

Polk County Forestland Classification Committee

Meeting Minutes

August 7, 2008

1:00 – 5:20 p.m.

Oregon Department of Forestry, Dallas Office

Meeting called to order by Don Duhrkopf (Vice Chair) at 1:10 p.m. on 8/7/08, Oregon Dept. of Forestry, 825 Oak Villa Rd., Dallas, OR.

Members in attendance: Don Duhrkopf, Tom Parsons, Jeff Classen and Brad Withrow-Robinson.

Quorum present

Guests: Mike Totey, Oregon Department of Forestry Assistant District Forester for the West Oregon District. Eric Foucht, Oregon Department of Forestry District GIS Coordinator for the West Oregon District. Allison Blair, Oregon Department of Forestry Protection Supervisor for the Dallas office.

Jeff handed out copies of documents the Committee had approved at its July 17th meeting. Those documents included the By-Laws and Minutes from the June 13th and June 25th meetings. The approved documents all have a footnote at the bottom of each page with the date the Committee approved them.

Changes to Agenda:

Jeff indicated that the Assessor was unavailable, and proposed a revised agenda, which the Committee adopted:

- Brad/Jeff update on Meeting with Leslie Friesen about getting our information on Polk County's web page.
- Review background information Benton County is working on and see if some of it could work for our needs.
- Discuss developing a press release about our committee for local paper(s).
- Review process to record committee's classification decisions on the computer while reviewing.
- Continue to test and review the classification criteria, look at coarser scale maps and photos.
- Determine if a field visit is needed at future meeting.

Approval of Minutes: July 17, 2008 minutes approved unanimously.

Approved 8/22/08

Work to Develop Web Site and Press Release:

Brad reported on the meeting with Leslie Friesen. The County is willing to host the Committee's information, but Commissioners want a clear indication that the classification process was not initiated by the County. Brad will develop materials (on behalf of and with help of Committee). Leslie will proof read, and post in compliance with relevant regulations. Jeff will send Brad a rough document developed by Mike, providing key points to be revised for a web format. Brad will develop a draft of the web content to the committee by the next meeting.

Jeff reported that Rod Nichols, Oregon Department of Forestry, Agency Affairs Public Information Representative, has agreed to help develop a press release for us. Jeff will work with Rod to see he has relevant content (for Committee's purposes) and that he has access to people for quotes, to make it meet paper's needs. After a discussion, the Committee agreed that the objective of the release was to inform people about the process, and how they could stay abreast of developments. Although many landowners will want to know how this will affect them (change in assessment rate), it is beyond our initial scope. Also, would be difficult to answer. Providing more information to help landowners understand how they might be affected can be developed for the web, and/or as additional news articles. Rod will also help with placement in papers (including Polk County Today section of the Statesman).

The Committee discussed how we need to move several things ahead in a coordinated manner. The press release should go out soon, but the website really needs to be active so people can follow up.

Work to Develop Process for Documenting and Tracking Committee's Classification Decisions:

Eric reported on his progress on developing computer tools to facilitate and record the Committee's classification decisions as they are made. He demonstrated how the GIS system can now recognize and display 16th sections. Tabulated shape file data for each 16th can be accessed through pull down Identity Menus. New fields allow the Committee to record a classification (Forest, Non-forest, BLM and Exempt {probably applying only to USFS land}), and also the editing date of the classification. When a 16th is classified, it will be shaded with a transparent color to indicate its classification. A 16th can be divided along any boundary, creating a new line in the tabulated shape file data. At the end of the day, a query on edit date, will allow the Secretary to print out a table of all the lands classified that day, by 16th or smaller, to be attached to minutes as part of the official record. Eric and Jeff will work to develop a protocol for secure and consistent transfer of Polk county data to State database, as well as back-ups. The Committee was wildly enthusiastic of the progress made, highly appreciative of Eric and Jeff's work and looking forward to being able to use the system.

Continued Review of Forestland Classification Criteria:

The Committee then turned back to the classification criteria and process. Brad led the Committee in a lengthy discussion while viewing new, larger scale photos provided by the district that showed a complete township.

In previous discussions of the criteria, it seemed evident that the Committee was comfortable in being able to apply the definition of forest land as provided by the statute. That definition is quite broad, and most areas within the Protection Boundary appear likely to meet that definition.

The next criteria (to be applied to lands that meet that definition of forest land) has to do with contiguousness. The discussion at the previous (July 17, 2008) Committee meeting resulted in the realization that applying the criteria of contiguousness of each 16th section (as along a forest and agricultural or urban margin) was very difficult at the scale being used. At the July 17 meeting, the Committee was looking at aerial photo images depicting a section (on a sheet of paper or computer screen). This provides good resolution for a 16th section, and also allowed members to see what was adjacent to that 16th. But at that resolution, members could not really get a sense of the contiguousness of forest land.

The Committee discussed how, with a Township-scale image, members could get a much better landscape view of the area, and much more readily reach a conclusion of what formed a contiguous area of forest land. It was felt that recognizing contiguous forest areas would greatly aid in the demarcation of the boundary between areas to be classified as forestland and those classified as non-forestland, when considered by the 16th section.

Margin areas continue to be an issue and focus of discussion. Narrow bands of agricultural land extending into forested areas, as many farmed valleys of small drainages do, were clearly seen as contiguous at the landscape scale. So too do areas of mixed land use, with many small fields, patches of forest, and rural development. Larger areas of active agricultural lands would be separated, with boundaries demarked at the finer scale.

It was discussed how that demarcation still needed to follow logical natural or human boundaries (such as roads, streams, ditches or sub section lines) that represent defensible fire breaks and easily recognizable boundaries. Future fire crews need to be able to recognize what is in or out of their protection.

The Committee remained aware of the need to avoid creating islands of land classified forest within non-forest land, or islands of classified non-forest lands within forest lands. The Committee is also aware that application of the criteria must be consistent.

In the course of the discussion, the Committee was able to draw a preliminary boundary indicating contiguous forest lands along the eastern edge of the District Protection boundary, for the northern 2/3 of the county. The preliminary boundary traced the Protection Area boundary in many areas. The Committee found three areas: Grande Ronde, west Dallas, and Falls City where application of the classification criteria are likely to be challenging. It was decided that the discussion of criteria would now be facilitated by a visit to one or more of those areas.

Draft Agenda for next meeting – Friday, August 22nd at 8:00 a.m.:

- Discussion with Assessor (if available)
- Discuss progress on website, and press release if appropriate.
- Return to higher resolution photos, and work through criteria again, using west Dallas as a test area. Travel to the area to ground truth the Committee's application of the criteria.
- Visit Grande Ronde area too, if time allows.

Meeting adjourned at 5:20 p.m.