

What is Forestland Classification?

Forestland Classification is a process by which a committee reviews all the lands within the county to determine whether they meet the definition of 'forestland'. The committee further classifies the lands as Timber (Class 1), Timber/Grazing (Class 2), or Grazing (Class 3). This information is used to determine which lands are subject to the fire patrol assessment which helps fund a forest protection district budget.

What is Forestland?

'Forestland' is defined in state statute and means any woodland, brushland, timberland, grazing land or clearing that, during any time of the year, contains enough forest growth, slashing or vegetation to constitute, in the judgment of the forester, a fire hazard, regardless of how the land is zoned or taxed.

Why is Forestland Classification Needed?

- To help create a FAIR and EQUITABLE approach to funding ODF's fire protection program. The goal is to ensure that those landowners who should be helping to fund the system are doing so and the opposite is true.
- To allow INVOLVEMENT of local interests (County Government, Fire Chiefs, and Local Landowners) in the process.
- To update the current classification. Forestland classification was last completed in Jefferson County in the 1970's. Many areas have been urbanized and no longer meet the definition of forestland.

Local History and Overview

- On average, there are 40 wildland fires annually, which burn 2,217 acres on ODF protected lands within Jefferson, Crook and Deschutes counties.
- The District has been classifying lands since the 1940's.
- Forestland classification has not been done in Jefferson County since the 1970's. There have been substantial land use changes since then.
- Forestland classification and the corresponding per acre assessments of forestland is a major funding component for ODF's protection system. The state's General Fund is the other major funding source.

How is Forestland Classification completed?

- The classification process is guided by ORS Chapter 526 and associated Administrative Rules.
- A Classification Committee examines lands within the county to determine which meet the definition of forestland. Urban and irrigated agricultural lands do not meet this definition.
- For lands determined to be forestland, the committee classifies those lands as:
 - Timber production (Class 1)
 - Joint use--timber production & grazing (Class 2)
 - Grazing and non-irrigated agricultural uses (Class 3)
- Work is done using GIS mapping with vegetation, soil productivity layers, and aerial imagery layers. The Committee reviews the landscape on a square mile by square mile basis.
- Periodic field checks are made by the Committee and ODF Staff during the process.
- Committee finalizes classification designations after public meetings and a Hearing.
- Finalized classification is filed with the County Clerk.

Committee Membership – Six Members

- Three Committee members are appointed by the County.
 - One Forestland owner or representative thereof
 - One Grazing land owner or representative thereof
 - One at-large member
- One member appointed by the State Fire Marshal
- One member appointed by the Director of OSU Extension
- One member appointed by the State Forester

Transparent Public Process

- Committee meetings are advertised in advance and open to public
- Each meeting agenda include time for public comment
- The Committee elects its own officers and creates its own by-laws
- Minutes are recorded and available to the public
- Multiple public information meetings and a formal public hearing is conducted. All affected landowners will receive a written invitation to these events.
- Affected landowners can provide testimony prior to final classification information being filed with County.
- Once the Committee has finalized the classification, it is filed with the County Clerk. This begins a 30-day appeal period. Landowners may make their appeal to the Circuit Court.

Impacts on the Local ODF Budget

- A common concern is this is a “money grab for ODF”. It is not.
- The forest protection district prepares an annual budget to protect lands within the district. The cost of this budget is pro-rated over the acres protected to determine an amount per acre assessed to landowners to pay for wildland fire protection. If the protected acres increase because of classification, the per acre rate decreases and vice versa.

Impacts to Local Structural Fire Departments

- There are 2 Rural Fire Districts within Jefferson County, one which is within the Oregon Department of Forestry Protection District.
- Some lands inside the ODF Protection District and a local Rural Fire District are currently assessed by both entities.
- ODF protects the wildland and RFD’s protect the structures and up to 5 acres in overlapping areas.
- If ODF classifies inside RFD’s where we currently are not providing protection, there will be an impact to the RFD budget. This is because if ODF is not there, RFD can assess on entire taxlot. If there is overlapping protection, the RFD is restricted to assessing the structure and up to 5 acres. Vice versa is true also.

Other Information

- Wildland fire protection of private lands in Oregon is a private-public partnership. In general, private landowners pay half the cost of protection with the State of Oregon General Fund paying the other half. Non-federal public lands also pay into this system.
- The Classification process does not determine assessment rates; it only determines who will be subject to the assessment.
- Jefferson County classification process will begin in the spring of 2022 and is expected to take about two years to complete.
- Only lands within the Forest Protection District may be assessed.
- The Classification Committee may make recommendations to ODF to make changes to the Forest Protection District boundary. These recommendations are not binding.



