Status of Rangeland Fire Protection Associations

Report for the ……

Oregon Fire Protection Funding Committee

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approximately 3.2 million acres of private land in Eastern Oregon are served by Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPA) formed under ORS 477.315 and are supported by the Oregon Department of Forestry. Fourteen Rangeland Fire Protection Associations provide the protection. The RFPA’s also protect approximately ½ million acres of State lands. These lands are primarily Department of State Lands, with lesser amounts of Department of Fish & Wildlife, and Parks & Recreation Department.

II. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The RFPA’s operate as independent Associations of landowners that provide their own protection with the support of the Oregon Department of Forestry. ODF provides technical support in the form of grants, grant writing, equipment procurement through the Federal Excess Personal Property program USDA Forest Service and the Fire Fighter Program, Department of Defense, & firefighter training.

There are approximately 345 volunteer firefighters in the 14 RFPA’s and 151 pieces of water handling fire equipment that is listed with the Associations. In addition, there are ranch dozers and other equipment that is used in fighting fire. The amount of time and resources is hard to estimate because firefighting is part of managing these private lands. The ranchers tend to under-estimate the value of their contribution in time and equipment.

Mutual Assistance agreements are in place between the Rangeland Associations and BLM.

ODF Funding;
ODF’s monetary contribution to the Rangeland Fire Protection Associations is small. ORS 477.317 (2) limits the funding support to General Funds. Approximately $30,000 per biennium is allocated for the support of the Association to reimburse them for Insurance and Administrative costs. The primary cost is Insurance. The administration of the Rangeland program has been funded by federal grants since the Rangeland Fire Protection Coordinator position was established in 2005.

Federal Grants;
Federal Grants are a major source of funding for the RFPA’s. The two most common that the RFPA’s receive directly are Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) and Rural Fire Assistance (RFA) grants. The VFA grants are administered by ODF and funded by the USDA Forest Service. This grant is a 50/50 grant. The RFPA must match the grant funding with either cash or in-kind contributions of time or equipment. The RFA grants are administered by ODF and are funded by the US Dept of Interior. This grant is a 90/10 grant. The RFPA must only match 10% of the value of the grant by either cash or in-kind contributions. Federal grants have funded special project for the RFPA’s through ODF, such as Fire Mitigation, Fuel Hazard Reduction, Suppression Training and Prescribed Fire Training.

RFPA Membership & Fees;
RFPA membership is voluntary. The landowners within a RFPA boundary have the choice to be a member or not. The RFPA responsibility to suppress fires within the RFPA does not discriminate between members or non-members. This is covered in the agreement with the Board of Forestry when the RFPA is formed. The fees paid by the members to the RFPA are determined by the membership of the RFPA. These fees are paid directly to the RFPA organization. No fees are collected through the County Tax Assessor.

Un-protected Lands;
The landowners have a choice of whether to form an organization to provide fire protection. The RFPA’s are a basic form of wildland fire protection. A Rural Fire District is a choice where the landowners can have both structural and wildland fire suppression. The decision currently to have
all lands in Oregon protected from fire, both wildland and structure, is the decision of the landowners. The questions to have ODF provide this protection is again in statute and is the decision of the landowners. ORS 477.315 lays out the process for landowners to request ODF to protect their lands. If this were the landowner choice, it would be for wildland fire suppression only. Currently no fees are assessed by ODF on these lands.

**Rangeland Fire Protection Associations;**

Ironside RFPA, Malheur County, established 1964

Crane RFPA, Harney County, established 1998

Pine Creek / Drewsey RFPA, Harney County, established 1998, disbanded & re-organized as part of the Crane RFPA, 2001

Fields / Andrews RFPA, Harney County, established 1998

Silver Creek RFPA, Harney County, established 2001

Twickenham RFPA, Wheeler County, established 2001

Brothers / Hampton RFPA, Crook, Deschutes, & Lake Counties, established 2006

Post Paulina RFPA, Crook, Deschutes, & Harney Counties, established 2006

Juntura RFPA, Malheur County, established 2007

Jordan Valley RFPA, Malheur County, established 2008

Vale RFPA, Malheur County, established 2008

Ash Butte RFPA, Jefferson County, established 2009

Gateway RFPA, Jefferson County, established 2010

Warner Valley RFPA, Lake County, established 2011
APPENDIX A: Map, Oregon Fire Protection Status: