

County Commissioners
Colm Willis, Chair
Kevin Cameron
Danielle Bethell



**Chief Administrative
Officer**
Jan Fritz

**MARION COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
WORK SESSION**

**Forest Land Classification Committee
Minutes**

Thursday, May 21, 2026, 1:30 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Commissioners' Boardroom
Courthouse Square, 555 Court St. NE, Suite 5231
Salem, Oregon 97301

ATTENDANCE:

Commissioners: Kevin Cameron, and Danielle Bethell.

Board Office: Trevor Lane, Jonathan Sanford, Kendall Hall, and Matt Lawyer.

Legal Counsel: Michelle Teed, and Scott Norris.

Assessor's Office: Tom Rohlfig, Nate Combs, Brooks Skidmore, Jordan Schultz, Matthew Hamilton

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF): Chelsey Peters, Matt Mackey, and Kyle Kaupp

Commissioner Kevin Cameron called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

1. Welcome & Introductions

-Commissioner Kevin Cameron

2. Discussion

-ODF

- Reviewed the North Cascade District protection program:
 - Roughly 660,000 acres across several counties:
 - Columbia River to Lacombe/Scio area.
 - Cascade Highway to Cascade Crest.
 - Typical fire season is about 102 days:
 - Roughly 128 wildland fire dispatches.
 - 58 requiring suppressions.
 - Staffing and equipment:
 - Seasonal firefighters.
 - Multiple engines.
 - Water tenders.
 - Dozers.
 - Access to statewide incident management teams.
 - Contracted resources.
 - Protection readiness budget is approximately \$3.4 million, funded by:
 - Forest landowners' protection assessments.
 - Matching general fund contributions.
- Forest land classification:
 - Which lands meet definition of forest land to be protected from wildfire.
 - Definition includes:
 - Woodland.

- Brush.
 - Timber land.
 - Grazing land.
 - Cleared land with sufficient vegetation to constitute fire hazard:
 - Regardless of zoning or tax status.
 - Subject to forest patrol assessment and potential improvement surcharges.
- Examples of land that may not qualify as forest land:
 - Irrigated perennial grass fields that stay green and present low fire hazard.
 - Well-maintained commercial Christmas tree farms:
 - Depending on condition.
 - Recently cleared properties with forest vegetation and slash fully removed.
- Overlap with other fire protection:
 - Many properties pay rural fire district and ODF forest patrol assessments.
 - Even non-paying properties are typically still served during wildfire response.
 - Federal lands are not part of forest patrol assessment base:
 - Covered by mutual aid and cooperative agreements.
 - Bureau of Land Management (BLM) pays under specific agreements.
- Reviewed cost recovery and liability:
 - Landowners receive suppression services without cost recovery:
 - Unless there is willful, malicious, or negligent behavior.
 - Negligent actions may result in responsibility for suppression costs:
 - Even for paying landowners.
 - State protection resources can engage on federal land:
 - When there is an immediate threat to private lands.
- Need to update classification:
 - Original classifications date from 1960s:
 - Only minor administrative changes since.
 - Land use, vegetation, and structures have significantly changed:
 - Created gaps and inequities.
 - Some properties are paying, others not.
 - Aerial imagery and Geographic Information System (GIS) use:
 - Improve accuracy.
 - Identify missed parcels.
 - Correct partial parcel coverage.
- Legal framework and requirements:
 - Classification required by Oregon Revised Statutes (ORS) and Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs).
 - Owners of classified land must provide fire protection:
 - Typically, by paying patrol assessments to ODF.
 - In rare cases self-provided protection via agreement with ODF.
- Committee composition and role:
 - Committee consists of six members:
 - Three appointed by:
 - State Forester.
 - State Fire Marshal.
 - Oregon State University (OSU) Extension Service.
 - Three appointed by Marion County Board of Commissioners.
 - The committee:
 - Reviews maps, images, soil data, and information to classify lands.
 - Develops and refines countywide classification map.
 - Ensures equity in who pays for protection services.
- Discussed candidate profiles and representation:
 - Suggested representation from:

- Industrial forest landowners.
 - Small forest landowners.
 - Agricultural/Christmas tree interests.
 - Need geographic, sector and county-wide equity/diversity:
 - Not dominated by any one group, agency, or region.
- Public sentiment and communication:
 - Strong local frustration with state and federal agencies following recent fires.
 - Need transparency, clear explanation of benefits, services and message.
 - Maintain strong relationships with United States Forest Service (USFS), BLM, rural fire districts, and county emergency management.

3. Closing & Questions

-All

- Committee is a county committee:
 - ODF providing secretariat support.
 - Scheduling, agendas, technical materials.
- County likely to be responsible for meeting spaces and hosting materials on web.
- A commissioner does not have to serve on committee.
- ODF will coordinate with county to ensure compliance:
 - Statute requirements, public notice, and hearing processes.
- Timing and workload:
 - Meeting tentatively targeted for October or November:
 - Depending on fire season.
 - Full classification process is expected to take 18–24 months.
 - Hold public meetings in different locations and at various times for access.
- Historical use of state–federal agreements and incident aviation resources:
 - Tankers, helicopters, etc.
- Upcoming ODF infrastructure changes:
 - New office construction at North Fork.
- Collaborate with county emergency management and neighboring counties’ commissioners and fire organizations.

4. Next Steps

-All

- Provide county with:
 - List of three state-appointed committee members and contact information:
 - State Forester.
 - State Fire Marshal.
 - OSU Extension appointee.
 - List of potential local candidates for three county-appointed seats.
- Share:
 - Sample appointment letter:
 - Support documents align with county appointment procedures.
 - Updated statutory references and corrected materials.
- County actions:
 - Develop formal appointment process for committee:
 - Consistent with other county committees.
 - Work with legal counsel to:
 - Determine board order requirements.
 - Draft board order appointing members.
 - Decide how appointments will be structured and recorded.

- Prepare and launch recruitment process:
 - Application forms for potential members.
 - Outreach to target stakeholder groups.
- Coordination and schedule:
 - Assign county staff members to coordinate with ODF on:
 - Recruitment timeline.
 - Drafting and routing the board order.
 - Setting up public-facing information:
 - Web pages, notices, draft maps.
 - Aim for:
 - Board order and appointments by approximately August.
 - Sufficient time for recruitment, application review, and selection.
 - First committee meeting in fall:
 - Target October, subject to fire season conditions.
 - Plan public hearings and sessions once draft classifications are available.

Adjourned – time: 2:10 p.m.

Minutes by: Mary Vityukova

Reviewed by: Gary L. White