

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

June 14, 2023

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

Members Absent: Andy Gallagher

Guests Present: Mike Britton (NUID Executive Manager), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Shane Jeffries (FS), Jodie Barram (Oregon Living with Fire), Emily Curtis (Discover Your Forest)

Public Present: Jenna Diebu, Nettie Downing, Gayle Hunt, Tory Kurtz

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of April 12, 2023 minutes: Bill McCormack pointed out that the minutes did not reflect the BLM announcement that local solar applications had been suspended. Lynne moved to accept the minutes, reflecting Bill's changes. Bill Seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Reports:

Shane Jeffries provided the FS updates: Shane provided handout on monthly activities and a handout on Central Oregon Focal Landscapes, a 10 year strategy to address wildfires within the region (part of a much larger national effort). Shane reported that the Forest is working with the County on constructing rappel towers at the Airport. The Forest is leasing property at the airport. The original lease did not envision this training need. It has now been added. Construction of 2 towers will start soon. For fire season, Shane reported that soil moisture is still good put that the risk level is high for the possibility of large fires as the season progresses.

Shane provided an update on the Lemon Gulch Trials project. He reminded the Committee that the FS had issued a final Environmental Assessment but issued no decision by the Ranger. As the Forest Service moves forward, the FS intends to have a broader conversation with the community to discuss needs, locations, types of trail systems and size and scope. The process the Forest intends to use is one which is being tested on the Deschutes Forest for the purpose of creating rules, regulations, opportunities for E-Bikes. Committee members thanked the Forest for listening to the local citizens and the decision it made.

Walton Lake decision by the 9th Circuit Court is still pending. No updates. Frank asked about the Wild Horse facilities being planned for on the Grasslands. Shane said that the planning is moving forward, it is estimated that it will handle up to 35 horses per year. Melinda expressed concern that the size of the

facility did not match the herd goals stated in the Management Plan. Shane shared information about current herd size, annual recruitment from new births, and the desire to address herd objectives over time. Shane also mentioned that the facility could be made available to other PNW Forests with wild horse herds.

Kim asked about the Mill Creek, North Fork Crooked River projects (others as well), and their relation to the announced fuels reduction plan... and any coordination with industry and associated mills? Shane said that the work was on-going and communication with these individuals is on-going. This work is outlined in the attached monthly progress report.

Stephanie McKinney reported on BLM activities: Stephanie reported that the public input period for the new rule on Conservation for lands administered by the BLM is ending soon (June 20th or July 5th?). There is work being done on updating the Murders Creek Horse Plan. Several individuals indicated they would like to receive that information. Stephanie said she would make it available to them. Over 1400 letters were mailed to residents of the Juniper Canyon area regarding the BLM Record of Decision 2005 regarding public land use, access, etc. The letter was in response to issues of trespass, vandalism, resource impacts over the last view years. BLM has published new maps which are now consistent with this 2005 Decision Notice.

BLM is working on updating its Greater Sage Grouse Management Plan. A draft EIS is anticipated to be released by December, 2023 with a 90 day comment period to follow. BLM is working with ODFW to redraw the PAC boundaries for General and Priority Habitats. BLM funded some work to collar and track sage grouse. That tracking data is being used to update the maps. Approximately 200,000 acres of general habitat and 200,000 acres of priority habitat is under study for adding to the plan. New draft maps showing these areas is anticipated to be available to the public in July, 2023.

Agenda:

Mike Lunn introduced the video "Changing a Landscape to a Lifescape: The Humboldt Ranch". A 15 minute video on riparian recovery with the use of grazing as a tool for success.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wz1mNjdPuzI>

Mike Britton, Executive Manager of the North Unit Irrigation District was introduced along with the topic of cloud seeding as a tool for drought management. Mike worked with the Oregon legislative process this spring in an attempt to get SB58 passed. SB58 was a bill which would have required the State of Oregon to investigate the opportunities to utilize cloud seeding for drought mitigation. Cloud seeding is a tool used by a number of States and governmental jurisdictions across the west and mid-west. Mike provided a power-point presentation provided by the Idaho Water Resources Department highlighting the Idaho program. Following the presentation, Cliff asked about the energy release associated with turning water vapor into ice? Kim asked what goes into a study that identifies appropriate watershed that are "suitable for seeding"? Stephanie McKinney asked about the possible impacts on biological systems and the liability associated with structural damage from increased moisture generation. Mike provided his thoughts to these questions and suggested that many of those answers would have come from a SB58 study had the bill passed. SB58 died in committee.

Shane Jeffries introduced Jodie Barram (Oregon Living with Fire) and Emily Curtis (Discover Your Forest). Shane provided some overview to the National Wildfire Crisis Strategy and the local efforts on the Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests (and Crooked River National Grasslands). Shane indicated that because of this new effort, the Ochoco National Forest will be redefining its 5 year work plan. The Committee watched a video on the new, national wildfire strategy. Afterwards, Emily introduced herself, now serving as the Wildland Fire Education Coordinator. Cliff asked how this all will be implemented. Cliff stressed the need to get projects on the ground in addition to developing plans. Shane said there is approximately 50,000 acres being targeted for treatments by the end of 2024 in central Oregon.

Good of the Order : No reports

Public Comment: none

Cliff moved to adjourn @ 4:00 p.m. Kim seconded. Motion passed



Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland

June 14, 2023

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM

Spring burning has concluded for the Forest. Spring burning opportunities, known as “burn windows,” were very limited this year lending just a few days to have prescribed fire on the landscape. Activities will now shift to preparing for fall burning and other methods of hazardous fuels management. Fire managers have now transitioned to wildfire season and the annual wildfire training of new firefighters and support staff is underway.

“The West is Burning” documentary and public events

The Forest, along with Oregon: Living With Fire and Discover Your Forest, hosted a showing of “The West is Burning” in Prineville on June 5 at the Bowman Museum with Forest Supervisor Shane Jeffries, Crook County Fire and Rescue Fire Chief Matt Smith and Crook County Fire Marshall Russ DeBoodt, as well as tri-county Health and Climate Coordinator Sara Worthington speaking to attendees. This was the first opportunity to introduce the Wildfire Crisis Strategy to the Prineville community and discuss the strategies for project planning for the next several years.

HERITAGE/ARCHEOLOGY

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 has issued the final Environmental Assessment and Response to Comments for the Lemon Gulch Trails Project. Effective immediately, the District Ranger is removing the project from consideration and will not be issuing a Decision. This action indefinitely suspends the planning process for the proposed mountain bike trail system east of Prineville and the Forest has no immediate plans to issue a Decision on the final Environmental Assessment.

In the near term, the Forest Service has no plans to issue a Decision based on the Environmental Assessment because we recognize the need for a broader conversation in the community around non-motorized trails in the Ochoco National Forest. We believe this analysis and the final EA will be useful tools in those conversations.

Instead the Forest will focus efforts on the current list of priority work including wildfire mitigation associated with the Wildfire Crisis Strategy on the Crooked River National Grassland, and community engagement and planning for the official designation of Corral Flats, an equestrian trail system on the Forest.

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. Department of Justice attorneys represented the Forest Service before a three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals at a hearing in Seattle on March 30, 2023. A ruling from the court is anticipated in 2 to 4 months.

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 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 has been completing effects analysis on two action alternatives. An environmental assessment will be released for public comment in the coming months.

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 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.





Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

WILDFIRE CRISIS
strategy

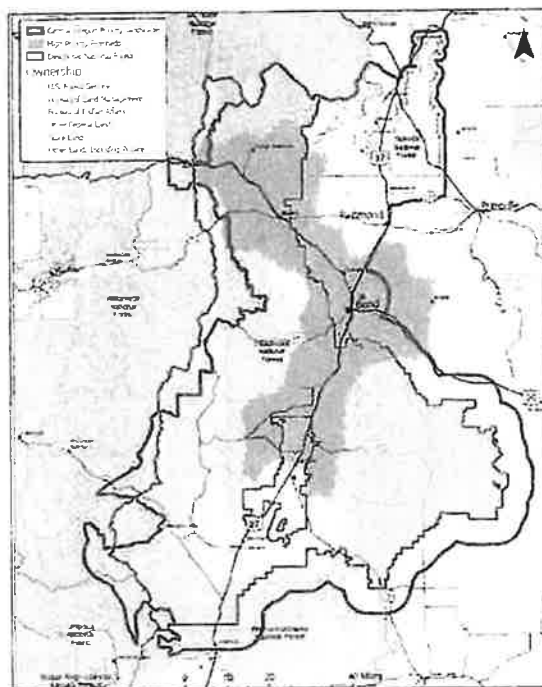
CENTRAL OREGON FOCAL LANDSCAPE

DESCHUTES NATIONAL FOREST AND CROOKED RIVER NATIONAL GRASSLAND –
Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) Investment Landscape

The Forest Service has launched a robust, 10-year strategy to address western wildfires in the places where they pose the most immediate threats to communities. Central Oregon was chosen as one of the initial focal landscapes identified for targeted investments in the “*Wildfire Crisis Strategy*.” The strategy combines a historic investment of congressional funding with years of scientific research and planning into a national effort that will dramatically increase the scale of forest health treatments over the next decade.

Central Oregon will receive up to \$43.1 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding to implement the Wildfire Crisis Strategy through 2024. With that investment, the Deschutes National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland along with Tribal, State and local partners, expect to treat more than 50,000 acres by 2024.

The Central Oregon Landscape covers State, county, private and federally managed lands on the eastside of the Central Cascades. This area is experiencing the fastest and most extensive community growth in Oregon with some communities increasing nearly 30% in the past 10 years. Hundreds of thousands of acres of public land are adjacent to homes, subdivisions and valuable private land assets;



Map showing the current boundary of the Central Oregon Landscape.

and with human ignitions accounting for nearly 90% of wildfires nationwide, every fire puts our communities at risk.

Under the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, the Deschutes National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland are pioneering improvements to project planning to increase

the pace and scale of wildfire risk reduction in our communities and across the landscape. We are an area rich in collaborative successes from implementing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration program and Joint Chief's Projects to executing the National Cohesive Strategy. Additional investments will build upon that success to continue reducing the risk of fire to numerous growing communities and critical infrastructure.



Open ponderosa pine stand representing a more accurate historic condition in a dry forest ecosystem.

Photo credit: USDA Forest Service

Central Oregon's economy is driven by recreation and tourism. The Deschutes National Forest is the primary destination, setting, and background for this economy. In 2021, in trail trips alone, \$136 million was spent in Deschutes County. Additionally, two popular Oregon State Parks border the Crooked River National Grassland—Smith Rock is internationally recognized as a rock-climbing destination and Lake Billy Chinook is a well-known destination for fishing and water sports. Mitigating wildland fire risks is not only critical for public safety, but it also contributes to a sustainable and robust local economy.

YEARS 1 & 2: First Steps

During the first two years of work on the Central Oregon Landscape, the Deschutes National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland have focused on securing partnerships to assist in implementation, and hiring more firefighters, environmental planners, wildlife biologists, archaeologists and other personnel needed to plan and

implement future projects. Adding this additional capacity is possible through funding support provided by the Wildfire Crisis Strategy via the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (enacted by Congress in Fiscal Year 2022) and the Inflation Reduction Law (enacted by Congress in Fiscal year 2023).

EARLY SUCCESS

While the hiring and planning processes are ongoing, the Forest Service has been collaborating with partners to educate our school-aged youth and engage the public on the work that is being done and accomplish more work on the ground.

- The Deschutes National Forest has entered into an agreement with the Clackamas County Fire District No. 1 through the *Wildfire Crisis Strategy*. The agreement will provide increased opportunity for both parties to engage in prescribed fire and fuels reduction projects with a large element of cross training while completing important fuels reduction projects in an interagency collaborative environment, further facilitating effective collaboration across organizational and jurisdictional boundaries.
- Discover Your Forest, the non-profit partner of the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland, hired a wildland fire education coordinator. This new position plans and hosts community events, develops fire ecology curriculum for local youth and cultivates relationships with local fire education and mitigation specialists for outreaching into Central Oregon communities.
- Discover Your Forest is also spearheading a new volunteer group to serve as a conduit for delivering information related to the *Wildfire Crisis Strategy* at popular

trailheads adjacent to areas that have or are currently undergoing landscape treatments. The program, and the newly hired Forest Stewards coordinator position, are funded in part by the *Wildfire Crisis Strategy*.

- The Crooked River National Grassland (and Ochoco National Forest) has entered into a Good Neighbor Agreement with the Oregon Department of Forestry to assist in planning invasive weed treatments and completing archaeological surveys on the Crooked River National Grassland.
- In coordination with the Mt. Hood National Forest, the Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests and Crooked River National Grassland are working with the Klamath Tribes, Burns-Paiute Tribes and the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to share information and resources and to coordinate treatments across boundaries to maximize efficiencies.

YEAR 3 AND BEYOND

Multiple projects are slated to be implemented in Fiscal Year 2024 and beyond. These projects include treatments to thin overgrown forests, reintroduce low intensity fire back into a fire-adapted ecosystem, improve watershed conditions, remove invasive species and more.

But we can't do this work alone. We rely on the scientific community and practitioners to help inform and refine our work; we rely on community members and partners to stay informed and involved; and finally, we rely on neighboring land managers and owners to engage in cross-boundary planning and all-lands implementation. We are building a foundation of shared values that include minimizing the risk of wildfire to our homes and communities, as well as protecting private property and public infrastructure.



Crooked River National Grassland, the only National Grassland in the Pacific Northwest, is dominated by sagebrush, perennial grasses, annual invasive grasses and encroaching western juniper. Photo courtesy: USDA Forest Service

By taking steps to meaningfully address the wildfire crisis in the west in our own Central Oregon communities, we can preserve and protect our unique and cherished way of life for generations to come.

- **2.73 million acres**
- **3 high-risk firesheds**
top 10% for risk to structures, roads & infrastructure, and watersheds
- **\$17 million in 2022-2023**