

## HOUSE AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, September 17, 2013

HR D, State Capitol, Salem

**Members Present:** Representative Witt, Representative Frederick, Representative Esquivel, Representative Thompson, Representative Krieger, Representative Reardon, Representative Unger, Representative Whitsett

**Member Excused:** Representative Clem

### ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE RULES

The Committee adopted the proposed committee [rules](#) dated September 17, 2013.

### 2013 FOREST FIRE SEASON

Representative Bentz spoke about the fire in his district last year that burned one million acres, much of it sage brush and sage grouse habitat. He noted the effects of fuel loading on fires. He looks for better coordination with the federal government to reduce fuel loads and to restore burned areas. At this time, federal funding goes to fight the fires, not for restoration after a fire.

Senator Baertschiger discussed the relationship between forest health and the size of a fire. He described the dry lightning storm that led to a large complex of fires in his district this summer. He noted the negative effects of these fires: timber lost; poor smoke and air quality (fire fighters couldn't use air assets); tourism (the Rogue River was closed to rafting due to Big Windy fire). He also indicated a need to start addressing forest health with our federal partners.

Representative Witt showed a [photo](#) of a fire that started near where he was camping this summer.

Doug Decker, State Forester, Oregon Department of Forestry provided a [letter](#) to the Committee Chair and stated that this has been a historic fire season; 116,000 acres burned on state-protected lands, the most since 1951; \$120 million has been spent, the most expensive fire season in state history; four fire fighters died; and there were untold financial and resource losses on timber and other values, including tourism and smoke/air quality impacts.

Travis Medema, Deputy Chief, Fire Protection Division, Oregon Department of Forestry presented the Fire Season 2013 [Update](#) and noted that early predictions of an extreme fire season were correct. In May and June there were more than 200 fires. In July, fire conditions worsened. On July 26<sup>th</sup> an efficient and effective lightning storm produced no rain; everywhere there was a strike, there was a fire. Many fires (more than 1,000) didn't make the news because they were stopped at less than 10 acres. The energy release component (ERC) measures the amount of moisture in alive and dead fuels and is an indication of how readily and hot a fire will burn. On July 26<sup>th</sup> all-time records were set for the ERC on that date and five significant fire complexes were the result. At one time, the Douglas Complex had more than 3,000 people working on it and at the peak of the fire season in southern Oregon, more than 6,000 people were working on

the fires. He also said that the Douglas complex fire was the largest in the nation for 11 days this summer. The initial attack effectiveness saved millions of dollars not counting environmental resources.

Nancy Hirsch, Chief, Fire Protection Division, Oregon Department of Forestry said the net cost estimate is \$73 million for the 2013 fire season (this is the total cost minus expected US Forest Service and FEMA reimbursements). They currently estimate \$28 million in large fire costs that are not covered by the state's insurance policy or previously approved funding. She said lightning strikes this summer were more than double the 10 year average. There have been 1,083 fires to date: 43 percent (483) were lightning caused, it is typically about 33 percent. She noted that Oregon is the only state with an insurance policy and fire payment system in place.

The Committee discussed the value of the lands protected by ODF, the state's ability to pay the cost of fighting fires, and land ownership patterns in southern Oregon.

Heath Curtiss, Oregon Forest Industries Council discussed private land management in the face of wildfire and wildfire risks associated with neighboring lands.

Phil Adams, Roseburg Forest Products (RFP) made a [presentation](#) and noted that RFP operates in O&C lands (red squares on [maps](#) are RFP lands). He reviewed circumstances that existed prior to the implementation of the Northwest Forest Plan and noted the need for a responsible neighbor policy.

Mr. Adams described the events of July 26<sup>th</sup> and showed photos. He indicated that that it will require a three year plan to get back to where they were before the fire. The state Forest Practices Act does not require replanting after a catastrophic event. It will require an estimated \$6 million investment; reforestation will start in the 2014 winter.

Javier Goirigolzarri, Communities for a Healthy Forest made a [presentation](#) and [discussed](#) the circumstances after the fires of the early 2000 and the effect of the timber economy on school enrollments and other community interests. He also submitted a [document](#) entitled, "Fire in Oregon's Forests" to the Committee.

Mike Cloughsey, Oregon Forest Resources Institute presented "[Fire in Oregon's Forests; Risks, Effects and Treatment Options.](#)" The presentation reviewed recent fire behavior in Oregon and treatments to lessen fire severity.

## **PROPOSED GRASSY MOUNTAIN GOLD MINE**

Vance Thornsberry, Vice President Exploration, Calico Resources made a [presentation](#) that described the proposed mine site and permitting process at Grassy Mountain. He provided a history of the mine site and regional gold deposits. It is expected that the mine will provide 150 – 200 construction jobs and operational employment for 120 – 150 people. The average salary is expected to be \$70,000 plus benefits.

Representative Bentz [discussed](#) efforts to offer good wage jobs to high school graduates in Malheur County in cooperation with community college. Oregon has been in a mining moratorium for about 40 years; this has resulted in a saved resource bank but mining techniques have also improved over this time. A question is how to ensure that local communities reap the benefits of mining? A key is offering jobs to kids in these communities. He praised Calico and the Department of Geology and Mineral Industries for efforts toward the permitting of this mine site.

Vicki McConnell, State Geologist, Department of Geology and Mineral Industries [briefed](#) the Committee on the Division 37 permitting process.

Randy Jones, Department of Environmental Quality described the current status of the Calico application. He noted the value of interagency collaboration on permitting. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2014, Calico will be assembling the consolidated application. Early 2016 is the target for construction to start. The agencies want a replicable permitting process for other sites to use.

## **FARM TO SCHOOL AND SCHOOL GRANT AWARDS**

Rick Sherman, Child Nutrition Program, Oregon Department of Education provided the Committee with a [news release](#) announcing the grant awards and a [list](#) of highlights and innovations from the winning grant proposals. He offered to come back for follow up report for the Committee on these grants.

## **CORMORANTS**

Ron Anglin, Wildlife Division Administrator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife told the Committee that the US Fish and Wildlife Service is not issuing more permits for cormorant control, but the Regional Office is identifying a one to two year pathway for Northwest states to manage cormorants under a state plan. They are submitting a revised depredation permit for the Tillamook estuary for 2014 and expect it to be granted. The Department is also collecting information on the Coquille and Rogue, but won't have until 2014. He also offered the Committee [information](#) regarding double-crested cormorant breeding colonies in the Klamath Basin and an update on the ODFW Avian Predation Program.

## **IMPORTANCE OF HUNTING AND FISHING TO OREGONIANS**

Curt Melcher, Deputy Director and Roger Fuhrman, Information and Education Division Administrator, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife made a [presentation](#) on the importance of hunting and fishing to Oregonians. They noted that \$1 billion is spent on fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing travel in the state. These activities are tied to 14,769 jobs and \$515 million in salaries and wages.

The Committee asked for a comparison of the economic contribution of hunting/fishing to other major economic drivers in the state.

## **2014 COMMITTEE BILLS**

The Committee briefly discussed potential 2014 committee bills:

1. Follow up to House Bill 3441 (2013) to allow OWEB dollars to go to research related to salmon.
2. Rep. Reardon noted his interest in a hearing regarding bees and pesticides in November 2013. He said there may be a need for a 2014 bill out of this discussion.
3. The Coastal Multi-Species Conservation and Management Plan may also require legislation.