

Agenda Item No.:	B
Work Plan:	Fire Protection Work Plan
Topic:	Ongoing Topic: Rangeland Protection Association Formation
Presentation Title:	Approval to Form Petersburg Rangeland Protection Association
Date of Presentation:	January 4, 2023
Contact Information:	Levi Hopkins, Wildfire Prevention and Policy Manager (503) 949-3572, <a href="mailto:Levi.a.hopkins@odf.oregon.gov">Levi.a.hopkins@odf.oregon.gov</a>

## **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this agenda item is to obtain Board approval to proceed with bringing specific areas of northern Wasco County, into the Oregon Protection System.

## **CONTEXT**

Rangeland fire protection associations are non-profit, locally governed groups of landowners which have been organized to provide fire protection to rangeland in portions of eastern Oregon. These organizations are formed under the authority of the Board and with assistance from the Department.

Currently, there are 26 Rangeland Protection Associations (RPA) that have previously been approved by the Board of Forestry. The most recent being the Lower Bridge and Northern Harney County RPA's that were formed in 2022. These RPAs protect over 4,855,598 acres of private land and approximately 639, 982 acres of state-owned lands. These lands, including federally owned land, combine to encompass over 16 million acres.

Several representatives of rangeland owners in north Wasco County have requested the Board hold a public hearing about providing protection from fire for rangelands in the vicinity of Dufur, Oregon. The Board, on July 20th, 2022, authorized a public hearing on the formation request, pursuant to ORS 477.320. A hearing was held at the Urness Residential Shop, in The Dalles, Oregon, on November 16, 2022.

At the hearing, strong support for the formation of an association was evident in the immediate area. Testimony presented during the hearing indicated a need for organized fire protection, and the local landowners want to assist local wildland agencies with initial attack to prevent more large fires in the area.

These landowners want a way to protect their private property and actively take part in the protection of their lands. The increased level of protection for this area can be achieved by bringing it into the Oregon protection system and forming a rangeland protection association.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Department recommends the Board take the following action when it meets on January 4, 2023:

Approve the inclusion of rangeland in portions of northern Wasco County into a rangeland protection association and direct the Department to assist with the formation of the Petersburg Rangeland Protection Association, pursuant to ORS 477.320.

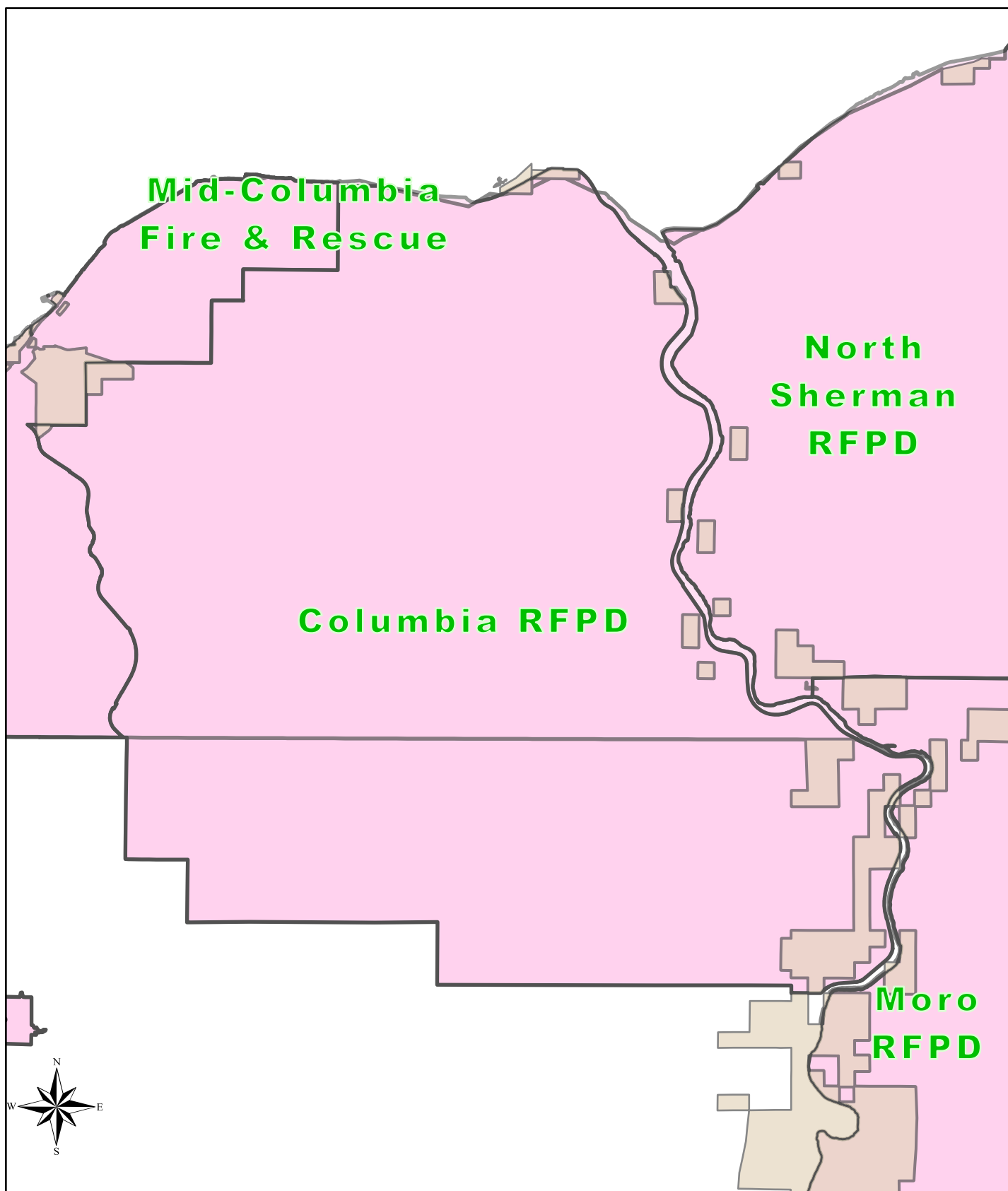
## **NEXT STEPS**

The Department will work with local landowners in the area to form the Petersburg Rangeland Protection Association. This will include developing mutual aid agreements, providing training as requested, offering FEPP equipment as available, and any other assistance as requested and feasible.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- (1) Petersburg Rangeland Association Boundary Map
- (2) Petersburg Rangeland Association Formation Public Hearing Sign-in Sheet
- (3) Petersburg Rangeland Association Formation Public Hearing Report
- (4) Letters of Support

# Petersburg RFPA Proposed



• Towns

Layer

Protection Status 2021

▭ Structural Fire Protection

▭ BLM

▭ Forest Protection Association

▭ No known protection

▭ Other Federal

▭ Rangeland Protection Association

▭ USFS

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Attachment 1

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PUBLIC HEARING PARTICIPATION RECORD  
 REQUEST TO Form Petersburg AREA INTO THE OREGON PROTECTION SYSTEM UNDER ORS 477.320

Location: Emerson Lane Date: 11/9/22 Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE PRINT**

NAME & ORGANIZATION	MAILING ADDRESS	TESTIMONY SUBMITTED	
		WRITTEN	ORAL
Noah Williams	P.O. Box 323 Wasco, OR 97065		X ✓
Mike Urness	P.O. Box 761 The Dalles OR 97058		X ✓
Amy Kaser	4550 Fifteen Mile Rd The Dalles		
Mike Kelly	4730 Emerson Loop Rd T.D.		
Brill Alaxue	7075 Fifteen mile Rd. - T.D.		
Megan Wagenblast	6330 KELLY CUTOFF RD T.D.		X ✓
Jane Wagenblast	" " "		X ✓
Ryan Clausen	P.O. Box 1972, TD		
Dezi Remington	5815 Wrentham Market Rd TD		X ✓
DAVID BREWER	6124 ROBERTS MARKET RD. TD.		

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PUBLIC HEARING PARTICIPATION RECORD  
REQUEST TO Form Petersburg AREA INTO THE OREGON PROTECTION SYSTEM UNDER ORS 477.320

Location: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

**PLEASE PRINT**

NAME & ORGANIZATION	MAILING ADDRESS	TESTIMONY SUBMITTED	
		WRITTEN	ORAL
Brad McPhergan	1054 Quail Ct Hood River OR 97031		
Kristin Dodd	3701 W. 13th St. The Dalles 97058	X	X
Bob Palmer	1400 W. 8th Street, The Dalles, OR 97058	X	X

Revised 20100301

**Date:** November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
**To:** Oregon Board of Forestry  
**From:** Marvin J. Vetter, Rangeland Fire Protection Coordinator  
**Subject:** Hearing Officer's Report on North Harney Landowner Hearing ORS 477.320(1)

### **Hearing Information**

**Proposed Area:** Northern Wasco County  
**Hearing Date & Time:** November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2022 6:30 PM  
**Hearing Location:** Urness Residential Shop, The Dalles, OR  
**Written Comments Due:** November 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
**Hearing Authorized:** July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
**Hearing Officer:** Marvin J. Vetter, Rangeland Fire Protection Coordinator

The Public Hearing on the proposal to bring the Northern Wasco area into the Oregon Protection System was formally convened at 7:09 p.m. in the Urness residential shop after a lengthy discussion regarding the proposal. Registration forms were available for people who wished to provide oral comments on the proposed formation. The hearing was closed at 7:19 p.m.

There were 13 people in attendance, 11 of whom are local landowners, 5 landowners signed up to provide oral comments on the participation record. 3 of the landowners that provided oral comment were also board members of the Special District that is proposing to dissolve to become a Rangeland Fire Protection Association as the agricultural lands are now allowed following the passing of Senate Bill 590. In addition to the landowners, oral and written comment were submitted by the Wasco County Fire Defense Board Chief and the Unit Forester of the adjoining ODF unit; each expressing support for the formation.

### **Summary of Oral Comments**

Community interest in the formation of the proposed Petersburg Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) is strongly supported by landowners and the County. There is significant support from local city, rural, and wildland fire agencies. A board of directors existing for the special district will carry over as the established board of directors for the RFPA. The board is in the process of filing for corporate legal status and anticipates this process to be complete prior to the start of the new year; as well as beginning the dissolution process with Special Districts Association of Oregon. In addition, they have made commitments of time, equipment, and training to be prepared for the 2023 fire season.

Landowners and residents of the area have been heavily impacted by catastrophic wildfires in recent years including the Substation Fire (2018), South Valley Fire (2018), Long Hollow Fire (2018), and Wrentham Market Rd Fire (2021). The board and several landowners acknowledged the need to develop more cooperative relationships, establish more organizational structure, and learn ways to be more effective in limiting the size and intensity of fires affecting Wasco County landowners and crop lands vital

to the local economy and way of life. The board commented on the origin of the special district as it related to the definitions allowed in law for “rangeland” at the time of its formation and recognized that their existing model is more in alignment with the Rangeland Program.

There were no concerns or opposition expressed for the proposed RFPA formation. Oral testimony was in full support of bringing these lands into the Oregon Protection System and forming a Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

### **Summary of Written Comments**

The Wasco County Commissioners were in full support of the RFPA forming within their county.

The City of Dufur fire Chief was in full support.

Wasco County Fire Defense Board Chief and Chief of Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue was in full support.

Wasco County Sherriff was in full support.

Oregon Department of Forestry, Central Oregon District, The Dalles Unit Forester was in full support.

All written comment expressed an understanding of the vast benefits of forming a RFPA in this area including cooperative relationships, agreements, and additional resource capacity in Wasco county for fire suppression.

/s/ Marvin J. Vetter

Marvin J. Vetter

Rangeland Fire Protection Coordinator

Eastern Oregon Area.



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

## Department of Forestry

Central Oregon District

The Dalles Unit

3701 West 13th

The Dalles, OR 97058

PHONE: 541-296-4626

FAX: 541-298-4993

[www.ODFcentraloregon.com](http://www.ODFcentraloregon.com)

November 9, 2022



"STEWARDSHIP IN FORESTRY"

RE: Formation of the Petersburg RFPA in Wasco County

For the record, my name is Kristin Dodd and I work for the Oregon Department of Forestry. I serve as The Dalles Unit Forester which is part of the Central Oregon District. In my position, I manage the Fire Protection Program in both Wasco and Hood River Counties.

Within the ODF Central Oregon District boundary, myself and my staff are responsible for initial attack of wildland fires on private, state, and county owned lands. We do this with permanent and seasonal staffing as well as with firefighting equipment that is owned or contracted by the district or agency. However, we would not be successful without the cooperation, relationships and mutual aid agreements from our local structural and wildland partner agencies. These partnerships contribute to the overall statewide complete and coordinated fire response system.

Dating back to the formation of Ironside, the first Rangeland Fire Protection Association in 1964, the RFPA program has come a long way. Significant momentum and successes have occurred since then, including great local coordination between RFPA's and their adjacent wildland fire agencies. That success is why we are working with landowners to establish the 27<sup>th</sup> RFPA in Oregon, known locally as the Petersburg RFPA.

With the inclusion of crop land as part of the definition of Rangeland, under SB 590, the option for more Wasco County landowners to form a Rangeland Association became a reality. We have all seen and experienced devastating fires in Wasco County in recent years that have significantly impacted the landowners affected by these fires.

As a local wildland fire agency, I fully support the establishment of the Petersburg RFPA. This establishment will allow for access to firefighting equipment & clothing, radios for communication, training, and an opportunity to improve coordination and support through mutual aid agreements.

While I recognize that it will take time to fully get up and running, I look forward to working together to suppress wildland fires as quickly and efficiently as possible. As we know, wildfire knows no boundaries and this step will contribute to the statewide complete and coordinated fire response system.

Thank you for your time.

Kristin Dodd, The Dalles Unit Forester  
Central Oregon District – (541) 296-4626

AGENDA ITEM B

Attachment 4

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1400 West Eighth Street  
The Dalles, Oregon 97058  
541-296-9445 Fax: 541-296-8656

November 9, 2022

Oregon Department of Forestry  
C/o: Marvin Vetter, Rangeland Program Coordinator  
PO Box 1382  
Prineville, OR 97754

Dear Mr. Vetter,

On behalf of Mid-Columbia Fire and Rescue, it is my pleasure to offer this letter supporting the development and formation of Columbia Rural into a Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA). Several benefits can be realized through the formation of an RFPA:

Wildfire suppression responsibilities have historically been divided by ownership among resident ranchers, Federal, State, and local agencies. However, wildfire and interest in managing such events, crosses ownership boundaries. The RFPA model being proposed provides the opportunity to improve fire management by organizing, recognizing, and authorizing rancher participation in fire suppression activities alongside formalized fire protection agencies. Such volunteer firefighters are trained, equipped, and have the legal authority to respond to fires on their own private lands and, as applicable, in a mutual aid capacity alongside agency partners.

Ranchers possess important advantages that can be put into practice through the RFPA model. Such advantages include in-depth local knowledge, access to their own resources and equipment, spatial deployment across large areas, and the strong motivation to their and their neighbor's property from fire. This in turn will aide in their ability to respond quickly for initial attack, keeping fires small, and preventing any detrimental impacts that occur with larger incidents.

Potential challenges such as conflicts among individuals, differences between State, Federal and local agency standards, differences in culture between ranching communities and formal firefighting agencies, and specific negative incidents or experiences that have the potential to create tension and trust issues between parties may be alleviated through the RFPA model by experience and time spent together on and off the fire line. Going through similar experiences, building common understandings, and learning more about wildfire and each other will strengthen informal and interpersonal relationships between individuals. RFPA members will increase their understanding of how and why formal fire managers make decisions which in turn will help build improved repour and increased confidence between parties.

The RFPA model emphasizes the importance of informal and interpersonal communications and relationships in both ranching and fire management communities and the need/desire to foster positive, respectful communication by making space for informal interaction and trust building.

Finally, the RFPA model provides an avenue for the provision of equipment and training which will help ensure volunteer firefighters are prepared to safely participate in organized suppression activities so that all firefighters go home at the end of every incident.



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In conclusion, we fully support the efforts of Columbia Rural in seeking to develop and form a RFPA through the Oregon Department of Forestry. The RFPA model has proven to be a successful concept throughout the State. Such a concept is timely considering the increase in wildland fire activity we are now experiencing. The formation of an RFPA in the Columbia Rural region provides the opportunity to continue building upon our current positive and long-standing partnership, to better serve and protect our community patrons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert F. Palmer". The signature is written in a cursive style and extends to the right with a long, sweeping underline.

Robert F. Palmer  
Fire Chief



Dear Board of Forestry,

I'm writing this to address the Columbia Rural fire district moving to an RFPA. I do believe this would be a great thing in our area, do to the fact that when Columbia Rural was in operation, they had equipment to help fight these fires in the rangeland areas that all of us other fire districts don't. I think with the extra added training and more resources would sure help keep some of these fires smaller. That was always one part that bothered me is the way they would attack fires, it works great and is effective because of how aggressive they fight fire. But there are rules and regulation to follow to keep everyone safe. I myself have learned this over the years.

These people in the CRFPD that are trying to move to an RFPA are a great group of people, I have worked along side many of them in fighting some of these big fires. They do great work, they have the knowledge of the land that many don't. They are always willing to help with their water trucks or tractors with discs on every fire.

I know I would like to see CRFPD move to a RFPA , it would help them get better recourse and training to help fight these fire with all of the other fire districts in Wasco County.

Respectfully,

Dufur Fire Chief

Jon Keyser Jr

Phone: 541-993-2901

Email: [keyserjon2@gmail.com](mailto:keyserjon2@gmail.com) , [dufurfire@ortelco.net](mailto:dufurfire@ortelco.net)



**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

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*Pioneering pathways to prosperity.*

November 10, 2022

To Whom It May Concern,

Wasco County, dependent on agriculture for a substantial portion of our economy, is experiencing an unprecedented extended drought and has been significantly impacted by wildfires in the last 5 years. Farmers and ranchers work diligently to mitigate fire hazards to protect the their lives, homes, crops and livestock.

Columbia Rural Fire Protection Association is in the process of dissolving and requesting Rangeland Fire Protection Association status. With assistance from the Department of Forestry Rangeland Fire Protection Coordinator Marvin Vetter and Permanent Forest Officer Rick Fletcher, they are working through the process to become the Petersburg Rangeland Fire Protection Association.

The Wasco County Board of Commissioners supports this endeavor as it will bring all agencies together to combat wildfire in our communities. We commend the grass-roots undertaking of our forward-thinking rural communities who embody our mission of pioneering pathways to prosperity. We encourage you to join us in supporting their efforts.

Sincerely,

  
Kathleen B. Schwartz, Board Chair

  
Steven D. Kramer, Vice-Chair

  
Scott C. Hege, County Commissioner