

DECISION CRITERIA
POLK COUNTY FORESTLAND CLASSIFICATION COMMITTEE

December 5, 2008

General Parameters

- The primary mission of the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) is protecting forest resources (ORS 477.005). The definition of “forest resource” in the law includes vegetation and harvested products besides trees and wood. ODF’s forest protection role in the law is not strictly to protect trees.
- The ODF mission also includes protection of forestland, as defined in ORS 477.001. Grazing land included in a district is forestland. It is acceptable to include existing Class 3 land (already in the district) with structures where the structure density and characteristics of the vegetation meets criteria to be established (see below) and consider it as "forestland-urban interface".
- ODF has a role in structural protection in the forestland-urban interface within an established district boundary. One of the tasks for the Polk County Forestland Classification Committee, and this classification effort, is to define the point at which structure density and vegetation characteristics indicate that ODF should not be responsible for providing fire protection. The exact density of structures that constitutes this point will likely vary depending on a number of situational factors.
- ODF and the Polk County Forestland Classification Committee should not move to protect additional lands without forest cover (i.e. trees) where the primary value at risk is life and personal property. There is a mechanism in the law (ORS 476.310) for the counties to do this with assistance from ODF and the Office of State Fire Marshal. There is also the option of establishing a rural or municipal fire district under ORS Chapter 478.
- The agency should only move to include lands into the ODF protection system with forest tree cover when addition of those lands would improve its ability to protect timberland with commercial forest product value, not when the primary value to be protected is life and property.

Specific Criteria

- All parcels within ODF's West Oregon District Protection Boundary should be examined for classification.
 - Give each classification type, including "non-forestland" lots or areas within a lot, a code for use by county assessor's offices in their respective databases.
- There should be no minimum size lots for classification.
- The Polk County Forestland Classification Committee will review all Polk County lands that are within the West Oregon District's forest protection boundary by ¼ of ¼ legal section "blocks" to evaluate appropriate classification of forestland.
- Exemptions (non-forestland classification) should not be allowed on an individual lot basis within a sub-division or area of like fuels. Subdivisions or areas of like fuels and probability of fire suppression needs should be classified alike.
- Parcels of land that are classified as "forestland" need to be contiguous to, or a threat to, land that is also classified as "forestland".
- All lands within a forest protection district should be reviewed at a minimum of every five years.

Instructions for Polk Forestland Classification Flowchart

This "Forestland Classification Flowchart" is to be used only in assisting the Polk County Forestland Classification Committee, in determining which lands, including Wildland Urban Interface lands should be included within the protection of the Oregon Department of Forestry, and part of the statewide "complete and coordinated" fire protection system.

The following instructions are to be used with the Polk Classification Flowchart.

1. Does it meet the definition of Forestland?

You must first determine if the lands meet the definition of forestland* (see definition of forestland below). If it does not meet the definition then the land will **not to be classified** as forestland. If the answer is "yes" then go to # 2.

* Forestland Definition ORS Chapter 477.001: "Forestland" means any woodland, brushland, timberland, grazing land or clearing that, during any time of the year, contains enough forest growth, slashing or vegetation to constitute, in the judgment of the forester, a fire hazard, regardless of how the land is zoned or taxed. As used in this subsection, "clearing" means any grassland, improved area, lake, meadow, mechanically or manually cleared area, road, rocky area, stream or other similar forestland opening that is surrounded by or contiguous to forestland and that has been included in areas classified as forestland under ORS 526.305 to 526.370.

2. Is the area contiguous to or a threat to Forestland?

In other words if a fire was to occur, would that area be threatened by a perimeter type fire or if a fire was to occur within the evaluation area would it threaten other forestland or lands protected by ODF? If the answer to the question is “Yes” then go to # 3. If the answer to the question is “No”, then the land **will not be classified** as forestland.

3. Does the area have improved infrastructure? (Multiple lane-paved streets, standard fire hydrant systems)

This is to help the Classification Committee evaluate the infrastructure in the area. There are many physical features to be considered when evaluating areas for classification. Infrastructure such as two lane paved streets with sidewalks, hydrant systems for structure suppression/protection are just a couple of factors to consider when evaluating the land. If the answer to the question is “No”, the land **will be classified** as forestland.

If there is an improved infrastructure then the answer would be “Yes” and the Classification Committee may consider local concerns and situations, including input from the fire department in determining if the land will be or will not be classified as forestland. If the area has a home/structure density greater than 4-6/acre then the primary carrier of the fire will likely be structures. Areas such as this should generally not be classified as forestland. The exception to this recommendation would be if the local fire agency and the Forestland Classification Committee, as well as ODF, feel that there are significant reasons for ODF to protect these lands. These will typically be in high hazard areas with a potential risk to the Oregon Forest Land Protection Fund and areas with large fire potential.

Example: Not contiguous – inside a city

Forestland Classification Flowchart

For Classification of Polk County Forestlands within
the Western Oregon Protection District, by ¼ of ¼ section

