

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

May 11 2022

Committee Members Present: John Dehler, Lynne Breese, Tim Deboodt, Frank Porfily, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser, Ston McDaniel, Andy Gallagher, Jace Rhoden

Members absent: Trent Smith, Casey Kiser, Mike Lunn

Guests present: Kevin Keown (FS), Kevin Keown (FS), Johanna Kovarik (FS), Amanda Roberts (BLM), Rachel Davee (Crook County SWCD), Slater Turner (FS)

Public present: Jack Rabenberg, Stan and Nanette Hickman, Gayle Hunt, Nettie Downing, Shelley Santucci, Don Vogel, Kim Vogel, John Breese, Wendy Woodley, Melinda Kestler, Greg Jackle, Pete Sharp

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire @ 4H Building.

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of previous meeting minutes: Lynne moved to approve the minutes of the April 13, 2022 meeting as corrected. Frank Seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Reports: Kevin Keown reported on on-going Forest Service activities. Kevin mentioned that the Forest had been able to respond to the after-meeting (April 13, 2022) questions issued by the NRAC regarding the Lemon Gulch Trails Project. The FS had spent considerable time in answering them. Responses to the questions will be part of the April 13 minutes.

Kevin reported that the North Fork Crooked River planning project is on-going and has involved a lot of conversations. The FS is planning a field trip in June with the NRAC Committee and the AFRC (American Forest Resources Council). The field trip is tentatively scheduled for June 21st. The Forest will be reaching out to the Ochoco Forest Resources Collaborative (OFRC) to invite them to participate as well.

Several pre-sale planning efforts are underway across the forest. Approximately 1000 acres are scheduled for reforestation efforts (planting) as part of various fire rehabilitation projects. Prescribed burning is scheduled to continue as long as burning conditions are favorable in meeting burn objectives. Test fires are going on today in the McKay Creek area as part of fire rappel training.

Scoping and NEPA work is moving forward on a variety of recreational planning efforts. Lookout Mountain trail and Skull Hollow/Cole Trail reroutes continue to address conflicting uses. Court briefings are being held on the Wild Horse Herd Management plan and Oral hearings for Walton Lake are scheduled for July.

Amanda Roberts provided the update for BLM activities. Jeff Kitchens and Amanda have a meeting scheduled with the Crook County Stock Growers on May 24th. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss issues around authorized non-use and how to utilize allotments that have open permits on them.

Permit renewal efforts in the upper-country are still moving forward as BLM and permittees continue to work on trespass issues. Cliff Kiser asked how many allotments are in non-use? Amanda reported that for the Central Oregon Field Office there were not many. There is some concern about the non-authorized non-use and the BLM office will be checking in with permittees to see what their use intent is for this year. Most of the non-use issues are occurring along the John Day area. A question was asked if the BLM had many any changes to use levels based on anticipated drought impacts. Amanda reported that as of now, there has been no official changes made to use levels for the year.

Presentations:

Andy Gallagher and Rachel Davee, Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

provided a presentation on sage grouse conservation work on private lands in Crook County. Sage grouse work on private lands (ranches) within the County began in earnest in 2010. Crook County, as part of a multi-county effort (Crook, Lake, Deschutes, Harney, Malheur, Baker) obtained agreements with US Fish and Wildlife Service to be able to assist landowners to create habitat conservation plans that would address habitat issues for the sage grouse, management activities of the ranches and assure protections for both the bird and the landowners in the case the bird is ever listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

Sage grouse are monitored within two priority areas within the County. The Paulina (Twelve mile) area whose bird population is stable and the Brothers/North Wagon Tire area where the bird population is under a slow decline.

To date, approximately 1 million dollars have been granted through the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) and 10.6 million dollars have been spent by USDA, NRCS on over 120,000 acres of private lands for improving grouse habitat. Most of those dollars have been spent on removing juniper from grouse habitat. Research has shown that as little as 1 percent of juniper cover causes a significant decline in sage grouse numbers.

Rachel Davee provided an overview of the relationship between landowners, SWCD and USFWS as related to the CCAAs (Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances). These are conservation plans written by the SWCD in cooperation with the Landowner and approved by USFWS. The agreement is completely confidential between the District and the landowner. It is a 30 year agreement and covers all the conservation practices the landowner has agreed to implement during the agreement period. The benefits of the CCAA is that it provides for Conservation of the bird, provides assurances to the landowner of what expectations are (and that they won't change over time), offers flexibility to the landowner as things may change over time for their ranching operation and opens the door for opportunities to apply for grants and cost-sharing from various agencies and organizations.

Frank asked why cut juniper trees? Rachel and Andy responded that juniper competes with other desirable vegetation (sage brush, grasses and perennial forbs) and provides a place for birds of prey to perch on and prey on sage grouse.

Pete Sharp asked if sage grouse was still listed as endangered. Andy responded that the bird was not currently listed (avoided listing in the original review) but that a listing decision was under review again. Questions about sagebrush as a problem with sage grouse survival were asked. Sagebrush is needed by sage grouse. Andy mentioned that he didn't know of very many places where sagebrush cover/density was too high and prevented the other attributes of habitat were thus limited.

Slater Turner (Ochoco National Forest) provided an overview of the scoping the FS has initiated for the development of a wildhorse handling and adoption facility at the Administrative site located on the Crooked River National Grasslands between Prineville and Madras. Because this is a current administrative site for the FS, a Categorical Exclusion (CE) process under NEPA is being used to implement this project. The scoping process for this project ends on June 6th. A decision for this project is anticipated to be released the Fall of 2022. Even though this site has been used as an administrative site, FS will be required to conduct heritage/SIPO review prior to doing any on the ground work.

Frank asked if Slater knew the anticipated cost of this project. Slater responded that they FS does not yet have any cost estimated for this project. Some materials have been ordered for capturing horses on the Forest and about \$93,000 has been spent to date. Frank asked if the law suit on the Wild Horse Management Plan would impact the handling facility development. Slater said it would have no impact on the development decision. Pete Sharp asked if horses from other locations (Malheur Forest or Warm Springs as examples) might be accepted into the facility. Slater said that all options are on the table but that the facility development is focused for now on the Big Summit herd.

Good of the Order

The Committee held a discussion regarding the Lemon Gulch Trail Project. Steve suggested the project should be renamed Lemon Creek because no map lists Lemon Gulch. The Committee discussed the need to review the County's Natural Resources Policy and identify conflicts between what is proposed and what is found within the Policy. This is necessary as the County has formally issued a letter of Coordination with the FS in regards to the planning effort. John Dehler moved to create a subcommittee whose purpose would be to provide the review and develop a list of questions for the County Court. The subcommittee structure would include both Committee representation as well as non-committee citizen members. Cliff Kiser seconded. Motion Passed.

Steve McGuire appointed the following Committee members:

Cliff Kiser, John Dehler and Jace Rhoden (John Dehler to Chair)

Steve McGuire appointed the following non-committee citizen members:

Kim Vogel, Mike Ervin and Brittany Santucci

The subcommittee will meet with the goal of having their review and question development done by Monday, May 23, 2022. Work will be directly forwarded to the County with the entire Committee to get a copy of the questions.

Ston McDaniel announced to the Committee his resignation from the Committee. Ston and his family have recently moved out of state. Ston was an original committee member and he expressed his thanks to all the members of the Committee and the Community. Steve McGuire acknowledged Ston's leadership on the Committee and thanked him for this service to the Committee and the to the citizens of Crook County.

Public Comments:

Kim asked if there would be any discussion on the answers the FS provided to the written questions they answered in regards to the Lemon Gulch Trail presentation (April 13th, 2022). She felt that there were still some unanswered questions or that the FS didn't answer some of them. The Committee encouraged Kim and others to take time to read the responses and if they still have questions, to contact the FS directly.

Mike Ervin, responding to discussion about interacting directly with the County Court during its formal work sessions or County Court meetings to make sure to get on their agendas as their meetings have formally scheduled public comment sections.

John Dehler moved to adjourn the meeting. Jace Rhoden seconded. Motion Passed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:10 p.m.