

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

August 11, 2021

Committee Members Present: Lynne Breese, Andy Gallagher, Mike Lunn, Tim Deboodt, Frank Porfily, Ston McDaniel, John Dehler, Jace Rhoden

Members absent: Trent Smith, Casey Kaiser, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser

Guests present: Johanna Kovarik (FS), Kevin Keown (FS), Slater Turner (FS), Jeff Kitchens (BLM)

Public Present: Don Vogel, Melinda Kestler, Gayle Hunt, Mikayla Mills, Kim Vogel

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Lynne Breese @ 4H Building.

Pledge of Allegiance

Review of Minutes:

Mike moved to accept the July 14th minutes as amended. John seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Reports:

FS: Kevin Keown and Johanna Kovarik

Kevin provided an update for the Grasslands and Lookout Mtn. District. Currently, there has been very little fire activity on the Ochoco's. The Grandview fire, which included parts of the Grasslands had grown to over 6000 ac. but is now contained. Central Oregon has sent firefighters and fire administrators to the Umpqua and Bootleg fires. Some are working on preliminary rehab planning on the Bootleg.

Due to increasing COVID risks, the Ochoco Forest personnel are still on lockdown, requiring no face-to-face meetings.

Projects: Mill Creek Vegetation Management: Team is working on possible alternatives to evaluate. The same ID Team is working on the Lemon Gulch Trail Project. Walton Lake project hearings schedule has been set. FS is anticipating a preliminary injunction. FS hopes to start on Walton Lake project this fall as soon as the Campground closes for the season (mid-October). Wild Horse project is now being implemented. FS is working on plans for a fall, 2021 gather. FS is working with partners (including Central Oregon Wild Horse Coalition) to create a handling facility on the Grasslands (old headquarters) and an adoption program.

Johanna shared information about Paulina District. Many of the staff are assigned to various fires on other forests. Still working on the Sunflower EA, ID Team is working on reviewing options for the North Fork, Crooked River planning area. All the Forest is in an Industrial Level 4 classification, meaning all industrial activities are shut down and no camp fires are allowed.

Frank asked about the article in the Bend Bulletin regarding the FS settlement on the Black Mtn. project (to not log within 300' of a riparian area)? And the payment of \$100,000.00 to the environmental law attorneys. Kevin responded that that suit had been settled, allowing the FS to move forward with a significant amount of the planning area to still be logged. The plan did not include any decision from Team 21 (the 21" rule) because their decision came after the Black Mtn. project had already been approved. The FS had to settle (\$\$ spent) as part of the outcome. Frank thanked the FS for being able to move forward with the harvest and not let this area burn.

BLM: Jeff Kitchens

Jeff provided the update for the BLM. Most of the last month has been spent with wildland fire operations (Prineville District BLM staff). The last 10 days has been fairly quiet in regards to fire activity. In June and July, there was no 10 day period where there was not an active Type 1, 2 or 3 level fire team activated somewhere. Regionally, the area is in a Level 4 classification (like FS). Recent rains have helped reduce fire risk a little but have not had an impact on 1000 hour fuels.

BLM has been active with lands actions. Still responding to requests on access (right-of-ways). BLM workload has been impacted also by the lack of being able to get seasonal help this year. This impact is most commonly seen in campground management.

Jeff showed the Committee some of the most recent work on maps (draft) dealing with travel management. New maps are easier to read and understand and include additional detail over existing maps available to the public. In addition to map work, BLM is working on standardizing Kiosk design and content. The intent is to make the information provided in uniform manner, trying to make them user friendly. Jeff said that within the next few weeks, BLM will reach out to the Committee's transportation sub-committee to present this information and get feedback. John Dehler asked about the availability of the draft maps. Jeff said the new maps are not ready for any distribution until they have a chance to check all of them for accuracy. Ston mentioned that he wants to be a part of the review committee. Ston asked what happens if an area is closed to the public seasonally but are still used for private access (right-of-way) year round. Jeff responded that right-of-way access is outside of the road regulations for use/season designations. Jeff also mentioned that BLM will be working on increasing signage throughout the travel areas and will not be relying on Kiosks to provide all the information. Mike commended the BLM and the quality of the work and how difficult this is for a public land management agency.

Lemon Gulch Sub-committee report:

John Dehler, sub-committee chair provided the Committee with an overview of the sub-committee's meeting held August 10th. John reported that there was good discussion with lots of opinions. John provided a brief history of the events leading up to the sub-committee's formation and meeting. FS permittees had expressed frustration over not being involved in the process until this spring even though FS and Ochoco Trail Group had been meeting/planning for almost 2 years. FS has agreed to provide the sub-committee with a history of how they came to select Lemon Gulch for the expansion of bike trails in the Ochoco National Forest.

John mentioned that the discussion involved some alternatives to the proposed project including the use of existing road/skid trails within the Forest, modification of existing trail systems already in place, and changing annually the emphasis of trail use (horses, bikes, hiking). Darlene mentioned that the difficulty of using existing trail systems is that the tread (the surface of the trail itself) is not appropriate for what the bik'ers like/need/want.

A discussion about wildlife was also had. Lemon Gulch is located within a winter use area for big game and is a popular place to hunt in the fall. Questions about whether Oregon Hunters Association and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife had been consulted were raised. Also questions about how these groups were represented within the Ochoco Trail Group and did the organizations authorize such representation.

John closed his update with stating that the sub-committee was now waiting for the Forest Service report that Slater had agreed to provide (the history of the FS feasibility study that selected Lemon Gulch).

Don Vogel (FS Permittee in the Lemon Gulch area) stated that the permittees in this area along with the landowners in the Mill Creek drainage still want the FS to stop the Lemon Gulch EA and start over again with a broader representation of the public involved (beyond the Ochoco Trail Group). Don noted that the permittees were contacted by the FS during the feasibility study, a step that Don said was required within the FS Guidelines. Kim Vogel, responded that the FS should have also consulted the County since the County had its Natural Resources Policy. The FS should have addressed the Custom and Culture of the County and this area and that those most affected by this project, were not consulted (permittees) as required by FS policy.

Kim Vogel expressed that the permittees and landowners in this area are still asking the County to oppose this project and to encourage highly developed recreation to stay focused in areas of the forest that are designated for this use (Forest Land Management Plan) and not expand outside of those areas.

Melinda Kestler asked what areas are considered to be "designated recreational areas"? Kim answered that within the Forest Plan (for the Ochoco's) areas are zoned or designated as recreational areas. Through that adopted plan, the public has already agreed to development within these areas. Lemon Gulch is not within one of these recreational planning areas. Discussion from the public also included that there appears to be no evidence that the FS looked at the other areas (up to 5) that the Ochoco Trail Group had initially studied and presented to the FS in August, 2019, prior to expanding outside of the already approved (Forest Plan) designated recreational areas. Kim Vogel stated that she recognizes that the Forest has to be managed for multiple use but that the feasibility study done by the FS prior to moving forward needed to look at all affects, not just biological. Melinda stated that the Ochoco Forest is a working forest, the Deschutes is a recreational forest.

In closing, Kevin (FS) again mentioned that the Forest is working on a future presentation to the sub-committee, covering the issue of how Lemon Gulch was selected.

Discussion on Committee

Committee members were asked about their thoughts regarding the function of the Committee since they first were appointed by the County Court, December, 2018.

John Dehler: The Committee is breaking new ground in working with the public land management agencies. We don't have a template or real life example to draw from so we are always learning. John stated he felt the Committee and its work was doing pretty good.

Andy Gallagher: No comment

Mike Lunn: The Committee is doing pretty good. Some of the projects the Committee has taken on will take time to see results, ie: transportation issues. Mike stated that working with the BLM has gone pretty well and the he and Kevin (FS) still want to meet on the Williams Prairie Restoration Project proposal. Mike want the Committee to work as a conduit of information between the agencies and the public. Ultimately, Mike hopes the Agencies and the Committee with talk about project prior to their being actually developed by the agencies.

Frank Porfily: Frank asked Slater what the plan was for reducing horse numbers on the Ochoco under the recently approved plan. Slater responded that the FS plans to being capturing horses this fall. The FS is working on developing a learning and adoption center on the grasslands this fall also. They will be using the area that used to be the old headquarters on the Crooked River National Grasslands. Frank asked about some reported killings of horses on the forest. Slater had heard nothing about any horses being shot. Frank then said we tried to be involved in issues that were already resolved (roads) and that was a waste of time. Frank mentioned the Wild Horse project and the County's letter being submitted without the Natural Resources Committee meeting to discuss it. The County settle the dispute and had to pay for attorney's fee.

Jace Rhoden: As one of the newest members (spring 2021) he sees positive actions coming from the Committee. He likes the diversity of the group and the public comments.

Lynne Breese: The Committee has become more aware of issues within the County and seeing all the issues the County has to deal with. Lynne hope more public continues to come to the meetings. Lynne expressed a need to education residents (her example was the Post/Paulina Rangeland Protection Assoc.) on the use of fire on private lands, liability issues and County rules/regulations.

Ston McDaniel: He talked about how things rot in the dark, meaning that issues usually start out small but without input, can blow up. He said that when the Committee is involved early on in the process, issues are not blowing up when all parties get to hear the entire story. Ston believes that the community is better off with the Committee than without it. He said it is his desire that as a County, we become more proactive than reactive. Ston stated he believes that the BLM is good about answering questions and responding to concerns (ex. BLM road use map update). He stated we are still more reactive to FS issues but feels the relationship will improve as we continue to work together.

Public Comment:

Gayle Hunt expressed that her greatest concern about the Committee is the lack of diversity it represents. She said that the Committee should include diverse opinions by including the environmental community. John Dehler asked Gayle if she believed if the Committee heard those diverse opinions? Her response was that multiple use doesn't require including all uses on all lands. Her

example was mountain bikes. She discussed a variety of negative impacts of mountain bikes on the forest. She stated that the FS has no obligation to place its use somewhere on the Forest. She said we all need to know the difference.

Don Vogel said that this Committee has offered an opportunity to present their concerns that wasn't given to them in any other way.

Mike Lunn asked about an update on the BOR water right application on Prineville Reservoir. Tim stated that tomorrow (Thursday, August 12th) was the deadline for public comment to the Oregon Department of Water Resources. Tim directed anyone interested in providing comment should do so through the Department's webpage. Web link provide.

Andy provided an update on Crook County Soil and Water Conservation District projects. Andy mentioned the District had submitted a letter opposing the water right application. Also, SWCD was working on a large grant project in the eastern end of the County, addressing sage grouse habitat issues.

No other business, John moved to adjourn. Frank Seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned @ 2:20 p.m.