

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners

Tuesday, April 30th, 2024, 1:30 p.m.

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Present:

Andy Hover (AH), BOCC District 2
Jon Neil (JN), BOCC District 3
Laney Johns (LJ), Clerk of the Board
Pat Ryan (PR), DNR, Northeast Region Manager
Tim Luff (TL), DNR, Assistant Region Manager for Wildfire
Stephanie Downey (SD), WA High School Rodeo

Time stamps refer to the time on the wall clock. An AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date is available at:

<https://okanogancounty.org/departments/boards/livestreamingofmeetings.php>

Summary of Important Discussions:

- *DNR prepared for wildfire season with 195 available firefighters, 21 staffed engines, Huey helicopter at Omak airport; says Conservation District's preparedness plan becoming model for the state; operational grants could finance more pressurized water take-outs from irrigation ditches; several national weather briefings indicate "pretty average" fire year; 2024 timber sales to total 20M, many around Loomis*
- *Commissioners Hover and Neil discuss tick proliferation, clerk informs them of washes over paved road in burned area of Sinlaheken*
- *High School Rodeo rep asks for discount for upcoming event, says earnings go to scholarships, commissioners to discuss resolution setting rate for school-affiliated clubs on Monday when all three are present, money tight after \$2M spent on fairgrounds over last few years, adding sheriff's deputies now higher priority*
- *Meeting adjourned at 2:47*

1:30 - Wildfire Preparedness - PR: We've already had a few fires around the region. We also wanted to talk about timber sales, and something we've done, the Methow Rapids Natural Areas Preserve...

TL: Historically fires come on earlier in Okanogan than in the rest of the state. Our forty engines, we've moved everything up. Instead of July 1st it's June 1st. The new leadership in Olympia made us go back to the drawing board. We bring 195 fighters from around the region. We are going to have the highlands 20 crew fully staffed. A little bit of staffing shuffles... We lost some permanent leadership but we've brought some seasonal folks up, we'll still have 20 members hotshot crews are the top dog, type 2 IA is just below. Between South Oak and Highlands we'll have 21 engines staffed. The last one will come on July 15th or so. We partner with Douglas so we'll have a co-op engine. So we'll have 40 engines on this side and the last one will come on in July. We have to get one guy

qualified. We still have those three IA dozers. The way South Oak is split, with the Methow Valley, it just made sense to move it over here (*from Spokane*). That has been a great asset, having those. The Huey helicopter will be at the Omak Airport sometime the third week of May. They're staffed from Olympia. ...Still going to have the two fire bosses and the air attack by June 16th. There will be one on each side of the state. They did shuffle some of the heavier (*retardant*) tankers. They were running out of ramp space at Moses Lake so we're moving our large water scoopers a little bit closer to East Wenatchee. House bill 1498, the Aviation Insurance Act, sponsored by Asotin County where DNR doesn't have any protection, would guarantee, that we would send aircraft to an emerging incident down there. ...

AH: How does the state get paid for protecting what's not DNR? *PR says that county has always paid the DNR for firefighting; this bill provided language for the arrangement. If a fire elsewhere takes DNR resources they can go to the national market.*

JN: My understanding is that an individual fire district can call for assistance without worrying about who's going to have to pay for it.

PR: In the law, as soon as they call us we have to call state "mobe" and say we're sending aircraft to the incident. ...The other thing, we're working with the (Okanogan) Conservation District on the wildfire plans. I was a little bit nervous about the "CD" be the leader of those because it was a little bit of an untried method, but it seems like it's going well, and they have a lot more time and energy to dedicate to it so it's becoming the model now in other parts of the state since they have the grant funding to pull those together.

AH: Where I live (the Methow) we talked about take-outs from irrigation districts. Hopefully that stuff gets put into (the wildfire plan). In some of the newer ones they've put pressurized water take-outs where tankers can fill. In one of them the flanges are in but they're five feet down because the fire district didn't want to pay to have the rest put in so we're going to look for money to finish those and talk to the DNR about where it makes sense to put these in, where water is hard to come by.

PR: We might be able to partner on that. We have operational grants... *AH will invite him to a water district meeting. AH says it can be problematic getting water from the river, needing ramps. PR says a hydrant on an irrigation ditch could be "awesome". JN mentions spray dumps in orchards for filling water tanks.*

AH: We're trying to figure out the best places for some additional ones and how to get that all together.

PR: The best ones are the fire districts. The fire chiefs (*know the accesses*). That's a good place to start. We don't know any tenders. That would be tapping into local knowledge, and we can use some operational moneys to help do that.

AH: Over here there are a lot of lakes. *JN says he has a Fire Advisory meeting that evening.*

1:45 - Sinlaheken Cooperative Burn - PR: We conducted a prescribed fire project with the DFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife). It was the last piece of the Sinlaheken project. We're also working with the Tonasket and Methow ranger districts. They got some money so they're hiring us to augment their staffing. It's looking like a

good year. We're keeping an eye on the snow water deficit up there. That's concerning but—

AH: It's still a statewide drought but it's weird, yesterday in Chesaw it snowed four inches. There's still snow in the Cascades... Hopefully we stay mild and keep some of that snow up there.

PR: The two or three national weather briefings are saying it honestly is looking like a pretty average year. I'm more concerned about Canada. They're having what they call zombie fires, fires that never went out. We've also had outreach from the Alaska interior, and we still have three engines down in Texas. Obviously wind is a big deal. Last year we were doing real good until August 18th. ...You guys got a little bit of a break last year.

JN: It was baffling to me how little resources the Canadians have.

PR: With everything going up north they were completely unprepared. We have two agreements, Northwest Compact where we can send stuff deep into Canada, and what's called "Hands Across the Border" where we can take action on anything within three miles of the border. We're meeting next week with our Canadian counterparts in Wenatchee. We used that (latter) agreement twice last year. ...Any questions about fire?

AH: I want to think about the irrigation take-outs. Thinking about, after being commissioner so long, hired (inaudible) for subdivisions and sometimes you just couldn't do it because you can't fill a tanker fast enough on the water system that they're putting in but if you can get those pressurized ditches— I'm going to keep working on that.

1:50 - Conservation land - *TL passes out some information about conservation land*. TL: Our guys with conservation (inaudible) had a meeting last week. They're going to change the boundaries of the Methow Valleys Rapids Natural Areas Preserve to line them up better with county parcels. There's so much being put in, so much being taken out. ...it all comes to about 40 acres more. We'll still be paying the (inaudible) taxes on that just like we do on the rest of it. *AH asks if it's all DNR land. Yes, says TL. They're just trying to square it up.* TL: We also have timber sales. In our highlands in the last year, around Loomis and South Oak, down this way, we've sold just about 15M board feet of timber over five sales. We do have a couple more coming up this fall that amount to just over 5M board feet, in the Loup loup area and around Loomis. Good for the economy, keeps mills in the area going. The money we get goes to the Common Schools Trust, which you're probably aware of, 69% of it, and DNR works off of the other 31%. But the Legislature realized that we can't manage the stands we have on the 31% just because of the fuels problem that we have. So they've created the 21Q Account. Once we get a certain amount of money in it, then we distribute it to the trust. Then we keep the rest to do pre-commercial thinnings, prescribed fires. Whatever non-commercial type activity we have to do. When I was a young forester over here we had to fight to get money from Olympia because it all went to the west side. ...We don't produce the most wood, but we do produce better wood, I can tell you that.

AH: What's the primary species coming off of those two cuts?

TL: Up on the Loup loup primarily douglas fir, larch, and some pine. Up in Loomis you get all kinds of stuff. Western larch, douglas fir, lodgepole fir of course, they even have some alpine fir. *He tells AH that some of those sales go to the Hampton Mill in Arlington, WA, that it's a very competitive company and been good for both east and west regions. TM*

mentions forest resiliency. AH asks him if he can explain in laymen's terms, if he needed to thin for fire resiliency, how he would start that process. TL: You could go to a consultant forester. My recommendation would be to go to DNR and we'd come out for no charge and let you know about some cost share programs. A 50% or 75% match. For thinning, pruning, and getting rid of the slash. The match doesn't necessarily mean coming out of your pocket, but providing in kind. There are all kinds of grants.

PR: There's a "find your forester" tool on DNR.gov that will give contact information. We've got two for Okanogan County: Skylar Goodrich and Sam Halverson. It takes one or two weeks for someone to get out there. ...People see the stands of trees and think that's what's natural. Our ecology is built on wildfire.

AH: I was looking at the west side of the Loup where the Carlton Complex went through. It's a shame that all of that stuff had to get burned, it's all matchsticks laying down, but you see regrowth. Management by two different ways, either going in and taking care of it or just letting it blow up.

TL: That's why we're working really hard on getting our stands thinned out. It used to be if they thought the tree was going to die in the next 20 years they'd just cut it. That's not the way (inaudible), it needs to get opened up. We're trying to do better.

AH: I appreciate the effort the DNR's put into fire and forest health. Sitting on the Salmon Recovery Board, we're talking about, if all these trees are growing up and you've got this thick mat, you're losing water in the streams.

TL: That sucks up a lot of water. You've got to manage it. *They tell the commissioners they have a "diamond" in Emergency Manager Maurice Goodhall, that they value him as a partner. Briefing ends. AH thanks them for coming.*

2:11 - *AH and JN talk about current proliferation of ticks. AN conjectures that the winter might not have been cold enough long enough. LJ talks about a lot of people and dogs camping up in the Sinlaheken (maybe related to ticks), and about washes over the paved road in the burned part of that area. The commissioners are surprised to learn this.*

AH: The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) issued a disaster declaration for us "following weeks of extreme weather in January". *He wonders if it's because of the fruit drop. JN says it looks like it's more about property damage, not crops.*

2:25 - High School Rodeo - SD: We put rodeos on all across the state. We have 300 kids who bring 1000 people a weekend to events all over the states. People like to come to Okanogan. We had the state finals here last year, actually two rodeos... But it's not a money maker. So we try to go where it's affordable. But people love it here. The kids asked to put on a rodeo. So when I got on the fairgrounds website we found a spot where they gave a 50% discount for school events. We thought "perfect", after being turned down in the spring (*for lack of commercial pesticide applicator's license*). At the fair, it's really embarrassing— the county is fining people for noxious weeds and our fairgrounds were awful. I hope somebody takes it upon themselves to do make sure that doesn't happen again. They were so bad. So we thought... we should make a deal with the fairgrounds. We'll spray this... We talked to Nutrine but that didn't work out. So we were looking at the website and I saw "school event" and thought "perfect". We're putting on the Cowboy Prom the same weekend and getting charged \$250 to do that. So it's costing us \$950—

AH: Because it's a three-day event?

SD: (Yes). Whether you give us a 50% discount or not, I hope you look at the bigger picture for kids. They're bringing people to the community. They're not disabled or disadvantaged but they're trying to be good, productive people in our community, and it's not like they were making money. And they're just getting shut down. It's been brought up over and over that the county can't donate funds—and it's a state law— it's not a state law. Our treasurer needs to talk to these other fairgrounds, like Longview. We've gone there every year.

AH: We could actually set a rate for High School Rodeo. We just have to make sure we set it in a resolution. SD thought it was a state law and they couldn't donate funds but *supposes she's been told wrong. AH says they don't meet the qualifications for a discount but they could set a rate if they wanted to have it here. SD says they're not asking to do the finals here this year.*

SD: But when they go to Moses Lake, they have two indoor arenas, the outdoor arena, they work the grounds and provide the water truck, all for \$450, because they want the people in the community. And Longview (*along with Ritzville, and Othello*) provides the facility for free...

AH: We've put in close to \$2M for the grounds over the last couple of years. The reason things are kind of dilapidated are because counties can't pay for them. So... with the amount of people who ask us for discounts over there, how do you justify even doing anything over there? It's a community service for the county to have the fairgrounds but when your budget gets tight and you can't provide enough sheriff's deputies, that's the first thing that gets cut. JN says they tried to do a work-around for the applicator's license requirement but it didn't work. AH proposes a \$500 two-day rate. SD repeats the added services Moses Lake provides. AH says they'd have to specifically set a rate for HS rodeo. SD thought it would fall under the school section. The rodeo is May 17th-19th. AH prefers to make the decision the following week after Commissioner Branch returns. SD talks about strict qualifications for rodeo participants, a 2.5 grade average or a signed waiver. The money (\$52,000) won at rodeo goes toward college scholarships for rodeo association members. The national high school rodeo gives away close to \$1M for college or trade school. AH: How do they make money?

SD: Entry fees.

AH: So if we give a discount, that money is going into scholarships?

SD: Yes. AH says they should write up something on Monday that covers accredited school-affiliated clubs like 4H, FFA... He feels that contributing to scholarships justifies giving the discount. JN wonders if the organization that deals with youth drug abuse (FYRE?) might want to contribute. SD is not out to seek sponsors. AH reminds her that they can sublet vendor spaces. She is wary of food people because of the health department. AH recommends she they try to offset the cost this way. This is in the contract. But if they give a discount they might take this clause out.

AH: How do you show your expenses?

SD: Everything gets done by the state association who pays our bills. We don't have any money. *AH wonders what their administrative fees are. SD says secretary fees are \$3 per entry. AH says they'll address the question on Monday. SD thanks them and leaves.*

2:47 - Meeting adjourned until following Monday.