

Board of Commissioners Special Meeting
August 18, 2016

Present: Commissioner Steve McClure
Commissioner Mark D. Davidson (via phone)
Commissioner Jack Howard (via phone)

Commissioner McClure opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. and the pledge of allegiance was given. Commissioner Davidson and Commissioner Howard were present via phone.

Complete Burn Ban Request

JB Brock, Emergency Services Manager, stated that discussions to consider a complete burn ban took place over the last few days based on conditions that are currently in the county and throughout the state. Larry Wooldridge, La Grande Rural Fire Chief, communicated with area fire chiefs seeking input on local conditions and a possible burn ban. Based on those discussions, Mr. Wooldridge submitted a request on August 16 to implement the County Wide Burn Ban/Regulated Use per Section 3 of Ordinance 2016-01. The 30 day forecast shows warm temperatures and no precipitation. The state is considering additional regulated use closures and the Oregon Department of Forestry will go into phase B as of midnight, August 18, permitting fires in designated areas only. There are more concerns in the valley due to the fact that fuels cure out faster than forest fuels. There are a lot of concerns with the forecast as well as things happening on the ground; both support the burn ban as per the ordinance.

Larry Wooldridge, La Grande Rural Fire Chief, 10200 S. McAllister, Island City, stated that it takes a lot for a cigarette to cause a grass fire, which is the suspected cause of a grass fire one day earlier. The fuels in the valley are very dry right now. He is concerned about burn barrels and people not adhering to their allowed use between 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Recreational campfires are also a concern. Current conditions are dangerous and could have an impact on the county at a high level, which supports the need for a burn ban. Conditions may change in September enough to allow coming out of the burn ban.

Commissioner McClure asked for clarification of the areas affected by the ban. Mr. Brock stated that the ban would apply to the unincorporated areas in Union County. Commissioner McClure asked who would be responsible for areas inside city limits. Mr. Brock stated that individual cities hold that responsibility and today's decision would be sent to them for consideration. He added that this burn ban exempts regulated agricultural field burning and use of propane grills; burn barrel use would be restricted.

Commissioner Howard stated that Mr. Brock spoke last month at a meeting with Union County mayors; he asked Mr. Brock if he would send a direct request to them for a burn ban. Mr. Brock stated that he would send any notification requested by the commissioners. He planned to advise the mayors, but it is up to them to make a decision with their fire chief. Mr. Wooldridge stated that most of the cities, with the

exception of Union, are covered by a rural fire district; all of the rural fire district chiefs support the burn ban.

Mr. Brock recommended going into a burn ban at midnight on August 18 to match the Oregon Department of Forestry's timeline.

Commissioner Howard asked how current conditions compare to last year. Mr. Brock stated that these conditions occurred earlier in the season last year. The later into the fire season, the days are shorter and the nights are cooler. Conditions will be monitored closely. Starting the burn ban this late in the fire season lends itself to having a shorter burn ban duration. There are some remaining fires in the area, but there isn't a resource-intensive fire like the one in Baker County last year. There are red flag warnings in Washington and the west side of Oregon; firefighting assets are higher right now than this time last year, but it could change at a moment's notice. Things that cause rapid spread of fire could change quickly, but they are trying to forecast weather and resources and make a decision based on what is currently available.

Commissioner Howard asked if wind condition forecasts are available and if there are any in particular that are a present risk. Mr. Brock stated that it is a challenge to forecast wind in the valley and there are no long term wind predictions.

Commissioner Howard stated that the state didn't provide great services in monitoring air quality last year and wanted to know if Mr. Brock or his partners had any suggestions to provide that. Commissioner Howard suggested reporting air quality conditions by utilizing CHD to distribute regular reports, utilizing CHD's reader board, or placing a reader board on the Joseph Annex property. Mr. Brock stated that those discussions could take place.

Commissioner Howard moved to approve a Complete Burn Ban outside incorporated cities in Union County, effective midnight on August 18, 2016. Commissioner Davidson seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 10:18 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lorcinda Johnston
Sr. Dept. Specialist II