



King County

**King County Rural Forest Commission
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, March 20, 2025 – 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Online**

Commissioner	Present?	Commissioner (Ex-Officio/Non-Voting)	Present ?
Laurie Benson, non-timber values of forest land	✓	Ellen Arnstein, KCD	✓
Jeff Boyce, rural cities/professional forester	✓	Sarah Stewart, WSU Extension	
Wendy Davis, private forest landowner		New Ranger, USDA Forest Svc.	
Steve Horton, forest product user/forest landowner	✓		
Mari Knutson, forest landowner	✓	Vacant, forest landowner	
Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe		Vacant, large forest landowner	
Tom Amorose, forest landowner	✓	Vacant, academic forester	
Jon Matson, forest landowner			
Chris Raynham, professional forester	✓		
Lori Price, DNR Representative	✓		
<i>Six RFC members attending is a quorum</i>			
County Staff Present			
Richard Martin, DNRP			
Wendy Sammarco, DNRP			
Guests Present			

Motions

- **01-03202025:** A motion to approve the January 16, 2025 meeting minutes is made. Tom Amorose makes the motion, Lori Price seconds the motion. The motion is approved unanimously.
- **02-03202025:** A motion is made to adjourn the meeting, Steve Horton makes the motion, Tom Amorose seconds the motion. The motion is passed unanimously.

Action Items

- All RFC members assist in RFC recruitment efforts. RFC members may suggest and encourage forest landowners and managers to consider applying to serve on the RFC. (*ongoing 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 – 2024 work in progress*)
- Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR’s Trust Land Transfer Program.
- Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR’s Carbon Program.
- Explore amending the RFC Charter, motion etc. on adding a student member position to the Rural Forest Commission.
- July RFC Field Trip to Climate Adaptive Planting Trial site.
- Track progress/delivery of RFC correspondence and report on outcomes. (*RFC Liaison responsibility*)

Call to Order

Laurie Benson calls the meeting to order at 9:00 am. The RFC meeting is online. The meeting begins with a member roll call. A quorum is present.

Presentation: Wildfire Clearing Code Changes – Overview & Status

Wendy Sammarco and Richard Martin, King County staff

Wendy shares that the new wildfire resilient landscaping code is approved. This new code is part of the approved Comprehensive Plan package. The wildfire code was effective on January 2, 2025. The wildfire code is part of King County Code 16.82 Clearing and Grading. The new code begins with definitions including habitable space, pruning, tree crown, and Wildfire Risk Assessment certification. The basics of the wildfire code: Clearing for the purposes of wildfire preparedness that does not otherwise require another permit allows landowners to understory clear within 15 feet of habitable space, understory clearing and tree removal and pruning within 10 feet of an installed above ground petroleum tank, within 30 feet of a residential structure, with understory clearing and tree pruning underneath a tree crown to provide up to 10 feet of vertical clearance from the ground, within 30 feet of a residential structure tree removal and pruning to provide up to 15 feet of vertical clearance over driveways and roads used for emergency vehicle access, within 30 feet of a residential structure tree removal and pruning to provide up to 18 feet between crowns, and tree removal and pruning to provide 10 feet between tree crowns and decks, chimneys, and overhead wires. Also clearing is allowed up to 100 feet from a residential structure if advised by a wildfire risk assessment or a forest stewardship plan that includes best management practices to reduce wildfire risk and the plan is approved by King County, in the 30 - 60 foot zone trees can be spaced with 12 feet between crowns, and in the 60 – 100 foot zone trees can be spaced with 6 feet between crowns.

Wendy shares that the wildcard to this wildfire code may be the new critical area ordinance, anticipated to be passed in late 2025. It is likely that if a critical area (pond, stream, forested wetland, etc.) occurs in the 0-100 zone, that critical area buffer requirements will apply.

Discussion:

- Ellen Arnstein: The tree spacing of 12 feet between crowns in the 30 – 60-foot zone and 6 feet between crowns in the 60 – 100-foot zone may not be appropriate and may conflict with managing for forest health. Richard Martin: The wildfire code is not a ‘must do,’ the code is voluntary, under some conditions it may be ideal, but may not be ideal under all conditions.
- Ellen Arnstein: Recommends to not remove/modify the code, rather do communicate to landowners that the code is a not a concrete recommendation.
- Mari Knutson: As a small forest landowner, not sure there is a correlation between trees around a house and wildfire. There may be a problem with insurance companies reading this code.
- Chris Raynham: Spacing is fairly small with 12 feet between crowns and 6 feet between crowns.
- Steve Horton: I agree with Chris about the spacing. This spacing is trying to protect residents from wildfire. The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) is working on this and is also aware of insurance companies’ interpretations. This new wildfire code is not mandatory. The code provides no permit cost on wildfire clearing actions if a landowner wants to protect their home.
- Wendy Sammarco: Chris, what is the shaded fuel break spacing at Landsburg?
Chris Raynham: The prescription is 20’ spacing.
- Tom Amorose: Might someone, under the guise of this wildfire code, do a timber harvest?
Wendy Sammarco: Code writers do their best to minimize/eliminate abuse/misuse of the code, with

restrictive language and limitations.

- Richard Martin: Echoes what Ellen Arnstein shared, that we need to be clear with our messaging.

Review and Motion to approve RFC Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the January 16, 2025 meeting minutes is made. Tom Amorose makes the motion, Lori Price seconds the motion. The motion is approved unanimously.

Public Comments

None.

Agency Updates

- **DNR**, Lori Price: The Legislative session is still going on. Because of the timing of the state budget, Ferguson is navigating with Inslee's budget. The revenue projection is worse than anticipated, with additional cuts requested in general fund spending. DNR received a King County permit, after 23 months, to move forward with Tiger Mountain parking lot off of Highway 18. Commissioner Upthegrove put a pause on timber sales. Timber Sales program is funded by timber sale revenue. Discover Pass may increase to \$50, if a bill is passed in the 2025 legislative session.
 - Tom Amorose: Several years ago, DNR was looking into developing a carbon credit program, what is the status?
 - Lori: DNR did a carbon credit pilot project and experienced conflict with some stakeholders, and then the legislation did not pass a bill to support the carbon program. With a new Commissioner (Upthegrove), a DNR carbon program may or may not move forward.
- **KCD**, Ellen Arnstein: KCD has a new staff member, Natalia Williams, Project Coordinator, Wildfire Mitigation and Rural Forest Stewardship. Natalia will do home ignition assessments and cost share. KCD may be working with a Green River College student and their capstone project, having the student help with landowner Forest Stewardship Plans.
- **SPU**, Chris Raynham: No updates.
- **King County DNRP**, Richard Martin: The Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) draft will be completed in late 2025. The CWPP team is engaging with Tribes and Fire Chiefs. A certifiable template for wildfire risk assessments is under development. KC has installed a climate adaptation planting trial. The Strategic Climate Action Plan update will be submitted to King County Council for review and approval; anticipated to be approved Q4 2025, and active in 2026. Actions in the updated SCAP include: accelerating land protection through the Land Conservation Initiative, expanding the KC carbon program, accelerating restoration of KC owned/managed lands, increasing support to small forest landowners, and urban forest work focused on increasing canopy cover in urban unincorporated communities that have limited/no access to green space. A presentation to the RFC on the SCAP update is planned.
 - Lori Price: Does the CWPP work include DNR?
Richard Martin: Yes, DNR is included.
 - Tom Amorose: Kudos on the installation of the climate adaptation trial.
Richard Martin: Kathleen Farley Wolf is the project manager, and this project is identified in the KC 30-Year Forest Plan.

RFC Strategic Priorities Report & 2025 RFC Focus: Setting the Course for 2025

Laurie leads the discussion, with the goal being to choose two objectives from the RFC Strategic Priorities Report. The two chosen objectives will be the focus of the RFC in 2025. What do we want to accomplish and what/how do we accomplish it? The suggested priorities document is discussed. *(Note: the suggested priorities document is a subset of objectives from the RFC Strategic Priorities Report. The*

RFC members selected this subset of objectives at the January 2025 meeting and/or independently. The subset of objectives is summarized in the suggested priorities document.) Following a discussion about the objectives, the RFC members vote, with the criteria being each RFC member will select two objectives. The two objectives selected, which received the highest number of votes:

- A) Objective 3.2.2: Support Office of Emergency Management coordination of comprehensive wildfire preparedness, response, and recovery plan. = NOW ranking
- B) Objective 1.3.5: Investigate and, if appropriate, establish a county owned and managed “demonstration forest” to serve as an example of forest management for landowners and an outdoor classroom that demonstrates various sustainable forest practices for students and King County residents = NOW ranking

Concerns of the Commissioners

Steve Horton shares the current Community Wildfire Protection Map. Lori Price comments that the map identifies more area than just the wildland urban interface and that the map goes beyond King County boundaries. Steve Horton shares that extending beyond the WUI and King County boundaries is intentional, because wildfire does not respect boundaries.

Adjourn

A motion is made to adjourn the meeting, Steve Horton makes the motion, Tom Amorose seconds the motion. The motion is passed unanimously

The meeting ended at 11:56 am.