



**King County Rural Forest Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 21, 2023 – 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
hybrid**

Commissioner	Present?	Commissioner (Ex-Officio/Non-Voting)	Present ?
Laurie Benson, WA DNR		Brett Anderson, KCD	✓
Jeff Boyce, rural cities/professional forester	✓	Kevin Zobrist - WSU Extension	
Wendy Davis, private forest landowner	✓	New Ranger, USDA Forest Svc.	
Wyatt Golding, non-timber values of forest land			
Li Hsi, forest landowner		Vacant, forest landowner	
Steve Horton, forest product user/forest landowner	✓	Vacant, forest landowner	
Mari Knutson, forest landowner	✓	Vacant, forest landowner	
Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe	✓	Vacant, forest landowner	
Grady Steere, large forest landowner	✓		
<i>five RFC members attending is a quorum</i>			
County Staff Present			
Richard Martin, DNRP		Joanna Nelson de Flores, DNRP	
Wendy Sammarco, DNRP			
Public			
Eric Oien		Mike Mackelwich	

Motions

01-09212023 A motion is made to accept both March and May meeting minutes as written. Steve Horton makes the motion; Jeff Boyce seconds the motion. The motion carries unanimously.

02-09212023 A motion is made to adjourn the September 2023 Rural Forest Commission meeting. Wendy Davis makes the motion; Steve Horton and Jeff Boyce second the motion. The motion carries unanimously.

Action Items

Action item: All RFC members assist in the RFC recruitment efforts. The RFC members could suggest and encourage forest landowners and managers to consider applying to serve on the RFC. (*unending action item*)

Action item: Craft and seek a permit exemption (from a clearing and grading permit) for fire hazard and/or invasive species abatement. (*note: KC Code currently being drafted to allow Firewise BMPs without a Clearing and Grading permit = change prompted by RFC Firewise letter and RFC input to the draft Comprehensive Plan*)

Action item: Forest operations that are impacted by neighboring structures that are >+\$1,000 value, should remain Forest Practice (currently Clearing and Grading); craft and pursue resolution through KC Policy (*holdover from previous RFC meeting*)

Action Item: Schedule/Coordinate Forest Field Tour for King County Council – Local Services and Land Use Committee (*note: waiting for renewed interest from King County Council*)

Action Item: Draft a letter to King County Council Local Services and Land Use Committee emphasizing the

importance of forest and including specific asks. This letter will be a precursor to the field tour. Wyatt Golding will draft the letter; Wendy Davis will work on logistics to support the tour.

Action Item: Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR's Trust Land Transfer Program

Action Item: Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR's Carbon Program

Action Item: Explore, amend the RFC Charter, motion etc. on adding a student member position to the Rural Forest Commission

Action Item: Schedule a presentation on wildland firefighting readiness with DNR, Fire Districts, USFS and King County

Action Item: Schedule a presentation with Eric Beach (KC AFI Permitting Specialist) on Ag permits, alternate permitting pathways, class IV generals.

Call to Order

Grady Steere called the meeting to order at 9:05. Grady, serving as an RFC Executive Committee member, is managing the meeting in Laurie Benson's (RFC Chair) absence. This meeting of the RFC is hybrid, with participation both in-person and online via MS Teams. *Note: shortly after the meeting was called to order the meeting location (Preston) lost power. The meeting preceded using laptops on site.*

Presentation: Historical Wildfire Patterns in Western Washington and Recent Research on Climate, Ecological, and Social Impacts – Crystal Raymond, Climate Impacts Group, University of WA

Crystal begins her presentation sharing about 'A Climate Resilience Guide for Small Forest Landowners in Western Washington' as a source of information about climate change and management options for small forest landowners.

Wildfire research in northwestern Cascadia has increased in the last 5-years. The western US has had a 7-9-fold increase in area burned between 1984-2017. During the period of 1984-2016 about 10% of forests in the west burned and 20% of the forests in Idaho burned. The prediction is that double the forested acres will burn between 2021-2030 compared with 1984-2020. Contributing factors to this increase in wildfire in the western US include: 1) climate change; 2) forest management; 3) fire suppression; 4) fire exclusion; 5) invasive species (rangeland invasive species).

The Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) is growing. Crystal reports that 1 in 3 new homes are being built in the WUI, and 1 in 10-acre parcels are now located in the WUI. For comparison in 1990 177,000 homes were within the WUI and in 2010 286,000 homes were in the WUI.

Wildfires in western WA and OR are characteristically large and severe. Very large wildfires have burned in western Cascadia and are likely to occur here again.

Research about historic wildfire is occurring. Andrew Merschel is utilizing dendroecology (tree ring analysis) and finding that large intense fires as well as low severity fires were common in Western WA. Climate predictions indicate higher temperatures and less rain in summer which is expected to result in 18 more days of high fire danger per year for the period 2010-2039 when compared to 1971-2000. The increased fire danger days will occur at the end of August and early September. No change in wind patterns is predicted; however, wind will cause a fire to grow substantially, particularly an east wind which typically has wind speeds and is a drying wind.

Collaborative research is occurring on ecological recovery after a wildfire. Brian Harvey, researcher on ecological response, is finding that tree regeneration high in areas that experience 80% overstory kill if there is a seed source nearby. Harvey's findings indicate resilient ecological response to high severity fires.

Discussion

-Grady Steere: October 1 is where you stopped modeling and yet October has fires occurring. Crystal: Yes, fires do occur in October; however, the 60-day average temperatures consistently drop in October, and the high wind events that happen in October are typically with rain.

-Grady Steere: The ‘perfect storm’ can still occur in October. Crystal: Yes, however October has high evening humidity recovery.

-Eric Oien: Early fires are typically grass fires; later in the year (August) large forest fires occur. Crystal: Ignition may happen early in the year but increase in area burned is typically coupled with wind events.

-Grady Steere: It is interesting how quickly forests will regenerate recreating a forest that could burn in the future. Crystal: In drier areas (eastside) after a fire the resilience response is not as strong.

-Mari Knutson: Following a small (1-2 acre) medium severity fire in the Cedar River Watershed, woodstraw was used prior to planting (site preparation and moisture retention). Where woodstraw was not used, survival was lower, and erosion occurred. Mari suggests stockpiling woodstraw for future wildfire recovery efforts. [*Note: Woodstraw is an engineered wood strand erosion control mulch that is all wood, naturally weed free, highly wind resistant and long lasting.*]

-Mari Knutson: Expresses concerns about powerlines, related infrastructure with wildfires/ignitions occurring under powerlines and would like to see better management of power transmission. Crystal: There is a DNR Working Group (electric utility group) researching this issue [*Note: Utility Wildland Fire Prevention Advisory Committee in WA DNR was established by the WA legislature in 2021*]

Eric Oien: Powerlines are scary, not only from ignition starts but also dangerous to work around. A California solution is imposing rolling blackouts on high fire days. Crystal: It is messy to manage electricity on high wildfire days, and yet managing a narrow 2-week window in September may be do-able

Grady Steere’s Moment

Grady has served one partial and two consecutive terms on the RFC. Grady represents the large forest landowner in King County. Grady shares that he has served a total of 9-years. He looks forward to tuning in on future RFC meetings that cover relevant topics. The RFC has benefitted from Grady’s contributions.

Presentation: Best Available Science and Intersection with the Comprehensive Plan – Eric Beach, King County Ag and Forest Permitting and Regulation Specialist

Eric shares that WA State is requiring updates on Best Available Science (BAS) as part of the required 2024 King County Comprehensive Plan update. The BAS information is provided by WA state. BAS was last updated in 2005. BAS is linked to the King County Critical Areas Ordinance. Critical areas regulations are intended to protect public health and safety and the environment. Critical areas regulations apply to new development, land use activities and must be based on BAS and demonstrate “special consideration” for anadromous fisheries. BAS areas of focus: 1) Riparian areas; 2) Geologically Hazardous Areas (alluvial fans, tsunami hazard areas); 3) Wetlands. State BAS indicates need to increase riparian area widths, to better protect riparian areas where channel is prone to move across floodplain (channel migration zone), and to increase compensatory mitigation requirements. KC code will continue to recognize ‘no local permits required for forest management’ = Forest Practice Regulations (buffers) will apply.

Discussion

Eric Oien: Will the channel migration zone change? Eric: Forest Practice regulations for channel migration zones will apply to working lands.

Wendy Sammarco: Will the buffers for ‘shorelines of the State’ water bodies change? Eric: No change, Forest Practice regulations will apply to working lands.

Past Meeting Minutes

The RFC members review March and May RFC meeting minutes.

Motion: A motion is made to accept both March 16 and May 18 meeting minutes as written. Steve Horton makes the motion; Jeff Boyce seconds the motion. The motion carries unanimously.

Updates on RFC Actions

Status of the RFC Firewise letter

The RFC Firewise letter was sent to the King County Executive and the Sarah Perry, King County Council Land

Use and Local Services Committee Chair.

Status of the RFC memo on the KC Comprehensive Plan Public Review draft

The memo from the RFC, indicating specific areas of concern and suggesting changes, was sent to the Comprehensive Plan Project Manager. This memo included Firewise BMPs and the current collision course with Clearing and Grading requirements.

Good News/Results

King County Code has been drafted, respecting the RFC Firewise request. Basically, the new code will allow Firewise practices within the 100' zone (from a home), using Firewise BMPs and requiring landowners to have a KC approved Forest Stewardship Plan that includes details about their intended Firewise practices. If a critical area exists in the Firewise zone, critical area buffers will still be required. All Firewise actions will be voluntary and not required by King County.

Presentation: Battery Energy Storage Systems proposed Ordinance - King County Council (brief) – Wendy Sammarco, King County staff

Wendy shares about proposed KCC ordinance on Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The ordinance proposes BESS are intended to store electricity generated from renewable energy sources (solar, wind) and to help address the intermittent nature of these sources by storing excess electricity. Because widespread uses of these systems is relatively new, there are not currently regulations in KC zoning code. The BESS legislation provides amendments to existing KC code, and new code to support BESS.

Discussion

- Eric Oien: There should be hazard awareness for BESS, for example sign posting on storage container.
- Steve Horton: These batteries may cause fires. It is important to locate BESS away from homes and forests. -
- Steve Horton: It is important that KC code address contamination, not just require a concrete pedestal, which is not enough.
- Brett Anderson: There should be required onsite fire containment and suppression tools.
- Jeff Boyce: Are these intended to be placed near transmission grid, so that BESS operators can sell power into the grid when price is high, and store when price is low? This may be an unintended consequence.
- Richard Martin: How widely will BESS occur on the landscape?

Agency Updates

- WSUe** – An in-person Coached Forest Stewardship Planning Class in Preston began in September and will be complete October 31. Sarah Stewart is a new education assistant, helping Kevin Zobrist. Sarah will be representing WSUe at future RFC meetings.
- Campbell Global-Snoqualmie Tree Farm** – Grady Steere's RFC term has expired and Grady will no longer be attending RFC meetings. If there are issues that are relevant to the large forest landowner and/or a relevant presentation at an RFC meeting, Grady may assist/attend.
- KCD** – KCD staff is assisting with coordination of urban forestry projects: Green Tukwilla and Green Burien. Also working with the Trees for Shoreline project 'Communi-trees.' Working on Forest Stewardship Plans for Wolf Creek Ravine (Seattle), Historic Cemetery in Newcastle, and forested area in Renton including 15-acres of restoration.
- KC DNRP (Parks)** – Overall budget is supported by Parks levy (voter approved) + Surface Water Management Fees and General fund. The RFC (report) asked for more KC staff and the 'Strategic Climate Action Plan' asked for KC forest restoration. Paul Fischer and Josi West have moved to be 100% Parks employees focusing on KC Parks forest restoration. These two vacated positions allowed for a restructure of the AFI group. Joanna Nelson de Flores was hired to work as an Urban Forester in the AFI group. The second vacant position is intended to do small forest landowner stewardship and community wildfire risk reduction (education and outreach); however, due to a budget short-fall, this second position will not be filled.

Adjourn

Motion: A motion is made to adjourn the September 2023 Rural Forest Commission meeting. Wendy Davis makes the motion; Steve Horton and Jeff Boyce second the motion. The motion carries unanimously

The meeting is adjourned at 11:35