

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

March 8, 2023

Committee Members Present: Lynne Breese, Steve McGuire, Frank Porfily, Bill McCormack, Melinda Kestler, Kim Vogel, Tim Deboodt, Casey Kaiser, Mike Lunn

Members absent: Andy Gallagher, Cliff Kiser

Guests present: Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Chris Gerdes (State Parks), Jerry Brummer (Crook County)

Public present: Gayle Hunt, Carol Davis, John Breese

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire @ COCC Crook County Open Campus

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of previous meeting minutes:

Lynne moved to approve the Committee minutes from February 8, 2023 meeting. Bill seconded.
Motion passed.

Agency Reports:

Stephanie McKinney (BLM) reported on some permanent staff changes. Amanda Roberts is now the District Manager (formally Area Resource Manager, Central Oregon), Lisa Clark is now permanent Area Manager, Deschutes Resource Area and Stephanie McKinney is acting Area Manager, Central Oregon. Kyle Hensley will become the permanent Area Manager for central Oregon next month.

BLM continues to complete fuels reduction programs across the District. 5000 ac of jackpot burning in sage grouse habitat areas and 500+ acres of juniper treatments in the Millican area. There are no updates on the solar projects. The Central Oregon Resource Area is working on acquiring the McDonald's Ferry on the lower John Day River. In Wheeler County, BLM is working on making improvements in the Priest Hole area.

Forest Service report (written) was handed out to the Committee. The Committee asked how much is the Government spending to defend the Walton Lake Decision at the 9th Circuit Court? The Mill Creek Project area is approximately 36,000 acres but the handout only talks about a small part of that acreage for commercial harvest/thinning. What are the activities for the entire project area? The Committee is interested in an update presentation on the Mill Creek Vegetation Management project. Tim will contact Shane/Slater to schedule for the April NRAC meeting.

Chris Gerdes, Oregon State Parks presented the update for OSP. A new natural resources specialist has been hired and will be housed in the Bend Office. OSP is working with BOR to address some of the grazing issues around Prineville Reservoir. BLM is a part of this effort as well.

A NEPA Categorical Exclusion has been completed and the juniper thinning projects around the State campgrounds will now be moving forward. Work will be done mostly with Park employees. The Prineville Resort project now has a project manager assigned so the planning efforts for that facility will be starting soon.

OSP is currently planning events which will attract people to the Park. A question was asked about boat ramp extension. Chris responded that the only location in which this makes sense is the Powder House ramp and between planning and grant writing, construction would be 2 – 3 years out if approved. Chris also commented that the County Boat Ramp area needs some work as well to deal with unauthorized use and resulting damage by vehicles. A DSL permit is needed for this work to move forward.

New Business:

Mike Lunn discussed the need for the County to respond to the BLM's State Office scoping letter on the Programmatic NEPA for Aquatic and Riparian Restoration. (attached letter). Mike is concerned that grazing management practices are not mentioned as one of the accelerated tools being analyzed and that it should be. Stephanie McKinney (BLM) provide some background as to how grazing is permitted on 10 year permits and the BLM's process for getting those renewals done. Mike was concerned that in some areas, permits are not being renewed because of workload issues and thus, it is difficult for permittees to modify grazing activities that would benefit riparian recovery. Kim Vogel asked if this was in response to spotted frog management issues. Stephanie said it was not. Melinda Kestler spoke about the value of getting the permit renewals done and having the best management possible call for.

The deadline for the County to provide comments during the Scoping phase is April 14th. Mike moved that a subcommittee be formed to draft a letter for the County Court's consideration, speaking to the value of good grazing management as a tool to expedite riparian recovery. Kim Seconded. Motion passed. Steve McGuire appointed Mike Lunn and Melinda Kestler to this subcommittee. Deadline for submitting something to the Court is the last week of March. Court consideration and approval would be set for April 5th, 2023.

Lynne Breese provided an update to the Committee on the subcommittee work regarding the BLM Programmatic review for Solar Development in the western U.S. The Subcommittee submitted a 11 page report that reviewed the scoping document with the County's Natural Resources Policy. The report also included draft language for the Court's consideration should they choose to submit comments. Tim reported that the Court did consider the request, edited the draft language and voted to submit comments to the request for scoping by BLM.

Jerry Brummer (Crook County Commissioner) presented the Committee with an update on the transportation issues of the Juniper Canyon/Upper Davis area and the lack of emergency routes. The County is developing an RFP to design a system that would meet current demands and address future access issues. Jerry said grants are not available to pay for the design work so the County is trying to

move forward. Issues identified to date include the pinch point of the lower 2 miles of the road that offers very few options, seasonal use (summer) on the northern road of the Reservoir that connects with the Post/Paulina hwy., and fire evacuation (no money through emergency services). Anticipated time frame is 6 to 7 years. Currently 4000 -5000 people live in the area with an additional 1500 plated lots that could add to the impact.

Good of the Order:

Mike Lunn has been working on a project out of state. As a part of that project, he has learned about all the different types of bicycles and how each is regulated a little bit differently. E-bikes (3 types) and pedal bikes have different rules across different jurisdictions (BLM vs FS vs State lands). In many cases, E-bikes are viewed as motorized. Mike will send an email later to share with the Committee some of the different publications he has found that address this issue.

Kim Vogel asked how Counties coordinate communication on different issues/projects that impact regions (more than just 1 county). Jerry Brummer talked about how the Assoc. of Oregon Counties and the Assoc. of Eastern Oregon Counties work together as issues come up. Jerry said the AEOC meets monthly. Subcommittees of AOC also meet monthly. Steve McGuire asked how many other Counties have natural resource committees?

Kim Vogel asked about HB 3142 (Juniper Bill) being considered by the Oregon legislature. Tim explained the bill and if passed the benefits to Crook County. The bill would make dollars available for juniper control to improve the hydrologic function of range watersheds. Currently the bill contains language that Crook County would receive approximately 1.75 million dollars to be spent on private lands. The Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District would serve as the local technical assistance and would be accountable for how the money is spent. Kim expressed a desire that the federal agencies should coordinate their work with this project in order to obtain a greater impact.

Frank talked about the cloud seeding bill in the Oregon legislature and the regional effort (Jefferson County through North Unit Irrigation District) to make this tool available in Oregon as a way to mitigate the impacts of drought. Tim will contact Mike Britton (NUID) for a presentation at the April NRAC meeting.

Frank asked Tim to provide an update of this trip to Washington, D.C. for the American Farm Bureau. Tim talked about the trip, representing Oregon Farm Bureau on the AFB public lands committee. Tim had the opportunity to tour Capitol Hill, meet with Senator Merkley and the staffs of Senator Wyden and Representative Bentz.

Bill McCormack talked about several landowners in the Brother's/Hampton area getting requests to meet with a private company, exploring opportunities in wind energy development in that area.

Jerry Brummer commented that this Committee is greatly appreciated for all the work it is doing. Steve responded that he appreciates hearing from the County on what issues the Committee should be working on.

Public Comments:

Gayle Hunt, asked Tim if his conversations in Washington violated the County's commitments to the wild horse group in central Oregon as it relates to the wild horse management. Tim reminded the group that he was not there representing the County and the actual conversation about wild horse management dealt with the creation of separate handling facilities for BLM and FS, nothing about actual horse management.

Lynne moved to adjourn. Bill Seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.



Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland

March 8, 2023

PILE BURNING PROGRAM

The Ochoco National Forest firefighters were able to complete 4,404 acres of pile burning of the 5,100 acre target across the forest. The piles are concentrations of leftover materials associated with previous vegetation management activities. Burning these piles is the most cost-efficient way to remove these accumulations of hazardous fuels that can burn during summer wildfires. Pile burning will continue on the grassland as conditions become favorable.

At this time, conditions are not favorable for prescribed burning on the Forest or Grassland. We will update this briefing paper as conditions change. Information about planned prescribed burns is available at:

www.centraloregonfire.org

HERITAGE/ARCHEOLOGY

Roof replacement of Cold Springs Guard Station

Cold Springs Guard Station, constructed in 1934, is an historic site on the Ochoco National Forest that initially served a special role as the switchboard station connecting phone calls between various fire lookouts and guard stations during the summer months, as well as housing for the fire guard (and family.) The cedar shake roof was in desperate need of repair and while supply chain issues delayed the materials being delivered, the Guard Station was reroofed in October using fire resistant shingles and will now be protected for decades to come. It will continue to be available as a recreation rental cabin in May 2023.

Rager and Ochoco Ranger Station Kiosk project

The Forest competed for year-end Regional Office dollars in September and was awarded funding for Heritage Interpretive Panels to showcase the history of the Rager and Ochoco Ranger Stations. New kiosks and informational panels will be erected at both sites in the spring or early summer. This was part of mitigation measures agreed to between the Forest Service and the State Historic Preservation Office during the partial decommissioning process of the two administrative sites.

ENGINEERING/ROADS

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. 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. The Federal Highway Administration, Western Federal Lands Highway Division (FHWA-WFL) and the Forest Service will jointly complete the environmental review and NEPA documentation in 2023. FHWA-WFL will be responsible for completing the design and construction which is expected to begin in 2024.

PROJECT PLANNING UPDATES

Lemon Gulch Trail Proposal

The Ochoco National Forest initially proposed the Lemon Gulch Trails Project in March 2021. Following extended scoping, the interdisciplinary team developed five action alternatives and prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to document anticipated effects. The draft EA was released for a 30-day public review period on November 17, 2022. Over 800 individuals comment letters were received during that time. The Forest Service is now reviewing all of the comments as part of the decision-making process. The next step is to issue a draft Decision Notice for a pre-decisional administrative review period.

Walton Lake Restoration Project

Final Decision Issued

Judge Mosman of the U.S. District Court of Oregon issued an Opinion and Order on September 26, 2022 granting summary judgment to the Forest Service on seven counts. Three counts were previously ruled in the Forest Service's favor, and one in plaintiff's favor during the July oral hearing. The District Court issued an order dissolving the preliminary injunction, but stayed the order to allow plaintiffs opportunity to appeal. The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals also granted a temporary stay of the District Court's order pending the appeal. Briefing concludes in February and an oral hearing will take place in March.

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. The Forest is preparing an environmental assessment to disclose the effects of four alternatives, with commercial harvest ranging from 7,328 to 8,960 acres. We anticipate releasing of the EA for a 30-day public comment period this winter or early spring.

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 proposed action was scoped with the public in September. Sixteen comment letters were received. The team is using the comments to develop alternatives and will spend the winter and early spring conducting effects analysis.

Corral Flats Equestrian Endurance Ride Trails Project

Corral Flats trails are an unofficial trail system that has been used frequently by individual riders and organized group rides for decades. The Forest is proposing to designate and make official these trails for equestrian use, and we are currently looking at about 50 miles. The trail routes are coincident with Forest Service system roads (both open and closed) and non-system two-track roads. The project area is centered about 25 miles northeast of Prineville, Oregon in the Ochoco Mountains on both the Lookout Mountain and Paulina Ranger District. This project would also involve rehabilitation of areas damaged by OHVs, and improvements of road closures to prevent future damage. Public scoping may take place early spring 2023.

FOREST HEALTH

In the 2022 annually conducted aerial insect and disease surveys, Forest Health Protection Staff observed widespread mortality in the grand fir that is believed to be caused by drought stress and fir engraver beetles. The mortality is quite severe in some places but in general, at moderate levels. The mortality is across a very large area, essentially where grand fir is present in Central Oregon and all the way to the California border. The Forest is working with Regional Staff to consider options for addressing this issue.

<https://www.oregonlive.com/environment/2022/11/record-number-of-firs-dying-in-oregon-washington-in-what-experts-call-firmageddon.html>

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.





United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Oregon State Office
P.O. Box 2965, Portland, Oregon 97208
blm.gov/or



March 1, 2023

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Oregon/Washington is initiating a public scoping period for the development of a programmatic National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) document that will analyze a suite of aquatic and riparian habitat restoration activities on BLM-administered lands in Oregon and Washington east of the Cascade Mountains. The goal of this programmatic NEPA document is to accelerate the pace and scale of the BLM's aquatic and riparian habitat restoration projects in order to address legacy impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat, impacts from climate change, water quality impairments, and impacts to sensitive, threatened, and endangered aquatic species. The scope of actions currently being considered for proposal in the NEPA document include:

- (1) plantings and vegetation treatments, including conifer and juniper thinning where encroachment is impacting the hydrology of riparian areas;
- (2) improving water developments such as springs and reservoirs;
- (3) in-stream, pond, lake, wetland, and floodplain enhancements, including the addition of large woody debris and other in-stream structures, streambank stabilization, berm removals, head-cut restoration, and channel relocations;
- (4) culvert installation, repair, and replacement, including fish screen installations; and
- (5) road erosion control and decommissioning.

The BLM would like your input on the proposed actions, the way in which the actions could be implemented, alternative actions and/or approaches that should be considered, potential environmental issues or concerns that the BLM should analyze in the NEPA document, and any input you may have on areas BLM should consider prioritizing and/or excluding for restoration actions. Please provide your feedback to the BLM by April 14, 2023. You can submit your comments via email: BLM_East_ORWA_Aquatic_EA@blm.gov; or via hard copy to Bureau of Land Management, Oregon/Washington State Office, ATTN: OR-932, P.O. Box 2965, Portland, Oregon 97208. Information regarding this project will also be posted at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2023454/510>.

Thank you very much for your interest and involvement in public land management and for any input you may have on aquatic and riparian restoration activities on BLM-administered lands in eastern Oregon and Washington.

Sincerely,

**TODD
CURTIS**

Todd M. Curtis
Deputy State Director

Digitally signed by TODD
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