



Board of Commissioners

Office: (541) 766-6800

Fax: (541) 766-6893

4500 SW Research Way

Corvallis, OR 97333

bentoncountyor.gov

**MINUTES OF THE INFORMATION SHARING MEETING
BENTON COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
MAY 26, 2026**

Present: Pat Malone, Chair; Gabe Shepherd, Vice Chair; Nancy Wyse, Commissioner; Jane Vetto, County Counsel; Rick Crager, Interim County Administrator

Elected Officials: Jef Van Arsdall, Sheriff; Ryan Joslin, District Attorney

Staff: Rachel Bulder, Maura Kwiatkowski, Board Staff; Cory Grogan; Anne Thwaits, Public Information Officers; Bryan Lee, Emergency Manager

Guests: Matt Thomas; Leo Williamson; Brent Griffiths, Stephanie Stafford, Sierra Anderson; Ben Janes; Heidi Hagler; Kevin Fulsher; Chancy Ferguson; Dave Feinburg; Chris Barnes; Chris LaBelle

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chair Malone convened the meeting at 9:00 a.m. and introductions were made.

2. Review and Approve Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

3. Announcements

No announcements were made.

4. Proclamation

4.1 In the Matter of Proclaiming May 2026 as Wildfire Awareness Month in Benton County, Proclamation No. P2026-016 – Bryan Lee, Emergency Manager, Benton County Sheriff's Office

Lee read the proclamation.

MOTION: Shepherd moved to adopt Proclamation No. P2026-016 proclaiming May 2026 as Wildfire Awareness Month in Benton County. Wyse seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

5. Work Session

5.1 Benton County and the Oregon Department of Forestry Fire Chief Round Table – Bryan Lee, Emergency Manager, Benton County Sheriff's Office

Lee provided an introduction to the County's pre-wildfire season outlook and invited the other agencies present to report to the Board.

Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) – Leo Williamson, Forest Officer

- The 2025 year in review: fire season lasted from June 16 through October 9, with seven statistical fires in Benton County and five non-statistical fires the Philomath ODF branch assisted on.
- The 2026 fire season outlook: considerable increase in drought throughout the West compared to last year, the amount of moisture received in May and June matter the most for Western Oregon, fuels in parts of the State are showing early signs of stress, and there is very little snowpack.
- The Interagency Fire Center Predictive Services maps potential fires in the United States from May 2026 through August 2026.
- Preparation and prevention: the seasonal crew is fully staffed; expected to receive new Type-6 Engine; additional engine on reserve; coordination with the local fire districts, the Oregon State Fire Marshall, and federal partners; and prevention and education events.
- Helicopters and aircrafts on contract throughout Oregon.

Shepherd asked about the differences between Type 1, 2, and 3 helicopters.

Williamson stated that Type 1 is the largest helicopter, which can deliver anywhere between 800 to 1,200 gallons on a drop. Type 2 is medium-sized; tanks are housed within the aircraft and do not have external loads. Type 3 carry between 80 and 100 gallons.

Malone asked if Williamson knows when ODF will declare fire season.

Williamson believes it could be declared before June 16.

Malone asked about resource prioritization.

Williamson stated that local area needs will be established and prioritized before additional resources and personnel are dispersed.

Oregon State Fire Marshall (OSFM) – Brent Griffiths, Mobilization Coordinator;
Stephanie Stafford, Fire Risk Reduction Specialist

- Griffiths is assigned to support Benton, Linn, Lane, and Douglas Counties.
- Capacity: OSFM has approximately 18 task forces available to mobilize and can coordinate with other states if 13 or more task forces are utilized.
- In an effort to manage fire incidents and to increase fire department capacities during fire season, the Oregon Legislature has continued to authorize a seasonal staffing grant for fire agencies. Four agencies in Benton County have received that grant.
- Works with the Oregon Department of Forestry to access available aircraft.
- Expansion of mutual aid agreements with surrounding counties; this is the quickest way to receive additional resources.
- Stafford discussed future funding: House Bill 3940, which provided funding to OSFM, will be invested locally throughout Oregon. An investment strategy will be put in place.
- Stafford discussed upcoming grant programs.

Shepherd asked if the funding for the staffing grant lasts until 2027.

Griffiths confirmed.

Benton County Fire Defense Board (BCFDB) – Ben Janes, Fire Chief, City of Corvallis

- Fire service in Benton County, outside of the City of Corvallis and the Corvallis Rural Fire Protection District, is mainly volunteer-based.
- Senate Bill 762 allows volunteer departments to have some paid staffing.
- Expanded mutual aid agreements in place and inter-county task force addenda. Janes provided an example of a fire event in 2023 that could have benefited from a task force agreement with another county.
- Red flag days: Benton County typically deploys an all-county response on red flag days; meaning any fire during those days will receive a full response.
- Greenberry Gap is unprotected lands between Monroe, Corvallis, and Philomath. Current practice is Monroe and Corvallis share the incident command based on the part of the line a fire falls on. The State has passed ORS 478.702 that allows BCFDB to bring those lands into a fire district. Anyone within seven road miles of a fire station has an option to join; those who refuse to join are at risk of not receiving resources, can be billed up to three times the standard costs, and anytime there is an annexation, the land is automatically brought in.
- 911 radio system and infrastructure.

Malone asked if a homeowner within those lands has been billed.

Janes stated three years ago there was a fire at the William L. Finley Wildlife National Wildlife Refuge that required assistance from multiple agencies. The Federal Government was billed for that response.

The Commissioners and Janes discussed the logistics of fighting fires in the fire districts where some structures opt in and other do not.

Shepherd asked if the only option for structures that do not reside within a fire district, but still want fire protection is to create their own fire district.

Williamson stated under ORS 477, ODF has the authority to direct rangeland fire protective association organizations within Oregon to protect the rangeland; however, this mostly applies to Eastern Oregon. There has been interest to allow these organizations to voluntarily assist Western Oregon rangeland.

Shepherd requested that Williamson follow-up with relevant information for the Board to send to the Association of Oregon Counties as a potential topic for legislative priorities.

Malone asked about a backup 911 center.

Janes confirmed the Corvallis Police Department has one in the library, but it operates off the main system currently.

Wyse mentioned budget questions and concerns for the 911 service district that was discussed by the Monroe Rural Fire District.

Philomath Fire and Rescue – Chancy Ferguson, Fire Chief, Philomath Fire

- Provided an example of interagency collaboration that successfully put out a local fire.
- Task force coordination efforts.
- Local option levy.
- Paid staffing and volunteer operations.
- Response times.

Emergency Operations Center (EOC) – Bryan Lee, Emergency Operations Manager, Benton County Sheriff's Office

- Provided updates from jurisdictions that could not attend the meeting.
- Emergency operations planning updates: outreach for Wildfire Preparedness Month, alert and warning tests, and patrol coordination and readiness.
- Equipment: operational readiness of equipment, tools, software, and resources.
- Trainings and exercises: monthly EOC and Incident Management Team trainings, Emergency Management Volunteer Corps, Community Emergency Response Team, and additional exercises as needed.

- Mutual aid preparations: Oregon State Sheriffs' Association.
- Federal updates and future impacts.

Malone asked how the new EOC will help in emergency responses.

Lee stated that Benton County hosts a high volume of exercises and trainings in the State; having a fixed facility will help with these trainings and future events and collaborations.

6. New Business

6.1 County Administrator Appointment and Approval of Employment Contract – Jane E. Vetto, County Counsel

On May 12, the Board directed Counsel to begin contract negotiations with Rick Crager for the position of Benton County Administrator through the direct appointment process. Counsel met with the Board on May 20 in Executive Session to discuss the employment terms to offer Crager. The Board exited Executive Session, then Counsel met with Crager to discuss the terms. The Board approved the terms of the contract and directed Counsel to draft a contract and bring back for approval.

MOTION: Wyse moved to appoint Rick Crager as County Administrator and approve the employment contract as discussed at the May 20, 2026 Board of Commissioners meeting. Shepherd seconded the motion, which carried 3-0.

7. Other

8. Adjournment

Chair Malone adjourned the meeting at 10:52 a.m.



Pat Malone, Chair



Rachel Bulder, Recorder

* NOTE: Items denoted with an asterisk do NOT have accompanying written materials in the meeting packet.