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## PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Kathleen Otto, County Manager

**From:** Ahmad Qayoumi, Public Works Director  
Galina Burley, Parks and Lands Division Manager

**Date:** September 25, 2020

**Subject:** Camp Bonneville wildfire prevention

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**Background:**

Proebstel Neighborhood Association (PNA) contacted Clark County in 2019 and requested the county partner with the PNA and contact Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fire Management Office to develop a Camp Bonneville wildland fire risk assessment. The goal of this assessment would be to develop current objectives to minimize risk of extreme fire behavior to adjacent developed areas while maintaining healthy forest practices within Bonneville boundaries.

Clark County met with DNR staff to inquire about what process could be used to achieve this goal and DNR recommended a value loss prevention plan. A value loss prevention plan for this area would identify the neighboring values and land uses, major risk areas and hazards, and then propose prevention measures to address the highest risks first through hazard abatement.

PNA and Clark County acknowledge that more than 3,000 homes surround Camp Bonneville. Road infrastructure and fire breaks are limited in many portions of the property, and unexploded ordinance contamination poses substantial challenges for wildland firefighting within the park. PNA and Clark County also acknowledge that 95% of wildland fires are caused by human activities.

**Current Work:**

Following the request by PNA and meeting with DNR, Clark County's Forester began the formation of a team that will work to develop the value loss prevention plan for Camp Bonneville. This team consists of the County Forester, representatives from PNA, and the Clark County Assistant Fire Marshall. An initial meeting with this team started to develop the list of values for the plan and next steps will focus on gathering data related to hazards.

Clark County requested a set of The Natural Fuels Photo Series from the US Forest Service via email on 4/17/2020, which are a set of photographs with accompanying fuelbed characteristics data from sites where no recent management activity has occurred. They are used to make quick, easy, and inexpensive determinations of fuel

quantities and stand conditions when less precise estimates are acceptable. Clark County has not yet received the Pacific Northwest Volume from the US Forest Service.

Clark County continues to implement its sustainable forest management plan at Camp Bonneville and to date has thinned 950 acres targeting forest health (Figure 1). These thinning activities reduce forest stand stocking levels and ladder fuels that can result in extreme fire behavior (Figure 2). Clark County plans to continue these forest health thinning efforts in the coming years.

Clark County has completed unexploded ordnance clean-up at the camp, recently completing the west slopes. This area happens to be one of the more heavily developed borders of the park. Unexploded ordnance clean-up requires the removal of understory vegetation and small trees so that crews can effectively search for ordnance. These practices also reduce high levels of ladder fuels. Unexploded ordnance clean-up including brush clearing has also reduced fire danger across approximately 894 acres of the camp. The combination of forest health thinning and unexploded ordnance clean-up have helped to reduce fuel loading and danger of wildlife across many forested acres of Camp Bonneville.

Recent questions regarding wildfire risk were asked by neighbors of Camp Bonneville:

1. Do we do defensible wildfire buffers around the park?
  - In some locations of the camp, perimeter roads are in place and maintained that could be used as fire breaks.
2. Do we have a wildfire evacuation plan for the area?
  - In the case of a wildfire at Camp Bonneville, all non-essential personal would be asked to leave the camp immediately. Clark County Public Works would then work with local firefighting officials including Clark County Fire District 3, East County Fire District, and the Department of Natural Resources.
3. What is our plan to fight a wildfire at the site must it occur?
  - Clark County Public Works relies on the expertise of Clark County Fire District 3, East County Fire District, and the Department of Natural Resources in the case of a wildfire event at Camp Bonneville.
  - Clark County has also entered into an agreement with the Department of Natural Resources for Helitak resources to be on site 5 months out of the year.

#### **Fire Protection Assessment:**

RCW 76.04.600 requires every owner of forestland in the state of Washington to provide protection against the spread of fire.

RCW 76.04.610 requires any owner of forestland who neglects to provide adequate fire protection to pay an annual assessment for fire protection.

Clark County pays the fire protection assessment on many different properties including larger, undeveloped or forested parks, conservation lands, and Camp Bonneville.

Clark County inquired with the Department of Natural Resources about this requirement, and the Forest Fire Protection Assessment Coordinator confirmed that

“there are no actions other than paying the assessment that is required of a participating landowner.” Furthermore, DNR representative confirmed there is no state law requiring landowners subject to the fire protection assessment to provide defensible space at the perimeter of their properties, or to provide other forest fire prevention measures on their property. However, the county continues to manage Camp Bonneville for forest health, reducing fuel loading and fire danger. Clark County has also begun working with neighbors on a value loss prevention plan. These actions would be considered above and beyond what would normally be required under state law.

**Future Work:**

Clark County plans to continue to implement various management practices to minimize wildfire risk at Camp Bonneville, including:

- Thinning – This lowers the risk of wildfire by reducing the density of standing trees (ladder-fuel) or woody debris that may accumulate on the forest floor. It also promotes forest health, aesthetics, and timber production by concentrating growth on fewer, faster growing trees and by reducing the time to final harvest.
- Pruning – This reduces the risk by removing low-hanging vegetation that could ignite shrubs, vines, and eventually the tops of trees. Pruning crop trees also helps improve timber value, appearance, and access to the property.
- Fuel Reduction Burning – A fuel reduction burn lowers the risk by reducing the dangerous levels of combustible fuels under forest stands. This is balanced with leaving large woody debris & snags.
- Firebreaks – Develop a network of fire breaks, both natural and human-made, in order to reduce the risk of wildfire spreading.

Clark County Public Works submitted a request for the 2021 budget cycle to design and rebuild the main road that traverses the Central Impact Target Area (CITA). This roadway, once constructed, will provide access through the middle of the camp to access the east side of the property. This improved road access will set the stage for future timber work using the management practices listed above.

Figure 1: Forest thinning map

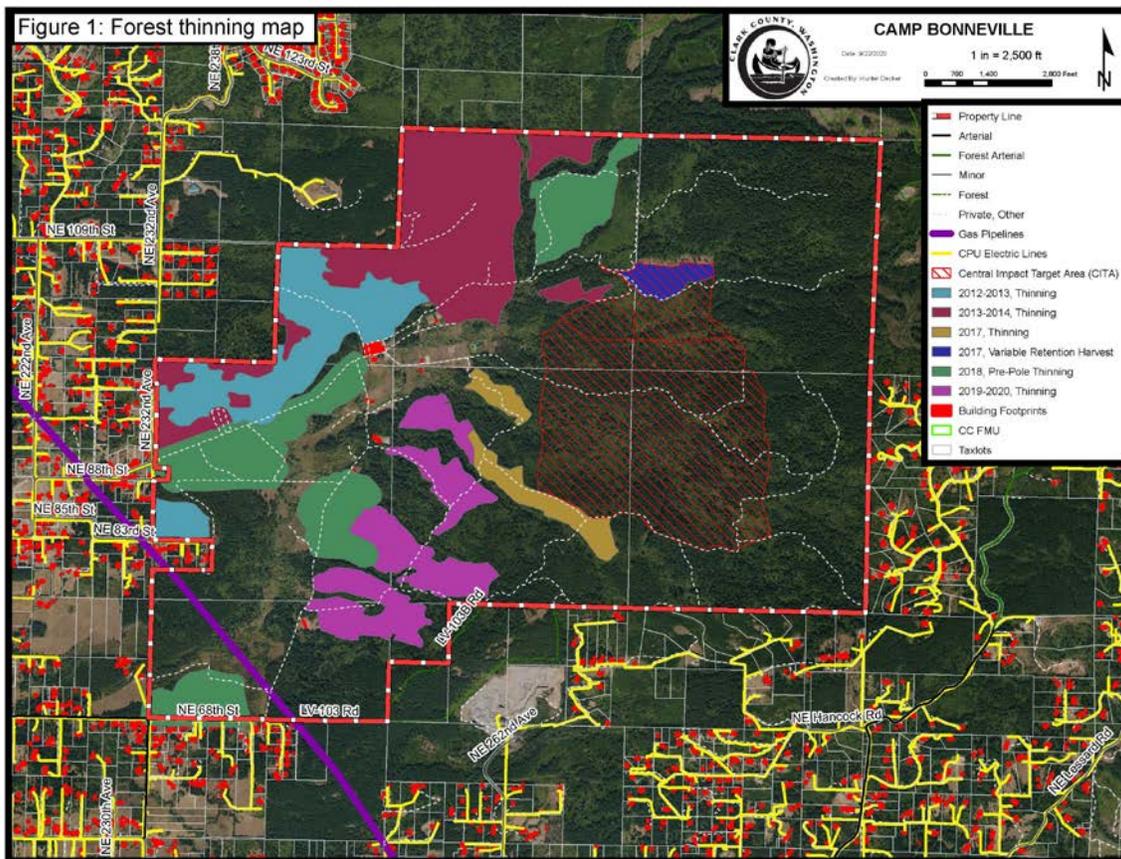


Figure 2: Results of thinning operations in 2020



Prior to Thinning

After Thinning