



King County

King County Rural Forest Commission
Approved Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 18, 2025 – 9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Online – Microsoft Teams Call

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		Mike Lasecki, DNRP	
Wendy Sammarco, DNRP			
Guests			
Hemalatha Velappan			

Motions

- **01-09182025:** A motion to approve the May 15, 2025 meeting minutes is made. Steve Horton makes the motion to approve the minutes as written, Chris Raynham seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously.
- **02-09182025:** A motion is made to adjourn the meeting, Chris Raynham makes the motion, Mari Knutson seconds the motion. The motion passes unanimously.

Action Items

- All RFC members assist in RFC recruitment efforts. RFC members may suggest and encourage forest landowners and forest managers to consider applying to serve on the RFC. (*ongoing action item*)
- Review final draft of the King County Community Wildfire Protection Plan and draft RFC letter of support (to King County Executive and King County Council).
(*note: letter should be completed at November 2025 RFC meeting*)
- 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*)
- Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR’s Trust Land Transfer Program.
- Schedule a presentation on the WA DNR’s Carbon Program.

- Explore amending RFC Charter; motion, etc. to add a student member position to the RFC.
 - Track progress/delivery of RFC correspondence and report on outcomes.
(RFC Liaison responsibility)
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Call to Order

Laurie Benson calls the meeting to order at 9:02 am. The RFC meeting is online. The meeting begins with a member roll call. A quorum of RFC members is present.

Presentation: WA DNR Wildfire Ready Neighbor Program

Guy Gifford, DNR Assistant Division Manager, Community Resilience Program

Guy shares that Wildfire Ready Neighbors (WRN) is a social marketing program intended to engage communities in wildfire preparedness. DNR has several strategic plans: Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan, 20-Year Forest Health Strategic Plan Eastern Washington, and the Western Washington Forest Health Strategic Plan, which is currently being developed. Guy then shares the Top 25 places most likely to be exposed to wildland fire in WA: #1 is Leavenworth and #25 is Manson; all 25 locations are east of the Cascade crest.

Guy explains that the WRN emphasizes a point protection program, with points having value to a homeowner and the community. Guy then explains the WRN is a social marketing program, using an approach to develop activities aimed at changing or maintaining people's behavior for the benefit of individuals and society. Social marketing is a proven tool for influencing behavior in a sustainable and cost-effective way. The WRN focuses on adults and uses words that people can identify with. The behavior WRN hopes to influence are wildfire risk mitigation actions around structures. With WRN the focus starts with the house. WRN roll-out uses a marketing surge targeting a particular county, with the surge occurring over 4-6 weeks. The marketing surge provides an opportunity for a landowner to sign up for a wildfire ready plan. The cost to the agency for the marketing surge is \$20K - \$30K. Examples of recent WRN community actions and success are incorporated in the surge to spread the message. Model communities are also used to tell the story, build trust, and demonstrate the effectiveness of the WRN program. Often local news/media outlets help deliver the message of the WRN program, increasing the effectiveness and expanding the target audience. Nearby WRN surges have occurred in Pierce, Thurston, and Mason counties.

Guy compares the WRN program with Firewise USA. Firewise is a recognition program that involves a community assessment and results in a Firewise Plan for the community. WRN is a motivational program, motivating individuals. There is synergy between WRN and Firewise. Guy shares that DNR has a grant program to support/implement WRN for local fire agencies and NGOs with the grant amounts ranging between \$5K and \$30K; Guy also shares that there have been 75% funding cuts for the WRN program this biennium. Guy shows a triangle with WRN at the top targeting individuals; the mid-section of the triangle is Firewise USA targeting neighborhoods; and the bottom section is the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network targeting communities.

Discussion

- Chris Raynham: How are the WRN partners utilized?
Guy: It varies and depends on the expertise of the partners.
- Wendy Sammarco: If Vashon were interested in rolling out the WRN Program, how would that work?
Guy: DNR would provide coaching, and train people to do home visits.
- Wendy Sammarco: After the initial WRN roll-out, how do you keep the program alive?
Guy: Sustainability can come through the CWPP, with WRN being one tool; coordination should occur between different complimentary programs.

- Ellen Arnstein: KCD, Eastside Fire and Rescue, and KC are doing home assessments and are coordinating closely with other agencies to help with sustainability. It would be great to do a marketing blitz, yet capacity is limited.
Guy: Key items are the same, with or without a marketing blitz, with the top 4-5 things covered uniformly and the rest customized to the area.
- Richard Martin: I noticed KC is not on the list for WRN program roll-out. What is the algorithm used to choose counties for WRN roll-out, and how are you managing funding shortfalls?
Guy: WRN roll-outs are based on the information in the WA State Wildland Fire Protection 10-Year Strategic Plan. The westside County (Pierce) is not listed in that Plan; however, the Pierce WRN roll-out is based on proviso funding through the legislature. Current situation is the WRN Program is managing with a 75% funding cut. The approach is to keep momentum going where there is momentum, but for a 'full meal deal' there is not \$30K in the budget for rolling out WRN in new counties.
- Tom Amorose: Great social media conversations about awareness of forest landowners for the risk homeowners face; how would you recommend advising landowners?
Guy: Homes are lost by embers, shrubs, and beauty bark, not by the forest. First, take care of area around your home; an ember shower is the home ignition source. You can reduce home vulnerability to wildfire by managing the home ignition zone.

Presentation: Snoqualmie Tribe Wildland Fire Program

Karen Zirkle, Snoqualmie Tribe Wildland Fire Program Manager

Karen begins by sharing that she began working for the Tribe as their Fire Program Manager in June 2025. Prior to that she worked for DNR for 12 years. She shares that she is passionate about working for the Snoqualmie Tribe and about wildfire. Karen's focus includes determining where fire fits into the Tribe's culture; how does the Tribe protect their lands from catastrophic fire; and how can neighbors work together to bring nature back into balance. The Snoqualmie Tribe Wildland Fire Program is brand new and being built from scratch. The objectives include providing for cultural burning and to establish a more self-sufficient wildfire suppression program. The Tribe's need for a Wildland Fire Program is centered on their 12K acre Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Forest, located north of the South Fork Tolt Municipal Watershed (City of Seattle), east of the Tulalip Tribe forestland and west of the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest.

This Snoqualmie Tribe forestland was purchased by the Tribe in 2021. Karen is investigating other Tribal fire programs, for example, the Colville and Quinalt Tribes. Karen is researching cultural burning, which is challenging for many reasons: tribes were prevented from burning the landscape; the Snoqualmie Tribe is a dispersed Tribe and has likely all but lost their connection with fire. Karen is hopeful that soil core samples may reveal where Snoqualmie ancestors burned. Prairies near North Bend may be a place to start with soil core investigation. We know that camas, fireweed, and other species thrive after a fire and that grazing areas can be maintained with fire. Cultural burning is dynamic and is the same yet different than prescribed fire. In the near-term, actions and preparations include Snoqualmie Tribe staff and some Tribal members are trained and red-carded; agreements are in place to participate in interagency wildfire response; a prairie burn is planned for next fall.

Discussion

- Chris Raynham: Exciting news that you are starting a Wildland Fire Program; you are off to a good start.
- Richard Martin: Snoqualmie Tribe members have been dispersed for a long time, is this circumstance like other Tribes? We are curious about pre-settlement tribal history.
Karen: We are just learning and have researched that burning is done by the Chehalis Tribe. It is emotional to share and learn about what was lost and what is now brought back/available.
Richard: Shares that Tribal history in the southeastern United States was mostly a white version of Tribal history; hopes discoveries will be grounded in true Tribal history.

- Steve Horton: Are you looped in with the CWPP Team, Mike Lasecki and Alli Ferrari?
Karen: Yes, I have met with Mike and Alli and will continue to meet and provide input to the CWPP.
- Hemalatha Velappan: What is the difference between cultural, broadcast, and Tribal burning? Is cultural burning like broadcast burning?
Karen: Prescribed burning requires an approved prescription, approved by the DNR. If the Snoqualmie Tribe Ancestral Forest goes into a Trust, the land will no longer require DNR permit approval. The differences between cultural, broadcast, and Tribal burning is not a difference of prescription but rather a difference in the ‘why’ of the burning.
- Chris Raynham: About the Fall Workshop, what might be on the agenda?
Karen: Preparedness and prevention, who are our partners, plans for 2026, with prescribed fire seeking opportunities to work together, inventory of fire response teams, expectations of the Snoqualmie Tribe. This Workshop will likely be held at the National Fire Academy near North Bend.
- Wendy Sammarco: Where might the Tribe burn?
Karen: Possibly co-owned prairies; however, there will be challenges with smoke management permits.

Public Comment

None.

Review and Motion to Approve Prior RFC Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the May 15, 2025 meeting minutes is made. Steve Horton makes the motion to approve the minutes as written, Chris Raynham seconds the motion. The motion is approved unanimously.

Discussion & Possible Actions Items Inspired by Today’s Presentations

- Laurie Benson: The RFC will be supporting KC OEM on wildfire preparedness; what other actions should the RFC focus on?
- Steve Horton: The final CWPP will be good but not perfect.
- Laurie Benson: Would a letter of support for CWPP be helpful?
- Steve Horton: An RFC letter of support has value; however, it is not critically important. The RFC should be on the side of supporting the goals of the CWPP.
- Richard Martin: I agree that RFC support is not critically important; however, KCC always wants to hear about support or opposition. This is the sort of thing RFC should provide support for.
- Laurie Benson: Now that we have heard multiple presentations about wildfire, is there any other information that we need?
- Mari Knutson: The RFC should hear from BPA and/or PSE about powerline management, relative to wildfire hazard mitigation.
- Mari Knutson: We would benefit from transparency on which landowners/parcels have had home wildfire risk assessments, and which neighborhoods are recognized as Firewise Communities. We can then determine where there are gaps in wildfire information sharing.
- Ellen Arnstein: Interagency organizations meet quarterly to discuss wildfire, and forest stewardship. Perhaps a gap analysis may reveal areas that are unintentionally not being served.
- Ellen Arnstein: KCD does not offer evacuation information; rather, KCD focuses on home preparedness.
- Steve Horton: The perception that the CWPP will identify who will save you and guide you out is not appropriate. Indirectly, the government will provide guidance and then it is up to individuals to act.
- Laurie Benson: Let’s make sure the CWPP addresses our concerns.
- Richard Martin: The role of the RFC relative to KC and Wildfire is -
 - 1) Strategic priorities about wildfire - Mike Lasecki’s position as KC Wildfire Mitigation Specialist;
 - 2) Steve Horton serves on the CWPP Advisory Group;
 - 3) RFC to review the CWPP. Mari’s questions and concerns about gaps are relevant and important.
- Laurie Benson: Would suggesting a gap analysis be of value to include in our letter of support?

- Jeff Boyce: A gap analysis to identify areas that have been missed is important.
- Steve Horton: The RFC should compare other County CWPPs with the King County CWPP. The CWPPs are not intended to be super detailed. While a gap analysis of missed areas is important, this level of detail may not be appropriate for a CWPP.

Agency Updates

- **KCD, Ellen Arnstein:** WSU has extended the deadline to register for the fall Preston Coached Planning course. KCD is working with WSUe and KC on an equipment loaning program, knotweed injector (KC), and lance. KCD Monitoring program is approved.
- **SPU, Chris Raynham:** None.
- **King County DNRP, Richard Martin:** The Upthegrove initiative to preserve 77K acres of mature forest/complex canopy in WA includes 11% of this type of forest in KC and managed by DNR. This specifically represents about 11,000 acres in KC. KC is analyzing the economic impact of this DNR action. Richard suggests the RFC should provide input to KC's response. KC may have a position by late October; however, the issue is complex. RFC input would be helpful. The DNRP Parks 6-year Open Space Levy was strongly approved, allowing for continued management and acquisitions for KC Parks.

Recruitment

Wendy Sammarco shares the RFC member recruitment ad, which will be posted online on Next Door, and a request will be made to KCC to include the ad in newsletters to constituents. The ad will post in October.

Adjourn

A motion is made to adjourn the meeting, Chris Raynham makes the motion, Mari Knutson seconds the motion. The motion is passed unanimously.

The meeting ended at 11:56 am.