

Board of Commissioners Meeting
September 30, 2015

Present:

Commissioner Steve McClure
Commissioner Mark D. Davidson
Commissioner Jack Howard

Chairman Davidson opened the special session meeting at 8:30 a.m. with all three Commissioners present.

County-wide Burn Ban Extension

JB Brock, Emergency Manager and Larry Wooldridge, La Grande Rural Fire Chief, presented to the commissioners Resolution 2015-15, In the Matter of a Resolution Extending the Annual Fire Season Burn Ban for consideration. JB Brock stated this fire season has been very active, and fire conditions are persisting. Over the next 30 days, temperatures are forecast to be above average with an equal possibility for precipitation but we haven't seen that yet. Evening temperatures have been cool, but afternoon temperatures have reflected a high haines index which can produce an active fire behavior. By keeping the burn ban in place for an additional two weeks, this can reduce the potential for fire starts. At the end of the two week period, the conditions will be reevaluated.

Chief Larry Wooldridge stated this has been discussed with all local fire chiefs and the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). ODF will stay in a burn ban and does not plan to come out of the burn ban season until a significant rain is received. One year ago Union County had the Harris Mountain fire, so conditions are still in the threat of a significant burn. Last week there was a fire near Highway 244 as well as a resident on Hunter Road who was burning a ditch within the last two weeks which ended up being a 12 acre stubble fire. Temperatures are cooling at night, but some of the largest fires in the history of Union County have occurred in the middle of January. Temperature doesn't really affect the fire that much when conditions are correct for burning. In the interest of safety and the threat to wildfires in the wildland urban interface areas, he would like to recommend the extension and revisit again if there has not been a wetting rain received by the end of the requested two week extension.

Commissioner McClure stated he had talked with the County Seed Growers Organization with regards to field burning and asked if they wanted an extension for field burning. Martin Tromp van Holst stated that most of the grass fields had been taken care of although there may be some farmers needing to do stubble burns later in the season. Field burning will cease until at least October 15, 2015. Commissioner McClure reminded Martin that if there is a county-wide burn ban in effect, that the farmers would also be subject to the burn ban.

JB Brock stated that this extension of the burn ban will also help to raise awareness within the community as we still have dry conditions very conducive to wildfire.

Commissioner Howard asked how compliance had been so far this season. JB stated compliance is an ongoing challenge but explained that overall, it has been good as people are aware and this is not a new situation. There were extreme fire conditions this year and early predictions indicate a similar season next year. There have been discussions regarding compliance with the fire departments and the Sheriff's office and the discussions will continue. When citizens are not in compliance, the main goal is education in order to prevent some of the human-caused fires from occurring.

Commissioner Howard asked what the incident rate is historically for September and October fires as well as the January fires mentioned previously. Chief Wooldridge stated that the Harris Mountain fire last year occurred in the first week of October and burned 300 acres. Fires in January would be when it is cold and dry. The weather doesn't have to be 100 degrees to have fire conditions. It could be 30 degrees, dry and windy, and the conditions would still be present.

Commissioner Howard stated that JB Brock had mentioned an early fire season and asked for him to elaborate. JB Brock stated that a discussion being held within the Community Wildfire Protection Group as well as in the Cohesive Wildfire Group is shoulder seasons. Shoulder seasons occur when the fire season starts earlier in the summer and runs later into the fall. The challenge associated with that is that the seasonal staff ODF and the Forest Service bring on are either not on yet for early season in June, or have gone off to school when the later season fires occur in October. Many of our state and federal partners are not staffed to the level that they would be during prime fire season. Solutions being looked at include better partnerships between the rural fire departments who are staffed the same year round, and having our federal and state partners provide support during those shoulder seasons to be a go-to when we have those late and early events. That is a recognized trend and is something the groups are working to address. Chief Wooldridge stated this will limit their local resources if they are being relied upon to go outside of their district to support the state and federal agencies, which diminishes their abilities in their own districts.

Commissioner McClure moved approval of Resolution 2015-15, In the Matter of a Resolution Extending the Annual Fire Season Burn Ban as presented. Commissioner Howard seconded.

Commissioner McClure complimented the rural fire departments and the job they did this summer. The efforts shown in Union County as well as in Baker and Wallowa County are significant, cooperation made a difference and he thanked them for the efforts. He stated that he hopes there will be a session to discuss

what happened after going through a fire season like we had and how to improve it. He has had a discussion with JB Brock about who would be next in line if JB was unavailable. The current plan calls for JB to respond first with a back-up of Doug Wright who is the Public Works Director, however it may make more sense to have Chief Wooldridge as the back-up rather than expecting Doug Wright to have knowledge of dealing with these situations. If plans need changed to accommodate this, then we need to. He agrees with JB that we will probably see more, not less of wildfires. Commissioner McClure stated that Union County did a good job with the Phillips Creek Fire. The timing of the fire allowed for having many crews available. He stated that all of the rural and volunteer fire departments are to be complimented. **Commissioner Howard asked for an amendment to the resolution to include a change in the wording in the third paragraph to make clear that the change in the burn ban is only for the 2015 season. Commissioner McClure seconded. Motion carried unanimously.**

Roll call for approval of Resolution 2015. Commissioner Howard, yes; Commissioner McClure, yes; Commissioner Davidson, yes. Motion carried extending the county-wide burn ban through October 15, 2015.

Microenterprise Intergovernmental Agreement

Lisa Dawson, Executive Director of Northeast Oregon Economic Development District, presented an Intergovernmental Agreement to the Commissioners for approval. Lisa explained this is to form a microenterprise program in Baker, Wallowa and Union Counties for the next eighteen months. This will allow Wallowa County to be in the lead roll for the three county program and apply for a Community Development Block Grant from the state that will go through the county and will then allow NEODD to offer classes in all three counties.

Commissioner McClure moved approval of the Intergovernmental Agreement between Union, Wallowa and Baker County for a Community Development Block Grant in order to provide microenterprise development. Commissioner Howard seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,



Annette Powers
Department Specialist