

Minutes of the Jackson County Forestland-Urban Interface Classification Committee Meeting

May 14, 2003 1:00 p.m.
Oregon Department of Forestry
Southwest Oregon District
Central Point, OR

Attendees: Keith Massie, Reeve Hennion, Dan Thorpe, Bill Rose, Lou Gugliotta, Brian Ballou, Jim Wolf, Michael Mattson

Mr. Hennion called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Mr. Ballou was asked to call the roll. All members were in attendance.

Housekeeping: The committee signed the rules of order; Mr. Ballou committed the signed copy to the committee's permanent record.

Comments from the public:

Walt Fitzgerald, a Sams Valley resident, recounted when Jim Wolf was asked to speak to Sams Valley residents on the Oregon Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act. Given that the act was a matter of considerable concern to Sams Valley residents, Mr. Fitzgerald was surprised that the Jackson County Classification Committee's meetings weren't better attended by members of the public. Mr. Fitzgerald had a prepared statement and offered to read it to the committee. Mr. Hennion asked him to keep his comments to two minutes. Mr. Fitzgerald said the act was adversely affecting private property rights, and that citizens' rights were compromised. Mr. Fitzgerald noted that he already paid taxes to two fire protection entities, the Oregon Department of Forestry and the Jackson County Rural Fire Protection District. Mr. Fitzgerald expressed concern that the act imposed a large penalty on those who do not comply. Mr. Fitzgerald also pointed out that implementation of the act was arbitrary. "Who determines who's in and who's not?" Mr. Hennion noted that forestland-urban interface boundary determination is the committee's job. Mr. Fitzgerald concluded by adding that the Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act compromised civil liberties, and therefore was not worth it.

Mr. Thorpe asked Mr. Fitzgerald to clarify some of his comments and concerns. Mr. Fitzgerald recommended that the watershed councils, the fire district and citizen advisory committees could manage the forestland-urban interface problem more effectively than legislation.

Minutes: A change was proposed on the first page of the minutes of the May 5 meeting. The phrase, "The decision was made to hold a work session on June 11 if Mr. Gugliotta could not attend," was changed to read, "The decision was made to hold a regular meeting on June 11 if Mr. Gugliotta could not attend."

On page 4, the phrase, "the Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act does not

supercede other laws,” was changed to read, “the Forestland-Urban Interface Fire Protection Act does not apply to federal lands.”

With these changes, the committee approved the minutes of the May 14 meeting (motion: Thorpe; second: Gugliotta).

Chris Chambers, City of Ashland, briefed the committee on wildland/urban interface hazard zone identification and mitigation already done in Ashland by the city. He offered to the committee maps of the city-identified wildfire hazard areas. He noted that, for the most part, the forestland-urban interface committee’s maps and the city’s wildfire hazard maps were in agreement. However, he wanted to propose some additions and deletions to the forestland-urban interface boundary maps.

Mr. Chambers asked, “How will high-density extreme lands be parsed out?” Mr. Hennion explained that high-density extreme areas, and other classifications, hadn’t been made yet. The committee had been establishing boundaries, but not classifications. He explained that the committee would establish classifications when the committee returned to identify forestland-urban interface areas for that purpose.

Mr. Gugliotta recommended that the committee show visitors the aerial photos and other visual information that the committee used in identifying forestland-urban interface boundaries.

Mr. Chambers asked, is the committee including lots that aren’t paying forestland assessment to ODF? Yes. Mr. Chambers noted an area in north Ashland, near the railroad overpass, downhill from Old Hwy 99, where a large, vacant lot with heavy fuels was in close proximity to several homes. However, the homes on the downhill side of the highway were not within the committee’s proposed forestland-urban interface boundary. Mr. Chambers recommended that the committee include the tax lots bordering the vacant land within its forestland-urban interface boundary (Mr. Massie drew the border on the Ashland forestland-urban interface map to enclose the lands in Mr. Chambers’ proposal).

Mr. Chambers outlined a second area of concern in the Grandview area in the hills of west Ashland. Discussion by Mr. Chambers and Mr. Thorpe resulted in a change to the forestland-urban interface line along a ridge (Mr. Massie noted the changes on his map).

Mr. Chambers outlined some lots in the Scenic/Nutley areas where homes had been included in the forestland-urban interface boundary, but they hadn’t met the city’s criteria as a contributor to wildland/urban interface fire hazard. He recommended that the forestland-urban interface boundary be shifted farther uphill (Mr. Massie redrew the boundary according to Mr. Chambers’ recommendation).

On the south end of Ashland, in the Morton St. area, Mr. Chambers noted areas where the city had recently completed some fuel reduction work. Mr. Rose also noted the presence of insect-killed timber in the area. Mr. Hennion said he preferred to leave the forestland-urban interface boundary as drafted in this area. The committee agreed to retain the

boundary as drafted.

Mr. Thorpe noted that information Mr. Chambers provided about the City of Ashland's fuel reduction work was good for the committee to hear, but noted that this information may not be something that the committee would or could use in its identification and classification process.

A boundary line adjustment was made in the Beach Street area.

Behind Southern Oregon University, Mr. Chambers noted that properties south of Prospect Avenue were considered wildland fuel areas by the city. He highlighted an area not included in the proposed forestland-urban interface boundary. After some discussion, the committee decided to leave the proposed boundary as it stood.

In the Bellview School area, Mr. Chambers highlighted a drainage south of Siskiyou Boulevard that wasn't in the city's wildland fuel layer, and wasn't in the committee's forestland-urban interface boundary, but was an area which met the criteria of a potentially troublesome wildland/urban interface fire area. The committee moved the forestland-urban interface boundary to incorporate the area in question.

The committee then revisited the area it first reviewed in north Ashland, below Old Hwy 99, near the railroad overpass, and confirmed, with one adjustment, that the boundary change in that area was consistent with changes made elsewhere in Ashland.

After a break, Mr. Thorpe recapped a discussion about the decision tree that the committee had to follow, by statute and administrative rule, to identify and classify forestland-urban interface lands. Mr. Ballou noted that he had made a database that used the decision tree "firing order." Mr. Hennion asked that this database be brought to committee for its review.

Mr. Massie told the committee that, to that point, approximately 4,000 tax lots fell within forestland-urban interface boundaries, and 2,600 of those lots were being assessed for forestland fire protection.

The committee reviewed a forestland-urban interface boundary on the south end of the Old Siskiyou Highway area, and made an adjustment to exclude several large (> 40 acre) tracts that may or may not have had dwellings on them. A similar adjustment was made in an area where the proposed boundary followed Interstate 5, and which included several large lots (paying forestland assessment) that didn't have dwellings. The committee decided to exclude the large lots without dwellings, and run the boundary along the railroad line instead of the interstate; the boundary continued to incorporate lands with dwellings and concentrations of structures. The committee followed this same track and excluded some agriculture lands west of Emigrant Lake (lands that had been previously included in the proposed boundary) and areas, paying forestland assessment, that were primarily grassland.

Mr. Rose initiated a discussion about whether fire history and experience in a given area could be used by the committee to justify whether an area was included as forestland-urban interface. Mr. Ballou offered that the administrative rules didn't preclude including that criteria; he recommended that decision criteria be recorded in the minutes and annotated on the maps. In particular, Mr. Rose noted that the Emigrant Lake and the Agate Lake¹ fuel environments were similar. However, the Emigrant Lake area, in Mr. Rose's experience, had higher winds during high fire incidence periods, which contributed to extreme fire behavior. Could the committee use this sort of information when it identified and classified forestland-urban interface areas? The committee discussed this and decided that such information could be used.

The committee focused on areas in the Elk Creek drainage. One question in the proposed forestland-urban interface boundary focused on a remote, loosely populated area along a road. The boundaries captured two separate areas along the road where dwelling concentrations were highest. However, dwellings were sprinkled between the two areas. The committee elected to connect the areas so everyone along that road would be treated equally.

In the Crowfoot Road area, the proposed boundary was approved.

Along the Rogue River, near Obstinate J Ranch, the proposed boundary was approved.

In the Rogue-Elk area, a minor boundary adjustment was made to exclude a large tract with an isolated dwelling.

Similar tightening up was done in the Trail area, especially concerning a few large tracts against public lands.

A tract was questioned along the Old Ferry Road, which ran on the south side of the Rogue River east of Trail. Properties on the north side of the river were included in the boundary. However, the committee decided not to include a property with a small concentration of dwellings located on the south side of the river because access to area was poor.

The committee reviewed an area near to where the Wall Creek Fire occurred. The properties reviewed were too loosely scattered to meet the criteria of forestland-urban interface.

A boundary was drawn around a concentration of homes below Lost Creek Dam.

Mr. Wolf passed along a suggestion that the Old Stage Road area be included in the Jacksonville area discussion at the committee's next meeting. This was a suggestion made by personnel from Jackson County Fire District #3.

Mr. Wolf and Mr. Massie asked whether to make proposed boundaries of the Greensprings/Jacksonville areas prior to the next meeting. Mr. Hennion confirmed that he

would like to see draft boundaries to show at the meeting.

The next meeting scheduled meeting is June 11, 1:00 p.m., same location.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:57 p.m.

Bill Rose, Secretary

Date

¹ In the draft minutes, Agate Lake was referred to as Antelope Lake. At the committee's June 11, 2003, meeting, it was noted that Antelope Lake should be changed to Agate Lake. There is no Antelope Lake in Jackson County.