



Board of County Commissioners

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Tammy Baney
Anthony DeBone
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July 20, 2015

Dear Fellow Elected Official,

Deschutes County has recently embarked on a collaborative journey with a variety of stakeholders including those who are greatly concerned about the impact of wildland fire in Central Oregon. This group has come together under the umbrella of the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative to collaborate and cooperate across jurisdictional boundaries, in order to achieve meaningful progress towards three goals:

1. Restoring resilient landscapes,
2. Creating and maintaining fire-adapted communities, and
3. A safe and effective wildfire response.

These are the three goals of the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy that have been embraced by the initial steering committee of stakeholders. (For more on the Cohesive Strategy effort, visit www.forestsandangelands.gov).

The conceptual boundary of the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative includes all of Crook, Jefferson and Deschutes Counties and the northern part of Klamath County that is bordered and surrounded by the Deschutes National Forest.

In Central Oregon, fire and land managers at the federal and state levels, cities, counties, non-governmental organizations and private citizens have a rich history of identifying shared goals and cooperating to accomplish shared outcomes. This strategic alignment and collaborative engagement has existed for decades and continues to build. We share similar threats to communities, infrastructure, economies and the environment from wildland fire. The challenges of an isolated, geographic location, limited budgets and diverse interests have helped steer us to work together to achieve far more than one agency or organization alone.

DC 2015-519

As part of our strategy to engage elected officials in support of the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative, we invite you to participate as stakeholders with a high interest in supporting the above goals. Our collective voice as elected officials is critical to the success of this endeavor.

Attached are two documents for your review – the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative concept document and the Political Leveraging Strategy for moving forward. We ask that you formally recognize the Initiative with a letter of support and your agreement to participate as stakeholders in this cross-jurisdictional effort.

We hope to receive your letters of support quickly, as we are planning a “Legislative Day” to publicly reveal the Initiative and give all parties a chance to hear more about the goals and anticipated outcomes of this collaborative effort. The tentative dates for this meeting are August 18, 20 or 21; we will notify you of the firm date as soon as possible. We hope you can join us!

By speaking with one voice as elected officials, we raise our chances for federal and state program support to implement the Cohesive Strategy in Central Oregon.

If you have any questions or wish to receive a more formal presentation about the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative, please contact Joe Stutler, Wildland Cohesive Strategy - Wester Region Co-Chair, at (541) 322-7141 or joe.stutler@deschutes.org.

Sincerely,

Deschutes County Board of Commissioners



Tony DeBone, Chair



Alan Unger, Vice Chair



Tammy Baney, Commissioner

Central Oregon

Cohesive Strategy Initiative

5-6-15

National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

In 2009, Congress passed the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Act. In it, Congress directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) to develop a national cohesive wildland fire management strategy. In 2014, development of this Cohesive Strategy culminated with the release of The National Strategy: The Final Phase of the Development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (National Strategy) and The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: National Action Plan (National Action Plan).

Developed collaboratively by and for stakeholders, as a proactive, collaborative approach to implementing the Cohesive Strategy, these national documents along with the Western Regional Action Plan, now provide a framework for implementation across landscapes, jurisdictions and communities.

The vision of the Cohesive Strategy is: *To safely and effectively extinguish fire, when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a Nation, live with wildland fire.*

The three primary goals necessary to achieving the vision are:

Restore and maintain resilient landscapes: Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.

Create fire-adapted communities: Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.

Safe & Effective wildfire response: All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient, risk-based wildfire management decisions.

In addition, three components, intended to be conducted concurrently, are necessary for implementation of the Cohesive Strategy:

- *Strategic alignment*, where all parties agree to the same goals, principles, and strategic course of action;

- *Collaborative engagement*, which includes governance, shared information and resources, communications, and monitoring and accountability; and
- *Programmatic alignment*, where individual agency or organization objectives are explicitly supportive of the national Cohesive Strategy goals.

The ultimate success of the Cohesive Strategy effort depends on how strategic direction and national priorities can be translated into the on-the-ground, local actions of agencies, organizations, governments, and individuals with meaningful, cumulative effects.

The Central Oregon Story

In Central Oregon, fire and land managers, cities, counties, non-governmental organizations and private citizens have a long and rich history of identifying shared goals and cooperating to accomplish shared outcomes. Here, a culture of strategic alignment, collaborative engagement and programmatic alignment has existed for decades and continues to build. The challenges of an isolated, geographic location, limited budgets and diverse interests helped steer stakeholders to work together under the concept that groups that cooperate and coordinate efforts can achieve far more than one agency or organization alone. When the Cohesive Strategy was framed in the West, it was quickly recognized as an evolution of collaborative strategies and behaviors that already exist and are enjoyed in Central Oregon.

With this positive foundation in place, stakeholders in Central Oregon have witnessed much success through current collaborative efforts:

- Increased hazardous fuels and restoration treatments on public lands in the WUI through the Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project;
- Establishment of a Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network Hub through Project Wildfire;
- BLM is working with NRCS on creating resilient landscapes across jurisdictional lines;
- Comprehensive Community Wildfire Protection Plans across Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook Counties;
- Integrated wildland fire response including mutual aid and cooperating agency agreements;
- Local agreements between federal land managers and private landowners to treat lands regardless of ownership;
- Consistent engagement and support by local elected officials, County Emergency Management and law enforcement;

- Central Oregon Joint Information System for emergency information;
- Agreement between Upper Deschutes Coalition and Deschutes National Forest for treatment both on private and public lands to create resilient landscapes and maintain fire-adapted communities;
- Natural Resources Conservation Service is working collaboratively with other federal and state agencies to create resilient landscapes on private, non-industrial forests near communities.
- Private land owners with critical sage-grouse habitat have completed Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAAs) and are working with federal agencies to complete Candidate Conservation Agreements (CCAs) to protect greater sage-grouse while maintaining viable economies and grazing operations.
- Project Wildfire through a collaborative steering committee, established by county ordinance, continues to facilitate and lead hazardous fuels treatments to create and maintain fire adapted communities, treating over 110,000 acres of private lands with the cooperation and participation of private landowners.

With all these successful efforts, the risk of loss to lives, our natural resources, economies, habitat, and communities is still extreme and there is much work before us. This begs the question: Can stakeholders in Central Oregon continue to use this successful history of coordination and collaboration to achieve greater restoration and reductions of risk on a landscape level, increase the community's understanding and acceptance of risk, and improve the safety and effectiveness of wildfire response, and successfully implement the Cohesive Strategy? The answer is YES.

Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative

The Cohesive Strategy provides a solid framework for making meaningful progress towards three goals – Restoring Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities and Safe & Effective Wildfire Response. What is the method to achieve that progress? Collaboration... to manage vegetation and fuels; protect homes, communities, and other values at risk; manage human-caused ignitions; and □safely, effectively, and efficiently responding to wildfire.

Stakeholders in Central Oregon now appreciate a solid platform from which to advance current collaborative philosophies and efforts and integrate them under one umbrella for increased success (the notion of “bigger, better, safer and faster”) across jurisdictions.

The collective ambition is to bring federal, state, tribal and local agency stakeholders together with interested non-governmental organizations and private landowners across three counties – Deschutes, Jefferson and Crook – to embark on a collaborative journey to identify shared values and goals, and implement prioritized actions to achieve them,

leading to meaningful progress towards resilient landscapes, fire adapted communities and a safe and effective wildfire response using the National Strategy, National and Regional Action Plans as guidance to continue successful implementation.

More than just successfully implementation of the Cohesive Strategy, this coordinated, collaborative multi-county project aims for recognition as a “regional learning laboratory” for others to either replicate and/or utilize valuable lessons learned to create similar successful environments throughout the western United States.

This level of integration, coordination and collaboration will require the following:

- Share and implement the purpose of our efforts:
 - To collaboratively implement the Cohesive Strategy through an “all-hands, all-lands” approach across three counties, and
 - Provide the “regional learning laboratory” for success for the Pacific Northwest and other areas in the west;
- Prioritized landscape treatments across jurisdictions;
- Increased, collective investments for these projects;
- Continue to identify and leverage resources among all stakeholders.

Stakeholders to-date include:

Deschutes National Forest
Ochoco Forest
Prineville BLM
Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
Oregon Department of Forestry
Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
All local fire districts and departments, RFPAs
Project Wildfire
Fire Learning Network
Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network
County Planning Departments
Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project
Elected officials from all counties, cities
Central Oregon Prescribed Fire Council
Environmental Community
OSU Cooperative Extension
NW Fire Science Consortium
County Sheriffs
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Deschutes Land Trust

Forest and Ranchland Owners
Walker Range Fire Protection Association
Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
Home/Property Owner Organizations
CWPP groups in each county
Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Mike Hollem and Romy Mortensen, Brooks
Resources Corporation, West Bend Property
Company and The Tree Farm

Ron White and Mike Tennant, Tennant
Developments, West Bend Property Company and
The Tree Farm

Charley Miller and Connie Marshall, Miller Lumber
Company and The Tree Farm

Next Steps:

- Create a Steering Committee consisting of senior agency and local government leaders, private land stakeholders and non-governmental leaders.
- The Steering Committee, with the support and contributions of all stakeholders, will ensure strategic alignment, collaborative engagement and programmatic alignment as the Cohesive Strategy Initiative is implemented.
- The Steering Committee will develop a coordinated approach to the three goals of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Develop and implement a robust, inclusive communications strategy to strengthen internal and external support for the collaborative efforts of the Initiative.
- Strengthen capacity to collect, analyze, interpret and integrate all types of data and information, including recognized data gaps, to inform decision-making. (Relying on scientific data and analyses, on the part of all stakeholders provides the best opportunity to restore and maintain landscapes, protect communities from wildfire, and effectively respond to wildfires when they occur. Using science and data analysis to support implementation planning and decision-making must continue).
- Utilize performance measures and monitoring information to assess effectiveness and accountability.
- Develop capacity and support training and utilization of support tools to better inform decision-making and trade-off analyses at all levels of fire and land management.
- Document successes and determine common themes of successful projects. Maintain knowledge and information resources that are easily accessible to stakeholders.
- Create incentives for all stakeholders to participate and embrace the principles of the Cohesive Strategy.
- Continue to foster Cohesive Strategy behaviors to change behaviors and attitudes, and ultimately change cultures.
- Continue to identify and engage all stakeholders.
- Identify political education and leveraging opportunities.
- Identify all current investments/programs/achievement and their value to truly understand values to be protected and measures of achievement.
- Develop concept of this Regional Learning Lab and how others might take advantage of the learning opportunities here.

The path forward

Success in Central Oregon depends on the collective commitment by all stakeholders at all levels to take action toward meaningful reductions in risk in the short- and long-term. Looking ahead, this will require:

- **Prioritized investment and use of resources.** Reducing risk significantly will require that existing resources, including budgetary resources, are used more efficiently.
- **Acceptance of increased short-term risk.** Significantly reducing fuels across broad landscapes will require expanded use of wildland fire to achieve management objectives. Using fire as a tool carries inherent risks that must be considered in the short-term to achieve the longer-term benefits.
- **Achieve greater collective investment.** Even with greater efficiency and acceptance of short-term risk, current levels of investment may be inadequate to achieve the levels of risk reduction desired. All who have a stake in the outcome, from individual property owners to the federal, state, tribal, and local governments, must share the costs and level of effort necessary to redeem responsibilities for reducing risks posed by wildfire.

Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative

Political Leveraging Strategy

Expected Outcomes: Universal support from local, state, tribal and federal elected officials for the Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative (COCSI). These elected officials can demonstrate that support by influencing agency and stakeholder budgets in legislative deliberations which will over time, deliver financial program support to the collective efforts of the COCSI. These elected officials will carry the messages to other elected officials and agencies at their respective levels based on consistent feedback of progress with implementation.

Sequential Path: Local, state, tribal and federal elected officials will be briefed on the COCSI strategy, by individual briefings and briefing papers on success stories, and by stakeholders who describe “why” Central Oregon must have their collective support to be successful.

Specifically, elected officials will be encouraged to support the following tenets of the COCSI:

- Based on Central Oregon’s institutional history of collaboration, interagency cooperation and a shared vision of healthy landscapes, safe environments for citizens, vibrant economies and a culture of shared visions for the future, agencies and stakeholders can continue these traditions.
- Based on these cultural norms, Central Oregon is currently implementing all aspects and tenets of the Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy and these endeavors must be recognized nationally, within Oregon and locally to enable these programs to rise to the next level of effectively and efficiently implementing the Cohesive Strategy philosophy of an “all hands, all lands approach.”
- This recognition must include financial support for all agencies and stakeholder programs.
- The potential for leveraging resources for achievement under the Cohesive Strategy in Central Oregon is more than unique; there is no other geographic location in the United States strategically positioned to achieve the goals of the Cohesive Strategy for generations to come.

- The agencies and stakeholders in Central Oregon are acutely aware that without consistent support from elected officials, the opportunities for success significantly diminish.

COCSI Coordination: As we begin the political leveraging strategy, deliver the messages we are asking electeds to share and support, continue to tell the Central Oregon story, engage new stakeholders, engage Central Oregon media, develop and implement a COCSI communication strategy and provide logistical and program support, a COCSI Coordinator must be identified. In the interim, Joe Stutler and Katie Lighthall will provide those coordination duties.

Legislative Day: Following the briefings, the COCSI Steering Committee will invite local, state, tribal and federal elected officials to a Legislative Day in August 2015 (taking advantage of August recess of federal legislators). The intent is to bring these elected officials together for an understanding of the COCSI, seek their advice for next steps and develop a collective legislative agenda for implementation.

Central Oregon Cohesive Strategy Initiative Declaration

Celebration: These elected officials will be invited, along with other senior agency officials and stakeholder representatives to a Declaration Signing Celebration in late September 2015. At this Celebration, all agencies and stakeholders within the COCSI will sign a Declaration of Support for the COCSI.