

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

October 12, 2022

Committee Members Present: Lynne Breese, Steve McGuire, Tim Deboodt, Cliff Kiser, Jace Rhoden, Frank Porfily, Casey Kaiser

Members absent: Trent Smith, Mike Lunn, Andy Gallagher, John Dehler

Guests present: Lisa Clark (BLM), Jerry Brummer (Crook County Commissioner)

Public present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt, Melinda Kestler

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of previous meeting minutes:

Lynne moved to approve the Committee minutes as presented from August 10, 2022. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.

Lynne moved to approve the Committee minutes as presented from September 14, 2022. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Updates:

Lisa Clark (Acting Area Field Manager – BLM) provided updates for the Prineville BLM District (see attached handout). Lisa provided information about the pending applications for proposed solar farms on lands administered by BLM. Approximately 30,000 + acres of public lands could be subject to construction and management of solar farm installations. Lands of interest are located south of Powell Butte. Lisa shared that as these applications move through the NEPA and approval process, questions about wildlife mitigation, single use management vs multi-use management would be implemented, etc would be addressed. BLM is planning on an extensive public outreach effort in order to keep local governments and concerned citizens involved in the process. Just how these lands would be leased, managed and mitigation requirements would be addressed during the process of approval or denial. Since the applications were filed, the BLM is required to implement a process of review. It will be a multi-year process. The Upper Deschutes Resource Management plan will be the guiding document.

Steve asked how much of the proposed acres are located in Crook County? Lisa did not know but would follow up.

Lisa talked about the Cowboy fire that occurred in the upper Davis area of Juniper Canyon. Restoration of dozer lanes (appro. 2.4 miles) is underway. See handout for more information.

Lisa indicated that there were firewood areas for the public off of the Millican Rd. Fuels will be conducted some controlled burns this fall but there is no scheduled broadcast burning.

BLM did provide comment to the Ochoco National Forest scoping for the North Fork Crooked River project. BLM expressed a desire for the FS to keep forest road 300 open as it provides the only public access to lands administered by the BLM on the south border of the Forest.

Employee recruitment is on-going and continues to present challenges. Housing availability is becoming an issue in being able to recruit. BLM is exploring all possibilities to address this.

A written report of Forest Service activities was provided by Shane Jeffries (see attachment). Frank mentioned that there is a lawsuit now filed regarding the new rule on harvesting trees over 21”.

Old business:

Tim reported on the new process the County is adopting to fill all County Board vacancies. There will be 30 advertisement of vacancies. Boards will be asked to review applications and make recommendations to the Court for appointment.

In brainstorming potential applicants, Steve wants to send an application to Mike Ervin. Melinda Kestler would also like to apply and Lynne mentioned that Jill Welborn was interested. Tim will send Melinda and Jill an application.

Good of the Order:

No reports

Public Comment:

No public comment

Cliff moved to adjourn the meeting at 2:15 p.m. Jace seconded. Motion passed.



Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland

October 12, 2022

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM

The Forest Service recently completed a 90-day nationwide operational pause and program review of protocols, decision support tools and practices related to the implementation of prescribed fire. This pause allowed time to identify and immediately implement program improvements to ensure firefighters have the resources, tools and support needed to safely carry out this important work. The lessons learned, driven by the best available science, have been incorporated into the Ochoco National Forest's fall burn program.

The Forest will share unit specific information before each burn comes into prescription and the public will be notified as early as possible when a unit is scheduled to be burned.

View a map of potential prescribed burns this fall in Central Oregon by visiting:

<https://www.centraloregonfire.org/prescribed-fire-smoke-plans/> and follow us on twitter @CentralORFire for up-to-date prescribed fire information.

ENGINEERING/ROADS

Forest Service Road 42 Paving Project (funded by the Great American Outdoors Act)

In September 2022 the forest completed reconstruction on 9.6 miles of Forest Service Road 42 located south of Big Summit Prairie ending at the junction of Forest Service Road 42 and Forest Service Road 30. The project includes milling existing asphalt, stabilizing the base material to mitigate future frost heave damage, repaving and restriping of the road along with completing necessary bridge repairs. The final phase of this project will be completed summer 2023.

Forest-wide Cattleguard reconstruction and replacement Project (funded by the Great American Outdoors Act)

The Forest Service has awarded a two year contract for the replacement or completion of deferred maintenance on approximately 35-40 cattleguards located across the Ochoco National Forest. Cattleguards were prioritized and selected based on health and safety concerns on our maintenance level 3-5 roads. A few high priority cattleguards on maintenance level 2 roads were also included based on those identified as needed by range staff. The first year of replacement and/or maintenance will begin in 2022 and short delays are expected.

Lamonta Compound

There are two large projects occurring at the Lamonta Compound. The forest recently completed siding replacement, painting and exterior restoration of three (3) of the four (4) CCC era warehouses and storage buildings. The forest is currently working with different youth education and employment programs to restore a fifth building used to store fire and lookout specific supplies. All these structures are part of or add to the historic significance of this compound. Cold Springs Guard Station will receive a new roof this fall as part of this historic facility restoration funding and in partnership with the Old Smokeys.

The second project is a two (2) phase project to construct an up-to-date fire facility to house the forest's 100+ fire employees, providing office space, training space, and a ready room to also accommodate visiting fire personnel. The first phase, scheduled to begin in fall 2022, will upgrade compound utilities and bring





connections to city infrastructure up to local and state code, provide for needed employee parking, and provide for improved access from both Lamonta and 10th Streets. The second phase, scheduled for 2023, will complete construction of the actual fire operations facility.

Forest Service Road 22 Reconstruction Project (funded by the Federal Land Transportation Program)

Federal Highways Administration will be prioritizing critical locations for partial reconstruction and/or overlay on Forest Service Road 22 between the junction of Forest Service Road 42 and Walton Lake Campground. Complete reconstruction of this road is warranted, however the existing funding is for \$1,000,000 in construction funds. Western Lands Federal Highways will be responsible for completing the NEPA, design, and construction.

PROJECT PLANNING UPDATES

Lemon Gulch Trail Proposal

The Ochoco National Forest initially proposed the Lemon Gulch Trails Project in March 2021. We accepted scoping comments until April 30th, 2021. We then paused planning to spend more time getting information from the grazing permittees through in-person meetings, understanding the concern from Mill Creek residents, and allowing for additional meetings with the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC). After six months, we started our planning process again in November 2021. The Draft Environmental Assessment will be released to the public in November 2022.

- At Lemon Gulch in the Mill Creek drainage, the Forest Service is looking at a range of trail miles in five different configurations. Alternative 2 was the original proposal. Alternatives 3, 4, 5, and 6 were created by reducing the amount of trail miles to address concerns with wildlife habitat and grazing management. These alternatives provide a means for comparing the type and intensity of effects against the no action (Alternative 1).
- The Forest is currently preparing an environmental assessment (EA) with a Preferred Alternative that will offer a range of trail layout and design alternatives addressing concerns raised such as wildlife habitat effects, effects to grazing operations, etc. The EA will include analyzing a range of trail system alternatives from 19 to 52 trail miles (plus a no action option) for mountain biking.
- Part of the purpose of the proposed project is to distribute current and future mountain bike use away from popular multi-use trails systems on the Ochoco National Forest while improving the experience and safety for equestrians and hikers in those areas. Currently the only bike trail offerings occur on trails constructed and designed for pack and saddle or hiking.
 - To continue supporting multiple uses, the Forest also recently worked on projects to add equestrian trail miles in the Allen and Dry Creek areas for traditional pack and saddle use.
- Myth busting—There is currently misinformation traveling around the community that this is a “destination ski resort type” trail system. That is incorrect. It is similar in development to many dispersed trail systems across the Region and National system that is supported with small trailheads and a single vault toilet. None of the alternatives would accommodate or attract thousands of visitors.

Walton Lake Restoration Project

Final Decision Issued

Judge Mosman issued an Opinion and Order on September 26, 2022 granting summary judgment to the Forest





Service on seven counts. Three counts were ruled in the Forest Service favor, and one in plaintiff's favor during the July oral hearing. At the time of this writing, the court had not issued a judgment and the preliminary injunction had not been lifted.

Mill Creek Restoration Project

The Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project (Mill Creek) proposes to actively manage stands to restore historic stand composition, structure, and density; reducing activity generated and naturally occurring fuels; and restoring streams, floodplains, and Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCAs). The project area is located on the Lookout Mountain Ranger District east of Prineville, Oregon, adjacent to the Mill Creek Wilderness. The project area is approximately 36,485 acres in size.

North Fork Crooked River Resiliency Project

The Paulina Ranger District of the Ochoco National Forest is proposing landscape restoration with the North Fork Crooked River Forest Resilience Project including commercial and noncommercial thinning, prescribed fire, and road system changes. The larger "planning area" includes about 37,554 acres (although activities are only proposed across about 10,000 acres) and is located about 31 miles east of Prineville, Oregon, and 9 miles north of Paulina, Oregon. The team has developed the proposed action this summer and the 30-day public scoping period will end September 19th.

Stay up-to-date with forest information by visiting: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ochoco> or follow us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/OchocoNatForestCrookedRiverNatGrassland>

To have your email added to the Forest's project mailing list, please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/ochoco/landmanagement/projects> and enter your email in the "Email Updates" box. You will then begin to receive notification of project announcements such as public comment periods. This link also provides information for all current planning projects.



Crook County Project/Activity Briefing

Bureau of Land Management – Prineville District – October 2022

Answers to last month's questions:

What is the proposed acres for all the solar projects in DFO?

- Expedition Solar- 4,037 acres
- Explorer Solar - 7,991 acres
- Eastwood Climate Fixer- 18,000 acres
- Leeward Energy- indicated they will submit an application; not received yet.

What will the mule deer and winter range mitigation look like for these projects. OHA had major concerns given the last proposal and mitigation required. How will ODF&W be involved with BLM process?

At this point, we can't say what the mitigations will look like, or even if the projects will be approved. Given the level of disturbance, it's highly likely that these projects will need an Environmental Impact Statement and the public and our partners will have the opportunity for input. In addition to wildlife issues, we could expect to see issues raised around the loss of OHV routes, special status species, views, cultural resources, etc.

Are solar farms being built on lands administered by BLM or is it just access (ROW)?

We have a combination of actions that are being proposed. We have several existing ROWs with associated solar farms. The new applications listed above are looking to be built on public lands. We have an additional application for a ROW to private land in the same area.

Are the resorts on BLM lands or are they looking for access with ROWs or Easements?

Are the resorts on BLM lands or are they looking for access with ROWs or easements? What's the BLM nexus?

We have several resorts in place (such as Eagle Crest, Brasada or Pronghorn) and several in process, (such as Thornburgh, RMG, and Hidden Canyon). All past and current resort development is on private lands. For the new resorts being developed, we have applications for ROWs, which can include primary access, alternative/emergency access, etc. In addition, depending on county requirements, the resorts may have mitigations to offset development. In the case of Thornburgh, for example, the resort will to 2.3 acres of mitigation for every 1 acre of disturbance. This mitigation can occur on public lands.

What access to BLM will the resorts have? Organized access or dispersed access?

For the most part, the access is dispersed with resorts required to use established entrances and follow the existing designations (non-motorized, etc.). In some cases, we may complete the necessary analysis to allow an organized/permitted activity on public lands (for example, Eagle Crest has a permit to conduct trail rides on public lands adjacent to the resort).

Cowboy Fire – Cowboy Fire:

What rehab for weeds will be completed? What rehab of dozer/cat/ hand lines was completed or are going to be? What was the cause of the fire?

At this point, the cause of the fire is listed as human, with no statistical cause. Under the suppression repair plan, we identified 2.4 miles of single blade dozer line, with berms



ranging from 1 – 2 feet. Approximately 5 areas had fence cut for access. The existing BLM roads were in poor condition and no further damage was caused. Recommendations are to pull back berms and add water bars at recommended grades; spread limbed juniper branches over the line, and to seed the dozer line with native species when weather conditions allow. Fences will be repaired.



Fall prescribed burning program

The BLM plans to burn approximately 16,000 acres in Crook County this winter if weather condition allow. The first project area is in the Williamson Creek area off of Millican Road, and this will be a cleanup of the firewood cutting area. The second area is part of the High Desert Shrub-Steppe project area, which removes juniper for shrub-steppe habitat restoration in the Paulina/12-mile Table area.

The Ochoco National Forest's North Fork Crooked Project: BLM submitted comments regarding the 300 Road that was proposed to be closed in the USFS proposal, as this provides the only public access into BLM-managed lands within and adjacent to the North Fork Wilderness Study Area. We also requested better communication regarding timber sales in case there are some opportunities for timber treatments across boundaries.

Lands trespass issues in the Paulina Area – the Central Oregon Field Office is resolving several on-going trespass issues, including irrigation pivots, fences, outbuildings on BLM land. We will continue to work with landowners on resolution of these trespasses. Some of these lands trespasses need to be resolved before grazing permits can be renewed in the future.

John Day – Snake Resource Advisory Committee

The Bureau of Land Management today announced that it is seeking public nominations for positions on the John Day-Snake Resource Advisory Council (RAC). This citizen-based council assists in the development of recommendations that address public land



management issues within the Bureau of Land Management's Prineville and Vale Districts and the Umatilla, Wallowa-Whitman, Malheur, Ochoco, and Deschutes National Forests.

The RAC is seeking to fill five nominations in the following categories:

- Category One – Representatives of organizations associated with energy/mineral development; federal grazing permit holders; the timber industry; transportation or rights-of-way; off-highway vehicles users; and commercial and developed outdoor recreation.
- Category Two – Representatives of archeological and historic organizations; dispersed recreation users; wild horse and burros organizations; and nationally or regionally-recognized environmental organizations.
- Category Three – Representatives of State, county, or local elected office; Indian Tribes located within or adjacent to the area for which the RAC is organized; academicians employed in natural resource management or natural sciences; employees of a state agency responsible for management of natural resources; and the public at large.

BIL Funding

We have submitted for Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation funding under the ecosystem restoration project category. In Crook County, we're hoping to get funding that will assist with data collection on deer and elk movement around Powell Buttes, removal of juniper in the Sanford Creek area, and juniper removal in Greater sage-grouse habitat. We hope to be able to use the Good Neighbor Authority to pass these funds to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for project implementation.

Continued Mgmt of Conflicting Uses

We have many instances of issues related to conflicting uses and/or illegal uses of public lands. This includes incorrect uses in areas (motorized vehicles in nonmotorized areas, mountain bikes in the wilderness, etc.), long-term residing/houseless related issues, motorized use in livestock allotments, motorized use in seasonally closed areas, parties/trash dumping, damage from use such as off-designated route vegetation and terrain damage, fence removal, damage to livestock infrastructure, route trespass, etc.

Hiring

Like many businesses, we are struggling with many vacancies and having trouble filling both permanent and seasonal positions due to low numbers of applicants and the challenge to find affordable housing. Some of the permanent vacancies we will be looking to fill in the near future include:

Field Manager, District Manager, Supervisory Outdoor Recreation Planner, Lower Deschutes River Manager, Lower Deschutes River Operations Lead, Botanist, Wildlife Biologist, Rangeland Mgmt Specialist, Realty Specialist, Hydrologist, Road Maintenance Worker, Fuels Specialists, Wildland Firefighters, Fire Management Officer, Property Specialist, Administrative Assistant, archeologist, and more. All but one of these positions would be based in Prineville – and any help or thoughts you have on increasing our outreach to get a bigger pool of applicants is appreciated.

