

# Public Meeting Report

## Harney County Wildfire Risk/Hazard Assessment and Mitigation Plan

Walsh Environmental Scientists and Engineers LLC convened a public meeting in cooperation with the Harney County Planning Department on December 1, 2005, 7:00 to 8:30 pm at the Burns Senior and Community Services Center as a forum for public input and education.

### Meeting Purpose

The purpose of the meeting was threefold:

- Inform the public concerning the findings of the wildfire risk/hazard assessment and mitigation plan.
- Solicit discussion concerning the proposed mitigation plan
- Provide educational materials to encourage homeowners to practices Firewise recommendations

### Meeting Notification

Notification of the public meeting occurred through press releases to the *Burns Times-Herald* and Burns radio station, KZZR / KQHC. A direct mailing to 1,059 rural addresses invited residents to attend the meeting.

### Attendees

Thirteen people attended the meeting excluding Walsh Environmental staff. The severe snowstorm and road conditions may have limited public participation.

#### Attendees That Signed Registry

NAME	ADDRESS	PHONE	ORGANIZATION
Harold Otley	Diamond	493-2469	Otley Bros. Inc.
Gordon Foster		541-447-5658	ODF
Dana Sanford	Hines	573-4422	BLM
Jack Dunkwater	Burns	573-6284	C Com.
Steve Morefield	Hines	573-3736	BLM
Kenton Dick	Burns	573-5562	Burns Paiute Tribe
Steve Gasty	Burns	573-6356	Harney County
John M. Potter	Ranch Road	-	Forestry
Richard Jennings	Burns	573-6655	Harney County
Jeff Rose	Hines	573-4400	BLM



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## Meeting Format

Richard Jennings, Harney County Planning Director, opened the meeting at 7:10 p.m. He explained the fire risk assessment project and need. He then introduced Jerry Barker and Angela Glenn as Walsh Environmental employees that conducted the fire risk assessment. Jerry Barker gave a PowerPoint presentation on the findings of the wildfire hazard/risk assessment and mitigation plan. Questions and discussion were encouraged during the course of the presentation. The presentation lasted approximately 45 minutes. The following is the record of comments, questions and answers, which occurred sequentially during the course of the presentation.

### *Comments and Questions*

**Question:** Is the percent by acreage in the tables by vegetation type? (This question is in reference to a table, which showed the responses from one question in the questionnaire.)

**Answer:** The numbers in the table were a percentage formed from the number of responses to each hazard.

**Question:** Is the fire regime reflective of the different types of vegetation and topography?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Comment:** The Pine Springs fire is not part of the total acres shown in the fire history table. It is too old. (Comment in response to the table on fire history from 1993 to 2004.)

**Comment:** Should look at fire history from 1980-2005 to get a more accurate year average.

**Comment:** North Burns is ready to go.

**Question:** Where are the hot spots in the county? (Question in response to the fire history slide.)

**Answer:** The ignition risk potential slide will identify 'hot spots'.

**Comment:** More grazing, even in the forested areas. Cattle can eat the ladder fuels.

**Comments:** Concern was expressed over where the lines end up on the maps for fuel breaks through private property. The landowner next to Burns/Hines is concerned with re-establishing fuel breaks. In the past there was an issue with motorbikes using the fuel break for recreational purposes.



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- Suggestions were made to reduce the fuel load and not remove vegetation to bare ground.
- Techniques include thinning, heavy grazing and brush beating.

**Comment:** The USFS uses prescribed drought to dry simulate drought. Frenchglen prescribe drought may increase fire risk because of dry vegetation. Fuel breaks are needed to protect community.

- Suggestion: mow the prescribed drought area.

**Question:** Is the plan going to allow us to make recommendations for safety zones around structures?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Question:** Is Fire Regime Class Code (FRCC) 3 juniper and sage areas?

**Answer:** In some cases yes.

**Comment:** Brush beating is a good technique to reduce fuels as long as you do not expose the soil.

**Comments:** BLM has had success with brush beating. The areas were they have been able to test brush beating, the flame lengths have been significantly reduced.

BLM can suggest widths of the treated areas. The BLM is currently seeding (crested wheatgrass) and doing striped areas.

Most of the brush beating and mowing the BLM has done is along roadways.

Some of the brush beating projects is done to help sagebrush habitat.

Rock in the ground makes it more difficult to get rid of all the brush. Suggestion was made to follow up with sheep and cattle grazing.

**Question:** Will CWPP help the BLM to let fires burn?

**Answers and Comments:** No it will support what we want to do (BLM).

There cannot be a “let it burn policy” in the forested areas because of the mix of private and public lands.

Property owners can let fires burn with an agreement with the adjoining federal agency. BLM is starting the work on a fire plan in February.

**Question:** Is it possible to have a prescribed natural fire program south of Highway 20?

**Answer:** It is possible but with restrictions.



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**Question:** Who is to say what improves the wildlife habitat?

**Answer:** Fire can improve wildlife habitat.

**Comment:** No more cheat grass. Everyone agrees that the county does not need cheat grass.

**Comment:** Put the citizens back to work to help put out wildfires. Historically there were districts and fire wardens.

**Comment:** The Rangeland Fire Protection Districts are the evolution of the old fire districts and wardens.

**Comment:** The insurance was paid for all the Rangeland Fire Protection Districts – Gordon.

**Comment:** There is an effort to get established access to the irrigation pipes.

**Comment:** BLM has always been given access to the irrigation pipes when it is needed.

**Comment:** Water sources including the irrigation pipes need to be identified on the map.

**Question and Comment:** Communications need to be coordinated. What is available and how can the Rangeland Protection Districts get the equipment they need?

**Answer:** Grants and using old equipment.

**Question:** Are the Rangeland Fire Protection Districts better off doing one big grant or separate?

**Answer:** No, grants usually have a dollar limit so more is better than one. Gordon's new job is to help write these grants.

**Comment:** If the landowner cannot afford expensive recommended building materials they need to make sure they have enough defensible space around the structures.

**Comment:** Limbing junipers up a few feet can help remove the ladder fuels.

**Comment:** Clear fuels out around power poles.

**Question:** Are there grants to help individuals with defensible space?

**Answer:** Yes – help for individual landowners are available.



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**Comment:** The County, State and Federal government need to work together to get the most out of the grants and funding available.

**Question:** Will the County be given an electronic copy of the final report?

**Answer:** Yes.

**Comment:** There are 65,000 lightening strikes a year on average. About one out of 1,000 starts a fire.

**Comment:** Change the date on the fire history map from 1939 to 1993.

**Comment:** Rangeland Fire Protection Associations are responsible for only the private and county lands within the protections zones not the public (federal) lands. The Rangeland Fire Protection Associations can be the first responder on federal lands.

**Comment:** There needs to be a section in the CWPP on how the plan can be used by the community.

**Comment:** One of the fire protection zones (association) boundaries on the current map is wrong.



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