

Wildfire Hazard Map Meetings with County Officials

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose

Meetings were scheduled by the Association of Oregon Counties to fulfill the requirements of Senate Bill 80 (1)(12): "...the department shall meet with county commissioners and the county commissioners' staff in eight in-person meetings throughout this state." Department of Forestry staff were accompanied by other agency representatives to discuss the purpose of the hazard map and related wildfire programs like home hardening, defensible space, and property insurance.

Association of Oregon Counties (AOC) meeting logistics

AOC District	Counties in district	Date	Location
5	Benton, Lane, Linn	September 8	Eugene
7	Clatsop, Columbia, Lincoln, Tillamook	September 15	Tillamook
4	Coos, Curry, Douglas, Josephine	September 18	Grants Pass
—	Jackson	September 19	Medford
2	Crook, Deschutes, Harney, Jefferson, Lake, Klamath	September 21	Klamath Falls
3	Gilliam, Hood River, Morrow, Sherman, Wasco, Wheeler	September 28	Moro
1	Baker, Grant, Malheur, Umatilla, Union, Wallowa	September 29	Pendleton
6	Marion, Polk Yamhill	October 6	Dallas
8	Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington	October 11	Remote

Agency Presenters

Oregon Department of Forestry—State Forester Cal Mukumoto, Deputy State Forester Kyle Abraham, Derrick Wheeler, Tim Holschbach, Derek Gasperini

Oregon State University—Dr. Chris Dunn, Andy McEvoy

Department of Consumer and Business Services—Commissioner Andrew Stolfi, Administrator Alana Cox, Eric Cutler, Eric McMullen

Department of the Oregon State Fire Marshal—Chief Deputy Claire McGrew, Assistant Chief Deputy Chad Hawkins

County Meeting Feedback Themes

Appeals

- County commissioners among multiple counties in several AOC districts expressed curiosity or concern over the appeals process.
- There was a high level of interest in the appeals process being inexpensive, accessible, and conducted as locally as possible, with some suggesting appeals be determined by county planning departments.



- » As explained at the meetings, appeals are designated by Senate Bill 80 to be contested case hearings, meaning they will be reviewed by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) and not reviewed at the county level. However, ALJ's can hold hearings by phone, or hold hearings with groups of appellants in certain cities to increase accessibility to all. There is no fee to file an appeal.
- » ODF will be working with the Wildfire Programs Advisory Council (WPAC) to provide a plain language explanation of the appeals process. Information will be provided in notification letters of how to exercise appeal rights. The explanation will include how and where to seek an appeal. Residents may appeal the hazard rating or wildland-urban interface designation of their property.

Hazard Assessment Methodology

- There were many questions from county commissioners, county staff, and fire service professionals on how recent fire footprints are represented in hazard ratings, and how vegetation is modeled over time after wildfires burned vegetation.
- Several counties that border federal lands remarked on the conditions of federal lands impacting hazard of neighboring lands and communities.
- Interest expressed from multiple districts to include local data sets to increase accuracy of fuel loading and modeling.
- Many questions focused on issues related to susceptibility of structures (rather than hazard), and misperceptions that decreasing susceptibility will reduce hazard. The following erroneous sentiments were addressed:
 - Proximity to water sources or fire departments decreases hazard ratings.
 - The map should reflect actions property owners have taken.
 - Once homes are hardened and they have defensible space, hazard rating will reduce.
- » Public outreach will focus on education between hazard and risk, including how susceptibility issues are part of risk, but not environmental hazard.
- » Explaining how hazard is assessed, and the base data sets used, are key components to public understanding and acceptance of the wildfire hazard map.
- » Potential inclusion of local data sets is being evaluated to determine if it's a potential policy issue, or a process/access issue.

Irrigated Farmland

- Concerns were expressed by multiple counties at several district meetings regarding how irrigated farmlands are shown as higher hazard than they expected. They believed heavily irrigated lands should not ignite or burn as if they were not irrigated.
- Strong interest expressed in how irrigated farm and crop lands may be adjusted through the mapping process.
- Concerns that orchard trees are treated as burnable forest fuel, rather than irrigated crops.
- » There are tradeoffs in decreasing the hazard rating of irrigated farmlands. Final decisions on how to update fuel modeling on irrigated agricultural lands will be informed by policy discussions of a Rulemaking Advisory Committee (RAC).
- » Explanations of updated policy, and how it's impacted updated maps, will be shared in public outreach meetings and published materials.

Adjacency Issues

- Broad expression that adjacent lots should have the same hazard rating.
- Observation that on-the-ground conditions show no discernable difference in vegetation or topography.



- Multiple examples were provided at several meetings of geographies that had different hazard ratings, but no discernable difference on the ground.
- » A longer timeline to produce a map, therefore a longer quality assurance process, will allow for “smoothing” some adjacency issues.
- » When hazard ratings at the property tax lot level are available, county planners will have an opportunity to review the maps. Additionally, one final meeting with county commissioners will occur prior to finalizing the map.
- » Specific focus on explaining legitimate reasons for different hazard ratings between neighboring properties should be provided in public outreach meetings.
- » Public acceptance will be influenced by our ability to explain the factors that drive a change from one lot to another.

Insurance (Division of Financial Regulation)

- County commissioners at every meeting shared concerns over cost and availability of property owner insurance policies.
- Many asked about how to combat increasing rates.
- Interest in property-level actions leading to insurance discounts or premium relief (incentives).
- » Presentations on insurance underwriting and rating, and Senate Bill 82, by Oregon Insurance Commissioner Andrew Stolfi were critical to addressing insurance concerns.
- » OSFM’s Defensible Space Assessment Tool also provided options for homeowners to pursue discounts when work in the home ignition zone has been completed.
- » As a key public concern, continued information on the insurance marketplace, changes to insurance regulation through SB 82, and driving competition through completion of property-level mitigation efforts will be critical for public outreach.

Defensible Space (Oregon State Fire Marshal)

- Many questions on the defensible space standard code, timelines for adoption, and when inspections/regulation will begin.
- Curiosity expressed on who will conduct defensible space assessments/inspections.
- » Details on final code adoption, timeline and availability of defensible space assessments, available insurance incentives, and any potential enforcement actions will be necessary during public outreach.

Home Hardening Building Codes (Building Codes Division)

- Several questions on standards under residential building code R-327.
- Commissioners asked whether local adoption is necessary, and who will enforce the code.
- Concern over retroactive application of code.
- Differing interest in where building codes should be required (regarding size of WUI)
- » Details on final code adoption, implementation timelines and clarity that building codes are not retroactive will continue to be critical during public outreach.
- » Any changes to definitions or application of wildland-urban interface would require rule changes. Potential to include better data on urban growth boundaries for inclusion in WUI (already designated in rule).

