agency update. Kate noted that the State Board of Forestry meeting would be occurring over the next two days in Salem. It will be the last meeting with Bob Van Dyke serving on the board as he did not ask for reappointment. She would like to thank him for his time served on the board.

In ODF personnel updates, Justin Lauer was selected as the District Forester for Northeast Oregon. Justin is replacing Matt Howard, who retired but will continue to serve in an Incident Commander role on ODF Incident Management Team 2. The Safety Manager position was filled with Eric Pineda, who has been doing the work for six months in an interim role. The position he vacated is being recruited for and she is hopeful it will be filled prior to fire season. Cal Mukumoto, State Forester, let her know that he wants to move forward on the Deputy State Forester position recruitment sooner rather than later, and she believes he is going to try to start that process in January or February.

Kate turned the floor back over to Kyle Williams. He added that for personnel, Chris Cline had been serving as the acting Protection Division Chief for 13 months, although he originally agreed to only four. They will be interviewing next week to finalize a permanent person for that position and hope to have that settled by February 1st.

Kyle's next update was regarding the Oregon Wildfire Funding Workgroup progress, which has been shared between ODF and OSFM. Meetings have been occurring since June and are made up of 35 deeply invested stakeholders that are part of the complete and coordinated system. He noted that the conversations occurring were not unique but rather have been ongoing for the better part of ten years in an effort to find sustainable alternative funding solutions for our protection system – both fire service and forestry. What did make this unique was approaching a broad set of outcomes. Rather than focusing solely on funding for protections, the group looked at a cohesive strategy of suppression, mitigation, and community adaptation to receive wildfire. In his opinion, this has made more progress than previous workgroups but also acknowledged that it built off of the previous work done. The workgroup has their final meeting next week, where there will be a final narrowing from the original 70+ potential solutions. The ultimate goal is to turn over their work to the legislative body for the upcoming long session with the hope that they can determine a durable and stable funding solution that addresses all three legs of the cohesive strategy.

Kyle noted that they just came out of a special session in December. The agencies were in a really tough spot from fire season 2024, and they received 191.5 million dollars. James Short will discuss where that money is being used throughout ODF, but he wanted to acknowledge that the awareness of both the public and legislative scale is at an apex that hasn't been seen before when it comes to the need to find a solution. Although he stated he is optimistic about the outcome, he doesn't think they will be quite finished by the June EFCC meeting but they will have a good picture of what to expect.

Kyle turned the floor over to James Short, CFO. He mentioned a one-page Governor's Budget rundown that he will provide to Nancy to distribute to committee members via email. It can be found in the meeting material [here](#). He stated that he would also address the agency financial report.

Financial Updates:

- **At the special session December 12th, the agency received 191.5 million dollars.**
 - 82 million dollars of general fund for net large fire costs
 - 109.5 million dollars for agency operations
 - Of the total 191.5 million, 133 million dollars has been spent since December 18th in backlog payments. These payments included fire vendors, normal operational business vendors, and other state governments.
 - The backlog is currently sitting at \$300,000. There are a couple active payment teams still going on in Central Oregon District (Fort Rock and some smaller fires) and Klamath-Lake District (Copperfield, which should be resolved soon).
 - As invoices are finalized and submitted, they will continue to be processed quickly.
 - Today, ODF paid DAS for the three months of payroll that they covered.
 - All programs have been made whole, and the agency is moving forward with **\$54 million in cash on hand for the remainder of the biennium**. This is approximately \$10 million above the five-year average.
- The next big cash injection will be from the Protection Program through the Direct Bill system (protection assessments). Invoices are due in January, and the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund will get their share at that time to hopefully get the balance up to 10 million dollars from the current \$7.2 million of cash available in the EFCC coffers.
- **Protection Program General Fund balance is 10.6 million dollars as of today.**
- It is projected that there will be 5-10 million dollars at the end of the biennium to go into fire season.

James expressed appreciation to DAS for their assistance with taking over our payroll for three months. He also expressed appreciation to the payment teams, district business managers, and the disbursement staff for their hard work. Of note, once the money came in from the special session Business Services had an "all hands on deck" approach and has been

running nearly around the clock to get payments completed. James had to advocate for employees to take Christmas Day off, which speaks to the dedication of our agency to pay the vendors that were part of the backlog for their services.

James asked for questions or comments on the cash items, and Kathryn VanNatta had a comment. As a small landowner representative on the committee, she has spoken with many landowners and has ran into people who were waiting to be paid from the 2024 fire season. She wanted to acknowledge that these folks were mostly Oregon small businesses and it was very difficult on them, but they waited to be paid. It was a difficult situation to be in that the funding was not enough to pay them as soon as things were done, even though they still had their business expenses to pay like payroll and business loans. That's a very difficult place to be as a small business. Kathryn continued that she wanted to commend James Short's team for getting the invoices paid so quickly once funds were available, and before the end of the year. It was a short amount of time to move that amount of money, which only highlights the need for a funding source that allows us to pay our operators that help us fight these fires in a timely manner. Our complete and coordinated system relies upon our partners and our equipment owners and the fire teams, so that funding is needed to make sure that they are paid in a manner that allows them to continue to help us fight the next fire and the next year.

There were no additional questions or comments, and James moved on to the Governor's Recommended Budget which was released December 2nd. **ODF saw minimal reductions.** He acknowledged great work with CFO analyst Sione Filimoeihala and talking through our story, our priorities, and helping us with a good budget for the upcoming biennium.

Governor's Recommended Budget:

- Human Resources: Workforce Development – Package 104
 - Funded through a reprioritization of vacant positions in HR
 - Fiscal Impact: -\$24,743 General Fund, \$63,000 Other Funds, .49 FTE, 1 Position
- Forest Resources Division: Urban & Community Forestry Grants – Package 105
 - Federal fund limitation package increasing federal funds expenditure limitation for implementing previously approved federal grants
 - Fiscal Impact: \$28,000,000 Federal Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
- Human Resources: Agency Payroll Operations Transfer to DAS – Package 106
 - DAS took over ODF payroll this biennium, so our payroll positions were vacated and transferred to DAS to staff for our payroll
 - Fiscal Impact: \$190,158 General Fund -\$327,714 Other Funds, -2 FTE, -2 Positions
- Fire Protection Division: Severity Positions – Package 107
 - This is for positions to staff the existing severity program- helicopter administrators [managers], firefighters, helitack crews, etc. ODF does not currently have the staffing to fully implement the program.
 - This is included in the \$16 million Special Appropriation Package
 - Fiscal Impact: \$4,014,099 Other Funds, 18.50 FTE, 37 Positions
- Capital Construction and Improvement – Packages 108 through 113
 - West Oregon Toledo Phase 3 – Toledo Unit replacement project in Newport to complete the facility
 - Fiscal Impact: \$6,754,060 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
 - North Cascade Santiam Replacement – Replacement of the office that was destroyed in the 2020 Labor Day fires
 - Fiscal Impact: \$5,716,854 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
 - Klamath Facility Replacement – Fire cache warehouse replacement for the original facility that was destroyed by a fire
 - Fiscal Impact: \$5,716,854 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
 - State Foresters Building Remodel – Repair and remodel Building B
 - Originally completed in 1938, the building's integrity is threatened by age and decades of deferred maintenance. Current status prevents use of many of the spaces to their full potential.
 - Fiscal Impact: \$22,436,385 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
 - Western Lane Veneta Campus Remodel – Modernization of Western Lane District headquarters and grounds
 - Fiscal Impact: \$16,850,122 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
 - Deferred Maintenance – Multiple maintenance projects around the state
 - Mandated by the budget instructions to be at least 2% of current replacement value of the department's buildings and infrastructure
 - Fiscal Impact: \$6,849,562 Other Funds, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions
- Fire Protection Division: Analyst Adjustments, Forestry Cash Flow Account – Package 090
 - \$135 million intended to be used for wildfire expenditures to be reimbursed later by federal partners.
 - Fiscal Impact: \$135,000,000 General Fund, 0.00 FTE, 0 Positions

- Other Budgetary Adjustments
 - Two general fund reductions in Agency Administration (one Business Services Program position) and Forest Resources (four positions) divisions
 - \$500,000 General Fund support for Federal Forest Technical Assistance provided to local collaboratives
 - \$2.5 million reduction of General Fund in the Small Forestland Grants Program
 - Emergency Board “holding” \$16M for ODF for wildfire severity costs
 - Emergency Board “holding” \$14M for grants supporting the Private Forest Accord

James opened the floor for any questions or comments. Chair Garrelts had the comment that he hopes that the Legislature can follow through with the recommended budget from the Governor. He expressed frustration that natural resource agencies have what he thinks is 1% or less of the general fund, including wildfire, and over the years we have seen a lack of financial support from the legislature regarding the needed funding. In his opinion, we are now seeing what that causes and its largely expressed in a wildfire condition amongst many other ills from a natural resource standpoint. He stated he is optimistic that the legislature can follow through with the Governor’s Recommended Budget and follow through with the sustainable fire funding as well.

Kyle Williams had two comments. First was that the 16 million dollars that James mentioned as Special Appropriation for severity is actually an additional one million dollars annually for the Severity Program budget. He stated that it’s not ideal, but its better than where we were in terms of budget last year. Second was that the 135 million dollars he mentioned earlier is to help with the net exposure. It still remains that we have the gross cost Delta. To Kathryn’s point earlier, our ability to make sure that we provide timely payment for our resources is really around the gross cost exposure. As such, they will be maintaining that conversation through the fire funding workgroup and into the legislative session that the Governor’s Recommended Budget certainly helps to address a significant piece of it, but it is not going to get us out of potentially what we just had in terms of a need for a special session. He stated there is more work to do, but it is good momentum and good awareness.

Chair Garrelts called for any additional questions or comments. There were none, and Chair Garrelts turned the floor over to Tracy Wrolson, Protection Finance Unit Manager.

Strategic Investments Financial Report

- 2020 Investments and Carry-Over of Previous Funds totaled \$1,504.959.93
- Actual Spent: \$702,282.26, Remaining Balance as of November: \$759,717.74
- Undistributed Funds: \$57,376.23

Details of each approved project and current status can be found on page two of the Strategic Investments Financial Tracking Report in the [meeting materials](#). There were some changes in December since the report was pulled. Of significance, project 7 “DFPA Fire Web Licenses” will be paid within a week or two. Districts should strive to have these projects completed by the end of the year. There were no questions or comments from the committee on this report.

FEMA Updates

- Currently have claims that are open back to 2019
- Estimated Claims to invoice: \$63,164,109 (approximately \$61.5 million from 2024)
- \$1.6 million to invoice out from past seasons (partly admin claims)
- \$6.9 million to receive from past seasons that are in the process of audit with FEMA and/or OEM
- Grand total due to ODF: \$68,420,058

The second table in the report shows the details of the claims for each year that make up the totals above, including estimated completion dates, and can be found in the [meeting materials](#). 2024 was a significant fire season, and the estimated claim amount may go up now that President Biden has approved Public Assistance federal funding. Amanda Ogden, FMAG Coordinator, is going to be leading a small team over the next six to eight months to complete remaining auditing and get everything ready for audits by OEM and FEMA. The goal is to have all claims submitted by the end of the year, and then it can take a couple of years to get through the federal system and start seeing money coming back in. There were no questions or comments from the committee on this report.

Severity Financial Status

- Allocation of about \$10.6 million

- End of fire season projected balance of \$1.1 million, which will carry us through the spring prior to the new fiscal year and new biennium starting.
- Gross costs of \$21 million, with approximately 56% to be collected in recoveries (large fire fund, other agency billings, FEMA)
- \$3 million OFLPF allocation was utilized
- Total General Fund request of \$8,640,811

Tracy noted that there isn't a lot of movement money-wise right now as we are in the dead of winter, just some reconciliations and a few corrections being made to expenditures. The detailed report can be found in the [meeting materials](#). There were no questions from the committee. Chait Garrelts commented that the report was excellent, and stated that he felt it was important that the committee have a good understanding of where things stand with these reports as they move forward. Chair Garrelts then closed Agenda Item 8.

ITEM 9: PROTECTION DIVISION REPORT *[Information Items and Decision Item]*

Chris Cline, Acting Protection Division Chief, started by sharing some bigger picture items from his lens that are being worked on.

- Headquarter Services Committee Meeting January 30th
- Upcoming Trainings
 - Agency Administrator – dates to be determined, but prior to fire season and with the intention of offering multiple times to make it accessible. This role is critically important and makes critical decisions, so redoing the training and updating the content is key. This training hasn't been offered in some time and is a priority item for Chris.
 - Fire Team Training for the upcoming fire season
 - Forest Law and Investigation trainings are scheduled
- Fire Season Prep
 - Fire Cache – there has been interest expressed in a Type 3 organization option. Fire cache is a high dollar item, and although we have a pretty decent one for initial response it would be great to have a different model locally. Currently there is support for the incident management teams, but Chris wants to dive into our fire cache and take a heavy look at how they can support the field in perhaps a more holistic approach. He acknowledged the fire cache team & their great work.
 - Severity – Chris mentioned the downstream effect. The Severity Program budget has been fairly small and hasn't had inflation costs considered or the nuances of supply and demand. Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs) are a very good tool, but Greece just bought 30 of those aircraft, taking them completely out of the market. Prices are skyrocketing while the program stays fairly static. He stated that he estimated hundreds of millions, maybe even a billion, dollars worth of large fire costs taken out of play due to the proactive approach to the Severity Program. He acknowledged that they are leveraging every nook and cranny of the program to squeeze every last penny out of it, and also stated how proud he is of the team for the work that they have done.
 - Department Owned Aircraft - A bill that was passed in the 2023 Legislative Session that said the Department of Forestry would purchase an aircraft and air platform to replace the Partenavia that is department owned and that the EFCC invested in. They are looking at Twin Otters and will potentially be purchasing bonds this Spring per the legislative direction. They will have a competitive bid process to secure the best option.

Chris turned the floor over to Ron Graham, Deputy Chief of Operations in the Fire Protection Division.

GeoBoard:

- Met quarterly since September and held an After Action Review with incident commanders in December, which was the final meeting of the year as well as one of the last AARs of the year
- Due to retirements, promotions, movement within the agency and other duties they need to recruit some new members
- 2025 focus is to continue to work on the Successional Management Plan for IMTs
- Supports the Protection Division in recommendation for the Complex Incident Management course that a team is being sent to in 2025, as well as in the transition to dual certified IMTs (traditional Type 1 certification and the CIMT designation)

BLM Western Oregon Operating Plan

- The agency submitted the first invoice for the current fiscal year, which was processed, reviewed, approved and paid by the BLM in a relatively short manner.

- BLM Western Oregon Operating Plan AAR will be on January 29th with district staff and BLM partners. This will be the last AAR of the season.

Ron turned the floor over to Jamie Paul, Senior Planning Analyst.

Strategic Investment Status Report and Proposal

- Full report and proposal can be found in the [meeting materials](#).
- Report Summary: ODF & DFPA request use of the remaining unallocated Strategic Investment funds of \$57,376.23 to purchase FireWeb licenses for 2025 in anticipation of SFA funding to be made available into the future. Priority is given to the NWOA district licensing, allocating \$45,000 while the remaining \$12,376.23 will be used to offset district costs in SOA for licensing. This is a continuation of the 2020 'DFPA FireWeb Licenses' Strategic Investment award of \$72,000.

Chair Garrelts opened the floor for questions or comments. Kathryn VanNatta commented as she participated in audits, she heard a lot of good commentary on FireWeb from dispatchers and the folks that used it. They found it to be very helpful and found it to make their life easier and more efficient. She wanted to share that as these were the people on the ground doing the work.

Chair Garrelts thanked her for her comment and asked if Eric or Chris had any comments. Erik Lease responded no, but did state that he would support the use of the common platform, and thinks it is a good direction moving forward for the fire community. Chair Garrelts stated that he agreed with Eric's comment, and that he has some firsthand experience with FireWeb as well as through his local district's use and preference for it.

Chair Garrelts had a couple of questions pertaining to the use of the strategic investment and the funds that the committee looks over. He asked what the total cost of the licenses are, and if the \$57,000 they are asking for would pay for the full cost of the licenses or a portion. Jamie answered that it would be \$45,000 for Northwest Oregon Area, and the remainder would be available to DFPA and CFPA as an offset, it would not cover their entire costs. Chair Garrelts restated for confirmation that this would just be to help alleviate some the unanticipated district costs, and that when it moves to an enterprise it would be picked up at the district. Jamie confirmed that he was correct.

Chair Garrelts stated that the committee made the initial investment of \$72,000 into FireWeb as a recognition of the importance of it. DFPA bore the cost of testing it, and the committee invested to see it moved to a larger scale and recognized that there was some benefit towards initial attack. That's the purpose of this fund, that the committee make investments in those things by which they see returns for initial attack success. He continued that he had no doubt that this investment has that return for initial attack success, but that he had some concern that they needed to be cautious. The fund is not a grant fund to help pick up financial needs from the districts or from the agency that they otherwise say they can't meet. He acknowledged that there is not an easy answer and he was going to be frank and candid, then asked what would happen if the committee said no. Would FireWeb go away? He stated that it put the committee between a rock and a hard place on how they vote, and asked how it would look if the committee voted no.

Ron Graham answered that he wasn't sure if it goes away and acknowledged that they have to pay the bill. He wanted to provide some backstory and noted that Jamie highlighted the connection to the Western Oregon Operating Plan. Two years prior, they were working on implementing WildCAD as the dispatching system for Northwest Oregon (everything but the Association and Southwest Oregon). They were unsuccessful in implementing it due to the vendor not being able to meet requirements on implementation and training in a timely manner. The unfortunate mistake was the availability of FireWeb being introduced as essentially a beta project to Northwest Oregon. He thanked Kyle Williams for his support and making the decision to make the move to FireWeb in order to meet the requirements of the Western Oregon Operating Plan. However, it created an unexpected funding ask because it was not the plan to implement FireWeb. They put in a Policy Option Package for the fire program to cover the cost, which is being supported in the Governor's Recommended Budget. With that support, this is truly a one-time ask to cover those costs. He continued that Northwest Oregon is doing a lot of good work evaluating their dispatching situation across all districts and looking for further efficiencies. When FireWeb moves to a statewide contract, he believes there will be additional efficiencies. He acknowledged that they are looking for grant funds, but that the extra cost was completely unanticipated at the time because they were going to use WildCAD. If not approved, it will require them to reallocate funding from existing grant funds and try to come up with money for the existing allocations.

Chair Garrelts stated he appreciated that and recognizes that they have to pay for FireWeb. If the funding isn't made available from the EFCC, they will have to pull it from other funds. He acknowledged that that is a hard position for any public agency to be in. He also noted that it happens a lot and ODF does have access to make the ask. He stated he isn't offended by the ask, and noted that based on 2020 strategic investment expenditure documents a camera is about \$75,000 and with inflation may round up nearer to \$100,000, maybe less. With the \$57,000 ask being made, if the districts

or other funds paid for the licenses then the strategic investment dollars could essentially fund half of a camera if there was an ask for that (which has been done historically). He wanted to offer that context to the committee.

Erik Lease commented that if you consider the strategic investment funds and the role that the committee has to disperse them, this is trying to encourage the complete coordinated system and feels in line with the intent of strategic investment funds. Chair Garrelts stated that it was a fair statement.

Chair Garrelts then asked if Chris Johnson had any comments, but there was a question of whether he had comments and was on mute. Kathryn VanNatta did not make a comment. Chair Garrelts asked for a motion to be made.

Erik Lease moved that the committee approve the request for the Strategic Investment Funds Balance to be used to cover the gap in the FireWeb platform adoption. Before moving to a second, Chair Garrelts confirmed that Chris Johnson could hear the discussion and could comment. Kathryn VanNatta seconded the motion. Three in favor (Chris, Erik, Kathryn), one opposed (Chair). **The motion passed.**

Kathryn confirmed it was an appropriate time for comments on the Protection Division's full report. She expressed thanks for everyone who works in the Protection Division for working on this very difficult 2024 fire year. She stated that the report shows the work being done and the commitment to continuous improvement to what could be done better for succession and cross-training to be more efficient and effective. She appreciates that work and commitment. She noted that a lot of the people attending were from the Northwest Oregon district and expressed thanks to those folks directly also. The commitment to the fine work that they do and to continuous improvement is what is going to get us through this next fire year and this transitional time period. It also gives the department hope to keep on going when things get dark, as it did this last year. She reiterated her appreciation and encouragement to keep up the good work.

Chris Cline acknowledged her comments and thanked her for them, stating that he was taking notes and planned to pass her words on to the staff throughout the organization.

Chair Garrelts closed Agenda Item 9.

ITEM 10: EFCC ADMINISTRATOR REPORT *[Information Item]*

Nancy Hirsch, EFCC Administrator, provided a brief report.

- The new Eligibility Policy the EFCC approved in November went into effect on January 1. Nancy, Lorna Hobbs, and Tracy Wrolson offered a training in December and had over 130 employees join virtually. They have one more training later this month. They have completed an FAQ that was utilized during the training that seemed to work well. They held an after action review and had some great discussion and comments to strengthen the FAQ for the next training. They have a meeting next week with ODF Fire Protection Leadership to begin working on further guidance related to repair work referenced in the policy.
- Fire Season 21 Insurance claim status. They are essentially done – just waiting on final corrections to go through from some miscoding related to investigation costs. Once those corrections are made and accounting reports are in hand they will be able to schedule the closeout of the claim for that season and hopefully see ODF receive two to three more million dollars.
- Lorna will begin reaching out to the districts in approximately one week to coordinate scheduling audits. As those dates are confirmed, Nancy will keep the committee apprised of the audit schedules.

There were no questions or comments from committee members, and Agenda Item 10 was closed.

ITEM 11: PUBLIC COMMENT / GOOD OF THE ORDER

The floor was opened, with direction for anyone wishing to make a public comment to please use the hand raising function or turn their video on as an indicator.

For good of the order, Chair Garrelts stated that he would like to lay down a public comment for his dissenting vote on the Strategic Investment Proposal. He stated that he fully supports FireWeb and thinks it's a great program. The integration into the agency is spot on. His hesitation and dissenting vote largely came from knowing that surprises happen often in business and agency work. Moving funds around to fill strategic needs seems like more of an agency challenge than an EFCC challenge for strategic funds. He also recognizes that it does match well with initial attack success, and he stated that it was good to see the rest of the committee supporting it.

There being no further business before the committee and no additional comments, Chair Garrelts adjourned the meeting at 11:59 a.m. The next regular meeting of the Emergency Fire Cost Committee will be held at **10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, March 4, 2025** at the Oregon Department of Forestry Headquarters in Salem and via Teams Video Conferencing, which precedes the Board of Forestry meeting on Wednesday, March 6th and Thursday, March 7th.

Minutes drafted by: Kelsey Ramos
Minutes reviewed by: Nancy Hirsch and Lorna Hobbs