

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

August 14, 2024

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Lynne Breese, Andy Gallagher, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Steve McGuire

Members Absent: Casey Kaiser, Melinda Kestler, Cliff Kiser, Kim Vogel

Guests Present: Will VanVactor (County Planning), Ann Beier (County Planning), Lisa Clark (BLM), Jon Soliz (County Assessor)

Public Present: John Breese

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

Pledge of Allegiance

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

Agency Updates:

State Parks: No Report

Forest Service: No Report. Handout provided

Steve mentioned the handout mentioned a Motor Vehicle Use Map and expressed concern about any possible road closures associated with this activity. Of particular concern is any RS 2477 roads. Steve reminded the Committee that several years ago, the County's GIS Department digitized all known (at the time) RS 2477 roads within the County.

Lisa Clark (Prineville BLM) provided the Committee with an update. Lisa provided a regional map, showing all the summer fire locations throughout eastern Oregon. In her overview, the Crazy Creek Fire was still active (lands impacted are FS, BLM and Private). BLM is working to reduce area closures due to wildfire activities. Resource advisors are responding to fire suppression impacts (ex. Fire lines) and impacts from the fires themselves. Surveys are looking for ongoing hotspots, potential weed issues, assessing the needs to replant and fence repair/replacement. Costs associated with suppression repairs are charged to the fire costs. Site repair will require NEPA review.

In addition to the fire report, Lisa shared that as a part of the Grazing Permit Renewal EA (Camp Creek area), the Central Oregon Field Office received 1 protest on one of the 4 proposed decisions (Camp Creek Community Allotment). BLM will be addressing this protest, and the other 3 decisions have passed the protest period and have become final.

BLM has received funding for a census flight, Liggett Table Horse Management Area. BLM will be finalizing contracts for this census this fall. Lisa reports that this census data is one of the most critical components of the process of conducting an EA to determine the appropriate Management level for this HMA.

In closing Lisa acknowledged that the first hunting season (antelope) is starting this coming Saturday and expresses hope that everyone stays safe and is fire cautious.

Will VanVactor and Ann Beier were introduced to the Committee. Will is the County's Planning Director and Ann (retired County Planning Director) is on contract to complete a project with the federal government (Defense Department) to ensure better cooperation/communication with DOD and the County as it relates to use of the aerial space within the County for flight training exercises. Different parts of the County have different approved flight elevations for DOD training (Military Training Routes). County planning works to mitigate flight training with other County development (ex: solar, communication towers or other conflicting uses). County zones affected by this work are forestry, EFU 1 and forest 10 ac. Most of the lands in the flight training areas are federally managed.

County outcomes could include overlay zones similar to existing flood plain overlays. DOD and the County emphasize that this is to be a public involvement activity with public meetings to be scheduled for later this fall plus hearing before the County's Planning Commission.

In addition to this work, the County will be looking at updating its Commercial Energy Code. State law requires coordination of this work with the military. Ultimately, this could lead to updating the County's Comprehensive Plan.

Andy Gallagher asked about how the increased interest in wind power development might be affected by the final products of this effort. Will stated that DOD is not interested in saying no to projects, it is more about coordination, and mitigation of possible impacts. John Breese asked about drone use in these military flight zones. Will felt that there is very limited drone use in these flight zones. Bill McCormack mentioned that this area of the County has been used for decades as a military flight training area.

Good of the Order: No Committee updates

Public Comment: No Public Comment

Andy moved to adjourn. Mike seconded. Motion Passed

Meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m.



Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland

August 14, 2024

PRESCRIBED BURNING PROGRAM

Firefighters have completed an additional 100 acres of pile burning this spring, in addition to a 271-acre unit of juniper jackpot burning on the Crooked River National Grassland near Skull Hollow and Grizzly Mountain.

In the fall of 2023, the Ochoco National Forest (ONF) completed over 6,000 acres of prescribed burning. Treatments included blacklining in the Maury Mountains, underburning in the Jackson Unit to the east of Big Summit Prairie, and pile burning in the McKay Units west of the Mill Creek Wilderness. This spring, the Ochoco National Forest (ONF) has completed over 700-acres of prescribed burning. Treatments included underburning in the HEJ Unit near Big Summit Prairie. For more information on prescribed burning practices and updates, please visit www.centraloregonfire.org.

WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY

The Forest Service has launched a robust, 10-year strategy to squarely address this wildfire crisis in the places where it poses the most immediate threats to communities. The strategy, called “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America’s Forests,” 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 was chosen as one of 10 initial landscapes selected to receive \$131 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) investment to begin implementation of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy (WCS) in 2022.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) of 2021 calls for reducing wildfire risk on 10 million acres of National Forest System lands by 2027. Funding from the BIL and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) are being directed at fuels reduction projects in priority landscapes including the Central Oregon Investment Landscape that includes the Deschutes National Forest and the Crooked River National Grassland (CRNG). ONF specialists are undertaking planning for fuels reduction across the Grassland in response to the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

The ONF released the Lower Bridge Fuels Reduction and Habitat Resiliency Project Notice of Proposed Action on January 8th, 2024 to the public. The Lower Bridge project area is about 20,210 acres located on the western side of the CRNG. and the proposal includes reducing hazardous fuels by removing juniper and treating slash and improving wildlife habitat and watershed resiliency by promoting native shrubs and grasses. Approximately 6,749 acres are expected to have juniper treatments and 756.6 acres will be planted or seeded.

The ONF is on track to complete the NEPA in November 2024. For more information on the Lower Bridge Project, please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/ochoco/?project=64324>. ONF staff have just begun assessing the second planning area, the Central Fuels Reduction and Habitat Resilience Project. The Elk Lane wildfire, which started north of Round Butte on August 4th, has impacted a small portion of the Central planning area. Once fire suppression activities are complete, the ID Team will resume planning for this project. We intend to issue a proposed action this fall.





NATURAL RESOURCES

Greater Williams Prairie Restoration Project Completion

Williams Prairie (the Prairie) is a 560-acre meadow located approximately 25 miles east of Prineville, OR, on the Paulina Ranger District of the Ochoco National Forest. The North Fork of the Crooked River originates and runs through the Prairie. Over many years of manipulation by both private and Federal entities the Prairie had primarily been dewatered with ditches and gullies and the NF Crooked River no longer ran through a lush, wet prairie.

The Prairie restoration work started on July 10th, 2023, and was completed on September 29th, 2023. The project focused on restoring 4.5 miles of degraded stream gullies and ditches, over two miles of valley length. Primary objectives were to 1) fill degraded gullies and ditches with earthen material to bring the shallow ground water table closer to the valley surface, 2) remove a 350 ft long by 12 ft tall earthen dam 3) improve the existing AOP and add 3 additional valley culverts on the Forest Road (FR) 4225-050 road crossing 4) restore native cultural and sensitive flora and fauna habitat, and 5) protect multiple fens and springs within and around the Prairie.

The project was completed over a 12-week period with a time-and-materials contract which included two excavators, three off-road dump trucks, a D6 dozer and a skidder. Approximately 45,000 cubic yards of material was excavated and transported from high terraces to fill down-cut gullies and ditches. In some areas of the project, gullies and ditches were 8-10 ft deep and 15-20 ft wide. Upon filling some of these areas, a subsurface water table response was witnessed rising as much as 3.5 feet in a few days. Approximately 400 trees were pushed over and placed on portions of the newly graded prairie surface. Upon finishing the project, approximately 10,000 native riparian plants were planted, most of which were sedge plugs and small mats. Additional planting was completed by contract in the spring of 2024 with a variety of riparian plants native to the site and additional heavy equipment work was completed to stabilize areas where vegetation had not yet established to prevent degradation

Lamonta Compound: CCC Building Restoration and Fire Facility Construction

In 2022, the Forest completed siding replacement, painting, and exterior restoration of three of the four CCC-era warehouses and storage buildings at the historic Lamonta Compound. 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. Another project at the site is a two-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 began in the spring of 2023 during which compound utilities were upgraded, and connections to city infrastructure brought up to local and state code, in addition to providing improved employee parking, and upgraded access from both Lamonta and 10th Streets. The second phase, scheduled for 2024, will complete construction of the actual fire operations facility.

First Phase of Forest Road 42 Paving Project Complete (funded by the *Great American Outdoors Act*)

This three-year project was completed in November. The project focused on work from Forest Road (FR) 4200-300 to the junction with FR 4210 and the area was fully closed while work was underway. The project included milling the existing asphalt, stabilizing the base material to mitigate future frost heave damage, repaving and restriping this section of road along with completing necessary bridge repairs. Contractors also patched asphalt on FR 42 from the junction with FR 22 to the junction with FR 4210. Striping of the new road surface will take





place in the spring of 2024.

Forest Road 22 Reconstruction Project (funded by the *Federal Land Transportation Program*)

The Federal Highways Administration will be prioritizing critical locations for partial reconstruction and/or overlay on FR 22 between the junction of FR 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 completed the environmental review and NEPA documentation in August 2023. FHWA-WFL will be responsible for completing the design and construction which is expected to begin in 2024.

Motor Vehicle Use Map Information

Our Engineering staff, together with our Natural Resources, Recreation, Range, and Visitor Information Services teams are in the process of making substantial updates to our Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs). This is a comprehensive effort to ensure our official information on maps is not only accurate, but also signed properly on the Forest and Grassland. This will be implemented on a rolling basis which began this summer with new carsonite posts, new kiosks, updated kiosks, re-signing road signs that have excessive wear, etc. in addition to posting and printing updated maps in 2024.

PROJECT PLANNING UPDATES

Mill Creek Restoration Project

The ONF's Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project (Mill Creek) was developed with the intent of actively managing conifer stands to restore historic composition, structure, and density; reducing activity generated and naturally occurring fuels; and restoring streams, floodplains, and Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA's). 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 36,430 acres in size. The final Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice in were issued in March, providing a 45-day objection filing period. Objections have been responded to or withdrawn by the objector. The final Decision Notice is on track to be signed this week. .

North Fork Crooked River Resiliency Project

The Paulina Ranger District 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 2022. The interdisciplinary (ID) Team used scoping comments to develop an alternative. The draft environmental assessment (EA) was released for a 30-day comment period which ended on December 1st. The Forest is finalizing the EA and plans to issue a draft Decision Notice for a 45-day objection period late August or early September. The Crazy Creek fire has impacted the eastern portion of this project area.

Corral Flat Equestrian Trails Project

The Corral Flat Equestrian Trails Project proposes the designation of approximately 50 miles of trail for equestrians as part of the Forest non-motorized designated trail system. The project is about 25 miles northeast





of Prineville on the Lookout Mountain and Paulina Ranger Districts. The trail routes are coincident with Forest Service system roads (both open and closed) and non-system two-track roads and closely follow the route of an annual equestrian endurance ride. This project would also involve rehabilitation of areas damaged by OHVs, and improvements of road closures to prevent future damage. The Forest has reviewed comments that were received from 63 individuals and organizations on the EA during a 30-day comment period that ended April 12th, and is working towards finalizing the EA and drafting a Decision Notice. The Draft Decision Notice will be issued for a 45-day objection period in August.

Jackson Watershed Fuelbreaks CE Project

The Paulina Ranger District issued a public scoping notice for a proposed fuelbreak project on July 29, 2024. The District hosted a public field trip with the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative on July 16th. This project will create up to 3,000 acres of shaded fuelbreak along major roads around the Jackson Watershed by removing trees and brush, maintaining largest overstory trees, and conducting pile and broadcast burning. The Crazy Creek wildfire is currently impacting portions of this project area. When suppression activities are completed, the ID Team will assess the impacts of the fire and determine how the project proposal will need to be modified.

Ochoco Wild Horse Management Plan

Forest Service Prevails in US District Court of Oregon

The Forest Service completed NEPA for an updated Ochoco Wild Horse Herd Management Plan in May 2021. A lawsuit challenging the new plan was filed in US District Court in October 2021. Following briefing, Magistrate Judge Hallman issued Findings and Recommendations in favor of the Forest Service on all counts on May 12th. The District Court adopted these Findings and Recommendations and ruled in favor of the Forest Service. Plaintiffs have filed a notice of appeal with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Briefing of the appeal was completed on July 24th. The Forest anticipates the Ninth Circuit to schedule an oral hearing for the case.

FOREST HEALTH

In the 2022 and 2023 annually conducted aerial insect and disease surveys, Forest Health Protection Staff observed wide-spread grand fir mortality 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 assessing the existing condition and working with Regional Staff to consider options for addressing this issue.

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.

