

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

February 14, 2024

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Kim Vogel, Steve McGuire, Lynne Breese, Cliff Kiser, Melinda Kestler, Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher, Calista Songstad

Members Absent: Tim Deboodt

Guests Present: Bridget Moran (USFWS), Kyle Hensley (BLM), Jacob Young (FS), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Marissa Ditunno (BLM)

Public Present: Eric Newell, John Breese, Mike Ervin, Shelley Santucci, Jenna Deibel, Scott Duggan, Donnie Rocco

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill McCormack moved to approve the minutes of the January 10, 2024 meeting as amended. Lynne Breese seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Update:

No Forest Service update

The BLM update was presented by Kyle Hensley. Kyle reported that Lisa Clark and the Deschutes Resource Area will be hosting meet and greets with permittees and new Range staff. The Millican Trail System is getting two new toilets. The Chimney Rock campground updates continue to move forward, high water in the river is causing some delay in construction activities.

Scoping is currently underway for grazing permit renewals in the Paulina Valley, involving 8 grazing permits. Comments will be accepted under 1 Environmental Assessment for 42,000 acres. Cliff Kiser asked if there are any major changes (surprises) being proposed. Kyle responded that there were not.

Cliff Kiser asked about updates for the solar projects. For the Programmatic NEPA, why were there no public meetings scheduled in Oregon? Kyle responded that he did not know why but would ask. Kyle noted that BLM is working through applications to determine suitability of areas for solar developments given current resource priorities and regulations. Kyle provided the following website for access for maps for the Solar Programmatic review and other related information. <https://blmsolar.anl.gov/> and <https://blmsolar.anl.gov/solar-peis-2023/>

Business agenda: USFWS update on Wolf management information

Bridget Moran, Field Office Supervisor (Bend, OR) reviewed the current decisions/publications by the US Fish and Wild Service regarding wolves. USFWS did not propose new management plans, instead issued

reports regarding population status. FWS has made numerous attempts to delist wolves from endangered status but have been unsuccessful within the Courts. Most of the issues raised in the Courts has been related to the limited geographic scope of their decisions and not being holistic enough. In 2021, attempts by the Service were challenged on the basis of insufficient analysis. The Service decision was reversed by the Courts and the wolf was re-listed. The announcement on Feb. 2, 2024 was a status assessment agreed to as part of Court actions. The Feb announcement also said the wolf does not warrant listing.

Bridget reported that wolves are currently listed as endangered but the announcement said it does not meet the criteria to be threatened or endangered. By December, 2025, the Service will develop a lower 48 state recovery plan for the gray wolf. She also mentioned that it is highly likely that the Service will be petitioned to delist western wolves within that timeframe. Any individual can file a petition. The Service is looking to make a more durable policy decision. The recovery plan being developed with focus more on threats to wolves than actual numbers.

With delisting, Bridget said that management of the wolf would fall to the States and in Oregon, ODFW would be in charge, using its wolf recovery plan as its management guide. Tools for management could include lethal take or hunting regulations. Frank asked if he were to shoot a wolf now would he go to jail. The response was, "don't shoot a wolf". Cliff mentioned the current fear of reporting wolves on private property by landowners. Bridget responded that with reporting, having better information on wolf numbers and locations makes for better management decisions. Melinda asked if agencies are mandated to report sightings to ODFW if citizens come to them. Bridget responded that no one is mandated but that ODFW is who reports should go to. USFWS will reach out to agency partners to update them on reporting requirements. Melinda suggested giving agencies flyers addressing reporting processes and the value in filing reports.

In public questions, Shelley Santucci asked where the wolves were originally released. Greg Jackle, ODFW responded that they were released in the states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. This is where our wolves are coming from.

Mike Lunn asked if USFWS is killing barred owls for the protection of spotted owls. Bridget responded that the Service is finalizing permits for Barred Owl removal by USFWS.

Bridget closed saying that there was no public comment opportunity for the status review. The public will have comments opportunities as the recovery plan is being developed and finalized. There is no upcoming decisions regarding the Boundary of Highway 395. A delisting decision, if made, would most likely be statewide.

Board Elections:

Annual elections are held in the month of February. Bill nominated Steve McGuire as Chair and Lynne Breese as Vice-Chair. Mike seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Good of the Order:

Lynne commented that it would be good to have a coordination meeting with agencies so that they can work together on projects that are county wide in nature. BLM works tightly with Wheeler and Grant Counties but not so much in central Oregon. Bill made a motion to have an agency cooperation event

annually to help agencies, landowners and others work together. Cliff seconded. In discussion, Cliff mentioned that this may help the Advisory Committee to be more proactive rather than reactive. Motion passed all affirmative with 1 abstention.

Cliff mentioned that the comment period for the Programmatic Solar NEPA was open for 90 days as of January 19th (closes April 18th). Cliff wants to have this on next month's agenda so that the Committee can develop a response and have time for the County to adopt it.

Lynne moved to adjourn. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.