

Polk County Forestland Classification Committee Meeting

Meeting Minutes

August 22, 2008

8:00 – 2:00 pm

Oregon Department of Forestry, Dallas Office

Meeting called to order by Don Duhrkopf (Vice Chair) at 8:10 a.m. on August 22, 2008, Oregon Department of Forestry, Dallas Unit, 825 Oak Villa Rd., Dallas, OR

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

Quorum present.

Guests: Dennis Day (Polk County Assessor), Doug Schmidt (Assessor-elect?), Tom Brateng (Assessor's office) Allison Blair.

Consideration of last meeting's minutes deferred until following the meeting with folks from the Assessor's office.

Discussion with Assessor and staff

Began with an introduction by Jeff on the review process, followed by opening comments by Dennis Day, and a general discussion. Dennis distributed a 7 page hand out "Polk County Fire Patrol Highlights" (copy attached to official minutes)

There are a number of approaches to the process of assessment for fire protection. Polk is one of just two counties where the Assessor compiles and provides to the Department of Forestry, a list of properties to be assessed for fire protection. Usually, the Department of Forestry gives the list to the Assessor.

The Polk Assessor's office has invested a significant amount of time and expense over the past 10 years, developing a data-driven and largely automated system of tracking/determining what lands are to be assessed using vegetation classes (5,6,7) developed in the 40's. Is not based on USDA soil classification system. The office uses it for a number of determinations.

Every tax lot within Protection District boundary is identified and has a notation that it "could be assessed". Those tax lots with vegetation and or timber land class are charged a fire protection assessment on those acres. Those tax logs with the fire protection assessment with improvements are also assessed a Fire surcharge.

Approved 11/3/08

The program calculates the assessment based on the portion of the lot in those three “forest” categories. Lots with any forest assessable land are assessed, beginning with a minimum assessment of \$20.64. This minimum represents about 21 acres (of assessable land, at \$.95/acre estimated assessment for 2008). Tax lots with more than this (approx. 21 acres in a forest land class) will pay more, based on a \$.95/acre rate. About 71% of the assessed tax lots in the county are paying the minimum assessment. It was noted that the Assessor’s automated system meant that for many tax lots, only a portion was deemed assessable. The forestland classification being applied by the Polk Forest Classification Committee would likely lead to many fewer properties/tax lots being partially assessed. Most anticipate the assessments will increase. Number of lots affected will not change as dramatically as the acreage assessed in larger lots.

There is an area along western edge of Protection Boundary where there is overlapping protection with Rural Protection Districts. In many cases paying dual assessment (ODF Fire protection and Rural District protection). An increase in dual assessment is hoped by all to be avoided.

Assessor’s office staff expressed concern about changes in classification that would make the automated program unusable, and force a return to a manual system (as used in other counties) which are labor intensive, and costly to keep current. Given tight budgets, that might eventually lead to the classification roles (lists) becoming out dated. There was concern of how those classifications would be made, and how efficiently they could be recorded. Using 1/6ths that lead to many pockets or islands would make it very difficult to manage and use any of the automation program.

The discussion turned to contiguousness. Tom Brateng and others agreed that if classification led to another line within the boundary, it would be able to be integrated with the automated program.

Nobody could answer the assessor’s question of “Who will pay for the programming and other record keeping to make these changes?” Another unfunded mandate?

Assessor’s office staff left meeting at 9:45.

Approval of minutes: August 7, 2008 minutes considered and approved unanimously without changes.

No changes to agenda.

Brad provided an overview of the website development. Don noted that nothing about assessment is included: How much a landowner pays, nor how determined. He questioned if it should be there. Consensus was that assessment is not the charge of the Committee, so unnecessary or inappropriate for Committee to address it.

Approved 11/3/08

Jeff reported that, due to the fires last week, Dallas and Salem fire staff fully occupied, and not progress made on press release.

Discussion of criteria:

The Committee returned to a discussion of the decision criteria, focusing on the wildland urban interface area around Dallas. Issues once again had to do with contiguousness, and the threat of woodland fuels to carry fire across a mixed landscape. The committee seemed to have a pretty consistent understanding of criteria when looking at any particular area, but continued to struggle with the flow chart as a way to structure and articulate the process.

Tom thinks that fire behavior is very relevant, and needs to be build into the process somehow, perhaps in flow chart. Don noted that even experts make big (sometimes fatal) mistakes in predicting behavior, so making it a formal part of the process would be difficult. Brad pointed out that Committee does incorporate some awareness of fire behavior and unpredictability when considering adjacency and contiguousness. Some members felt there was still a need to distinguish contiguousness from adjacency. It was noted that contiguousness is part of appendix F, although not clearly defined.

After some time in the building looking at potential separation of forestland along the urban interface, the Committee made a field trip along the western edge of Dallas to see how things looked on the ground.

Discontent with flow chart continues. A number of changes to flow chart arrows and boxes were discussed. Jeff handed out copies draft versions of criteria being developed in Benton County (copy attached to official minutes). Agreed that each member needs to spend more time with criteria and flow charts (considering both Polk and Benton Drafts) and come prepared to propose specific changes.

Appears Committee will not be able to meet in September due to member's schedules. Jeff will propose some dates for an October meeting by email.

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.