

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

May 14, 2025

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad (via Zoom), Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser

Members Absent: Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher, Kim Vogel

Guests Present: Monty Gregg (FS), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Amanda Roberts (BLM), Kevin Larkin (FS), Reese Mercer (Western Beavers Cooperative), Susie Hermreck (County Commissioner), James Osborn (BLM)

Public Present: Gayle Hunt, John Breese

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Frank Porfily moved to approve as presented. Lynne Breese seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No Committee members present voted no. Motion Passed.

Agency Updates:

Kevin Larkin (Acting co-Forest Supervisor) provided the Forest Service update. Kevin announced that Jeff Marszal will assume the duties of Forest Supervisor, Ochoco National Forest on June 2. Kevin Keown and Scott McFarland both retired in mid-April. Scott will be headed to the State of Washington to work for Washington Department of Natural Resources. Chris Joosen also retired. The Forest will be working on getting key positions filled. Process will take a month or two.

Lynne Breese asked about hiring fire fighters for the 2025 season. Kevin reported that hiring is going well and seasonal fire fighters are arriving. What is unclear will be the availability of those who filled in and held support service roles. James Osborn (BLM) shared that BLM hire numbers are good and people are on-board. BLM is reviewing weekly staffing levels and it is still unclear how support teams will be organized.

Mike Lunn asked about the conversation to create a "Fire Service". Kevin reported that there is a conversation going within the agencies but nothing will change for the 2025 season. Mike expressed concern about the agencies being able to access skills outside of the fire service but still within the Forest Service or BLM. Again, Kevin shared that the Chief of the FS said there would be no changes for 2025.

Stephanie McKinney (BLM) shared that there were no updates from the Deschutes Resource Area. She said that Kyle was back on the District from his detail and the District has begun to strategize on how to meet its 1 million board foot per year harvest target. The Crazy Creek salvage sale (1.2 mbf) offered this spring received no bids. Amanda Roberts (BLM District Manager) shared that there will be no major

reorganizational efforts until May 23rd. There is a current injunction in federal court to not allow for reduction in force. James Osborn (BLM FMO) reported on the rangeland fire protection associations (RFPAs) and the on-going discussions about the roles of Agencies/RFPA's and others in regards to initial attack and prolonged attacks as it relates to wildlife firefighting. 2024 saw the use of RFPA for prolonged fire-fighting efforts and it illustrated that more communication between Command and RFPAs needs to be worked out. Many of these Commands were staffed with people from out of state and are not familiar with existing agreements. Prineville BLM District works with 11 RFPAs. All have mutual aid agreements. All have reciprocal agreements. Agreements currently have no financial cost. RFPA's have the ability to access both federal and state surplus firefighting equipment. John Breese (associated with Post/Paulina RFPA) shared frustration that fire fighting agencies are having year round conversations but the RFPA's are only brought into the conversation at the beginning of fire season. Melina Kestler shared that she had a conversation with out of state firefighters last summer and they shared a strong desire to work with local ranchers who know the area but were not being listened to by the management teams.

John Breese asked about the status of BLM Range Conservationists on the District. Amanda shared that the District has 5 Range Cons covering 500 allotments. Seasonal hires are typically 20 – 25 per year and this year, there are 3. Currently the BLM is under a hiring freeze.

Susan Hermreck, Crook County Commissioner spoke about HB 3349 and 3350. Both bills deal with operational issues of RFPAs. Crook County has 2 Rangeland groups, Post/Paulina and Bothers/Hampton.

Reese Mercer, Western Beavers Cooperative shared a program with the Committee on her organization and their efforts to reestablish beavers on the landscape as a method of improving riparian areas and the hydrologic functions of the landscape. Her slide show is attached.

Committee updates:

Tim shared that the PNW Section, Society for Range Management in conjunction with OSU Range Field Days will host a field tour of the Paired Watershed Study on Camp Creek, Thursday, May 29. This study has been on-going since 1994 (31 years). The Field Day is free to the public but registration is encouraged.

No public comment

Cliff moved to adjourn. Frank seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No member present voted no. Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

CRW Beaver Action Plan Project

Spring 2025

Participants:

Crooked River WC, Bonneville Enviro. Foundation, Utah State University, Oregon State University, Western Beavers Coop. Funding by ODFW/OCRF (state).

Outcomes:

The project will deliver a written "Beaver Action Plan" for the Crooked River Watershed organized by 6 different subregions, to prioritize beaver-based restoration (and conflict mitigation) investments of time and resources by agencies and landowners.

The Plan will include:

- a) An assessment of existing beaver occupancy mapped throughout most subbasins of the watershed
- b) The potential for beaver recolonization given factors of: geomorphology, vegetation, hydrology and landowner interest
- c) The potential for beaver conflict areas around culverts, roadways, irrigation infrastructure, etc.

Additional outcomes of the Project:

- Increased community awareness on how a return of beaver activities, and beaver-managed floodplains (BMFPs), can again benefit land health, slow erosion, dampen high-water events, buffer wildfire, improve water security and water quality, and more;
- Two subbasin scale, ranch-operation focused Beaver Management Plans to guide different tools and solutions around beaver management;
- Expansion of beaver conflict services to landowners, providing beaver exclusion devices.

Activities:

- 1) Fall 2024 – Complete. Surveyed 115 of 315 total stream reaches.
- 2) Spring 2025 – Planned: The goal is to survey a remaining 200 reaches on private and public lands with small crews of 2. Each survey reach 300 meters long, randomly assigned.
- 3) Fall 2025 – The Beaver Action Plan findings and report recommendations will be prepared and shared to natural resource agencies and interested landowners.

Please consider:

1. Is there any information that CCRNC and other community participants would like to see come from this process?
2. Any suggestions of folks to speak with to inform this report and beaver knowledge for the region?
3. Sharing this project with others, for community awareness.

Thank you.

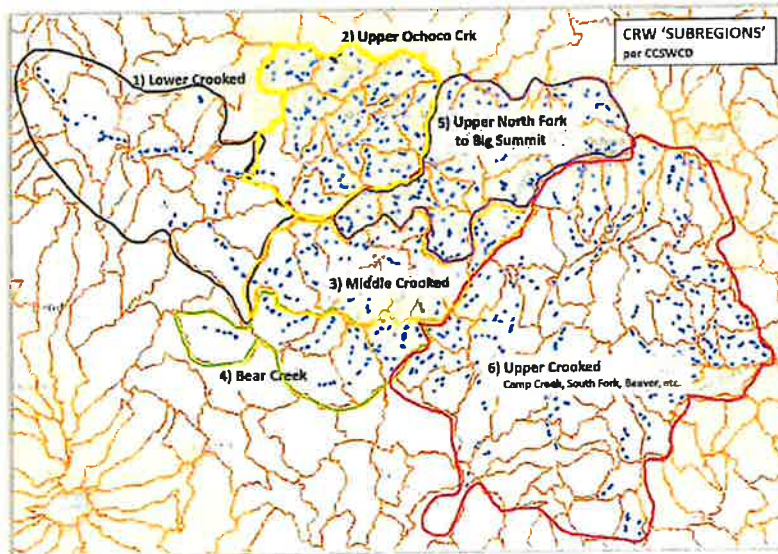
Questions or suggestions? Chris Gannon with CRWC, or

- Resources and support for landowners and local agencies
- Beaver management devices
- Beaver habitat restoration

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6 Subregions of Crooked River Watershed and Sampled Survey Reaches



Community Outreach Flyer

SPRING 2025

What's Happening
Planning around the watershed is underway as we're looking to better understand beavers in the drainage, how their activities can be compatible with landowner goals, and how agencies can support landowner operations and interests around beavers.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT FOR THE CROOKED RIVER WATERSHED

Activities underway

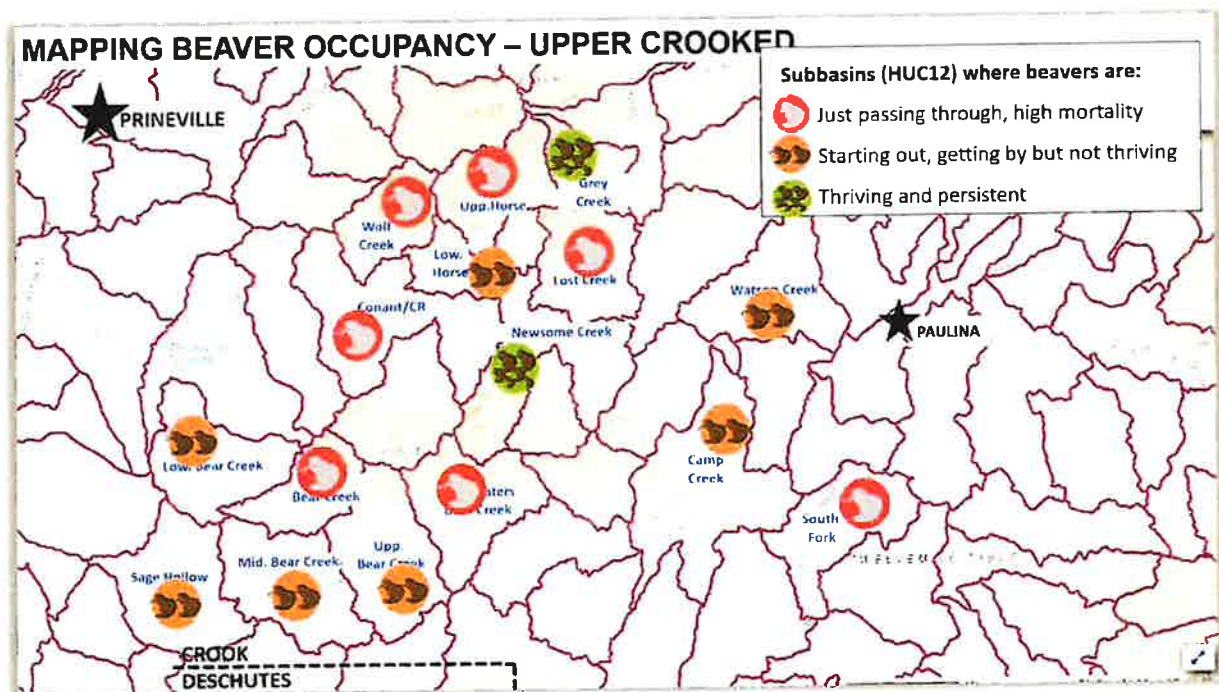
- Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) and keeping water on the land longer
- Forage game through increased irrigation
- "Beaver chatter" dances to address beaver problems
- Beaver Management Planning

To learn more, reach out:
Renee Mercer
541-362-1024
www.westernbeavers.org/beavers

WESTERN BEAVERS
Working to promote the healthy use of beavers in the Crooked River Watershed and its tributaries.

Consulting, design and construction with a focus on riparian ecosystems. Technical advice and support in Eastern Oregon.

Example of Beaver Occupancy Mapping by subbasin





SPRING 2025

What's Happening

Planning around the watershed is underway as we're looking to better understand beavers in the drainage, how their activities can be compatible with landowner goals, and how agencies can support landowner operations and interests around beavers.

LANDOWNER SUPPORT FOR THE CROOKED RIVER WATERSHED



Activities underway:

- Beaver Dam Analogues (BDAs) and keeping water on the land longer
- Forage gains through increased irrigation
- 'Beaver cheater' devices to address beaver problems
- Beaver Management Planning

To learn more, contact:

541-362-1024



Working to promote stewardship of the Crooked River Watershed and its resources.



Connecting ideas and people with beaver-focused resources, technical advice and support in Eastern Oregon.



BEAVER BACKGROUND

- Beaver ecology (since 2015)
- Native prairie wetland lands have been largely lost
- Put in place monitoring systems of beaver occupied stream reaches
- Assess and manage riparian health
- Track and assess beaver habitat
- Beaver based restoration planning and support (past 5 years)
- Regulation and implementation
- Beaver based restoration planning and support (past 5 years)
- Beaver based restoration planning and support (past 5 years)
- Beaver based restoration planning and support (past 5 years)

BEAVER



Castor canadensis

- AKA Beaver
- AKA "Ecosystem Engineer"
- AKA "Varmint"
- AKA "Lunch"

The March of Time in a Beaver-occupied Stream Valley

1. Small stream, active
2. Beaver dam, active
3. Stream valley, active



Water Management
 • Water Management
 • Water Management
 • Water Management

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 • Water Management
 • Water Management



If You Build It, They Will Come: Ranching, Riparian Revegetation, and Beaver Colonization in Elko County, Nevada

Susan Chinnery, USDA – Working Lands Initiatives

Observations (of 21 interviews):

- 16 described increased water availability, longer flows, during hot season
- 2 in 3 observed higher water tables and increased groundwater storage
- 1 half described increase in wet meadows over the long term

BEAVERS BACK ON THE LAND

WHAT BEAVERS NEED

BEAVER DAM ANALOGUES

BEAVER CHEATERS

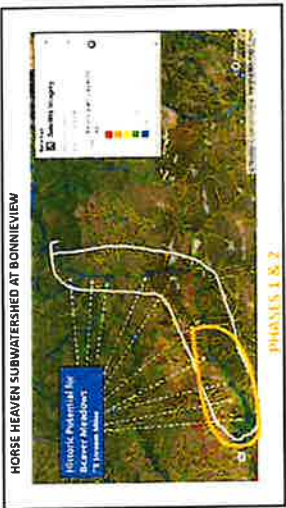
BEAVER CHEATERS

Projects making a difference

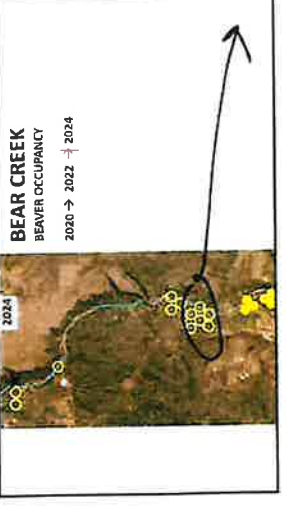
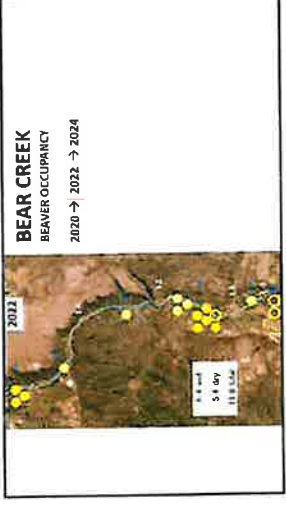
- Hay Creek (John Day trib)
- Pine Creek (John Day trib)
- South Fork Crooked
- Horse Heaven Creek
- Grey Creek

HAY CREEK & PINE CREEK

SOUTH FORK CROOKED



- Planned**
- More Horse Upper reach
 - Bear Creek Planting
 - Crooked River Watershed Beaver Assessment (Underway)



WHEN FORAGE IS LACKING

EMPHEMERAL

VEGETATION ASSASSMENT WITH BEAVER OCCUPANCY



WE KNOW – FORAGE COVERAGE > BEAVER PERSISTENCE

Beaver persistence is determined by the availability of preferred forage. If forage is lacking, beavers may eat less preferred forage or even non-food items like twigs and bark.

BEAR CREEK

LYTLE PRAIRIE

WHAT IF ?

BEAVER ARRIVAL

50% - 80% Coverage

DAY 1

BEAVER ASSESSMENT AT WATERSHED SCALE

SPRING 2025

LANDOWNER SUPPORT FOR THE CROSS RIVER WATERSHED

TAKE INVENTORY OF THE WATERSHED

1. River shape, geology, hydrology and infrastructure
Geomorphology/hydrology
Vegetation
Infrastructure (existing and potential)
Availability of dam building materials
2. Assess the quality and intent of existing beaver occupancy
(not pre-conditions, but enough!)
3. Chart existing forage availability
(coverage of preferred vegetation)

MAPPING BEAVER OCCUPANCY

