

February 4th MO Prescribed Fire Council

Tan Tara Conference Center during MNRC 2:00-4:00pm

Call to order @2:00pm

The Executive Committee of the Missouri Prescribed Fire Council held a meeting to discuss MPFC business; executive committee members present included Vice Chair Wes Buchheit, Secretary/Treasurer John Burk, and Members At Large Scot Mikols and Neal Humke. Also present by phone was Member At Large Robin Verble. See attendance list for other members present.

Prior to the meeting coming to order, Assistant Deputy Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) Aaron Jeffries provided the MPFC with an update on proposed bills addressing prescribed burning liability. Legislators wanted a clearer definition of what insurance level would be needed and wanted MDC to define the level of training that would be adequate and track who had attained it.

The meeting was brought to order by Vice Chair Wes Buchheit and included a round of introductions.

The first item discussed was the prescribed burning legislation. John Burk mentioned what was offered as a parting comment by the Cattlemen's Association (CA) lobbyist during the senate hearing. The lobbyist did not speak in opposition but he did offer words of concern on behalf of CA that they were not comfortable with absolving prescribed burners from liability. The words he chose to illustrate his point indicated that the landowners representing the CA had visions of western wildfires and losing everything with no legal recourse available to them. This is a clear indication of how some have misconstrued the objective of the bill. The purpose of the legislation was not to remove liability but to legally define it. Currently, in Missouri, there is no legal difference between someone with dozens of hours of specialized training and hundreds of hours of practical experience from someone who has no training or experience when it comes to using fire as a tool. This is why it is either nearly impossible or fiscally unjustifiable in Missouri to get insurance coverage for businesses interested in providing this service. Because there was no chance to rebut or provide clarification and these were the last words heard by the committee, the language in the senate version of the bill was modified in a way that was much less favorable than the original language we helped provide.

Scot Mikols mentioned that it would be beneficial to have simple negligence language address fire risk and gross negligence language address smoke risk.

The original language provided in the bills attempted to get a gross negligence interpretation of prescribed fire liability but simple negligence language would make the bills more palatable.

Scot Mikols and Chuck Caverly requested talking points for proponents of prescribed burning to have handy when approaching their legislative representatives seeking their support. A "benefits of prescribed fire" white paper was later produced by Holly Neill with The Nature Conservancy (attached).

Casey Bergthold suggested having CFM moving these bills to the top of the CFM legislative portal to improve exposure and activity.

Ben Webster recommended that the council go through Holly Neill and provide a position statement concerning these bills (this was done via the executive committee).

Fire Management Coordination Team. John Burk mentioned PBA development is being limited by training. Casey Bergthold mentioned that a PBA/MPFC Coordinator position that have been trying to pursue would be able to provide this training. There is still an obvious need for this position and the MPFC will continue to explore options.

MPFC Grant Funding Status

Ben Webster reported that the funding balance available through MDC was at \$8,600 and this needed to be spent by June of 2021. The best use of this funding would be for needed equipment. Wes Buchheit reported that there was a PBA in development in St. Francois and Perry Counties so support monies would be needed. Requesting an extension on this grant was recommended.

John Burk reported that the funding balance available through NWTF was also at \$8,600. The best use of this funding is to cover MPFC operating costs (annual meeting expenses, website development maintenance, etc.) and PBA member travel expenses related to training. This funding also has no window and is available as long as supply lasts.

Other Topics Covered

Wes provided a brief update on the NE Prescribed Burn Conference he attended with assistance from the Great Plains Fire Exchange and appreciated the ability to be able to represent MPFC at the meeting.

Discussion went back to a PBA Coordinator position. It was mentioned that The Fire Coordinator position in NE has been able to develop and maintain 20 PBA's and runs their council.

Casey mentioned that the primary obstacle to getting a similar position in Missouri has been funding and, more specifically, getting enough without having to pass the hat to too many partners. The issue with shared positions is that when more than 2 are pitching in to underwrite the costs, all contributing partners have expectations of what they would like to see accomplished. This historically has resulted in a "serving too many masters" situation to whomever is in the position and the organization that is holding it. Most NGO's figure 100k to cover salary, benefits, and all associated costs and most agreements end up being for less than 50k per partner.

Casey also suggested putting together a prescribed burn plan for Missouri that would help sell the need for a coordinator position. Scot Mikols and Wes Buchheit agreed to develop a draft to be ready for June meeting. Jef Hodges recommended that Mark Melvin with the National Prescribed Burn Association be contacted for ideas/existing documents.

Ben Webster provided an overview of the S130/S190 training provided in September. The course was well attended and considered valuable.

Tom Fielden changed jobs between the 2019 annual meeting and this one so his seat opened up a Member At Large seat. The Bylaws indicate that the seat can remain open until the next annual meeting and that was the consensus of the Executive Committee. Chuck Caverly asked if contractors could be an affiliate. John Burk responded saying that the 2019 meeting of the Executive Committee was a special session that included contractors. They were asked, at that time, and they did not express interest at that time. John Burk also explained the election process and that any interested affiliates could be considered for inclusion and voted in at the annual meeting.

Lisa McBrayer with QF/PF informed us that our current platform is Sight-And-Go. She recommended using a Go-Daddy platform and agreed to set it up. The committee agreed with Scot Mikols making a motion and Neal Humke seconding the motion to pay for the upgrade and letting QF/PF manage the website. (this has since been completed and paid for using the NWTF grant).

The final order of business was to select a date and location for the annual meeting. The date selected was 6/6/20. Upper Osage PBA and Pure Air Landowner Association expressed interest in hosting.

Meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.