Chelan County Fire Protection District No. 5

Special Meeting of Commissioners
Hosted by Chelan Fire & Rescue
232 E. Wapato, Chelan WA
Wednesday July 16, 2025 @ 4:00 pm

Commissioners Present: Fred Weiss, Chris Willoughby and Dan Baker.
Chelan Fire & Rescue: Russ Jones, Mark Donnell and Ron Simmons.

Others Present: Chief Arnold Baker, District Secretary Reggie Trusel, Lieutenant/Training Officer Raynor Baker. Chelan Fire & Rescue: Chief Brandon Asher, Assistant Fire Chief Shawn Sherman, District Secretary Misty Fifield, Administrative Assistant Karla Mendoza.

Guest Speaker Presentation: Hilary Franz, former Chelan County Lands Commissioner for Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Fire Aside-Community Wildfire Resilience.
Hillary Fran presented a slide show that illustrated the local fire demographic for Chelan and Manson areas and explained how the Fire Aside outreach will work.

- Increasing Wildfire Resilience in Chelan County.
  Washington has seen a 400% increase in acres burned annually over the past 30 years.

- Rapid response is key!
  After wildfires burned just under two million acres from 2014-2015 the WA State Department of Natural Resources decided to change their strategy and course of action implementing major changes.

  - New Goal: Keep 90% of fires below 10 acres.

  - Initial Attack: Aircrafts are in the air at the first signs of smoke. The goal was to do everything possible to keep fires from getting big, once that happens their resources are limited for working on any other fires.

  - Reduce time by prepositioning resources close to where they know fires are prevalent.

  - Two key pieces of legislation passed: HB 1498 which secured $500 million in resources for over eight years, making major investments in ground & air resources. Moved most all their aviation contracts to *exclusive use*, so they had better access/control as needed for the State of Washington. Keeping up with the growing demand, they tripled air resources and quadrupling ground resources.
    Over the last ten years the number of fires and geography has increased but the number of acres burned has decreased. Over the last four years, 95% of fires kept to below ten acres.
    2016-2020: 429,800 acres burned on average
    2021-2024: 324,750 acres burned on average

- Oregon has similar weather conditions to Washington State: drought, dry forest/fields, wind. By mid-summer WA & OR experienced roughly the same number of fires-but they had almost five times area burned.

  By the end of 2024 fire season, 1.9 million acres would burn in Oregon and 300,000 acres in Washington.
  For 2024, Washington had the fifth fewest number of acres burned in the past decade and less than half of what burned in the year 2020.

- Both HB1168 and HB1498 are at risk. Funding was just cut in half for HB1168 and HB1498 will end in 2026. It is critically important for Fire Districts and their communities to get involved in protecting both in the next legislative sessions.

- Restoring the health of our landscapes to be more fire resilient. What is needed in fuel treatment to reducing wildfires.

- Post Fire analysis was done by Vibrant Planet on the California Eaton Fire. Risk mitigation treatments would have been effective. Their analysis showed an investment of nine million in risk mitigation treatments would have slowed the fire down enough for firefighters to better defend more effectively and safely. Potentially avoiding the forty billion in losses.

- Landscape near Carson City Nevada
  Using the System: The community gave the pertinent information telling the system the outcomes they wanted from their management plan. Protecting built assets, water, electrical etc. Once they entered the available budget the platform instantly produces a prioritized list to start implementing.

- Engaging communities to make their homes and neighborhoods safer is the other thing that needs urgent focus.

- Wildfire risk for Chelan/Manson area: There are 4,120 properties that have some risk of being affected by wildfires over the next 30 years, which represents 98% of all properties in Chelan.

- Fire Aside is a software tool to help property owners, fire districts, local government and State agencies. Educating the importance in increasing resilience to the aggressive threat of wildfires. The old way of responding to wildfires will not work, communities must quickly change to a more effective approach. The Fire Aside program could in turn help insurance companies see how & what the property owners are doing to keep their properties safer. Doing annual assessments could help bring down the cost of insurance and even keep your insurance.

- Commissioner Russ Jones: Noted WA State is one of the only States where insurance agencies do not allow for discounts with hardening.

- Hilary Franz: Insurance companies have a role to help work with families that show the extra steps they're taking to lessen the wildfire risks.

- Commissioner Donnell: He indicated the outpouring concern he's heard from homeowners who have lost coverage or suffered high insurance increases. Showing visible proof: the science and modeling behind it would be helpful to companies and understand how effective risk reduction is. There are a lot of insurance challenges we are facing.

Chelan County Fire District 5 Board of Commissioners:

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Commissioner Chairman Chris Willoughby

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Commissioner Fred Weiss

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Commissioner Dan Baker

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Attest: Regenia Trusel
District Secretary