

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

October 9, 2024

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

Members Absent: Steve McGuire, Andy Gallagher, Casey Kaiser

Guests Present: Kyle Hensley (BLM), Shane Jeffries (FS) Isabella Isaksen, Seth Crawford (County Commissioner), Susie Hermreck (County Commissioner), Jenna Deibel (OSU Extension Forester)

Public Present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt, John Novak, Don Vogel

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Lynn Breese

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill McCormack moved to approve the minutes of the September 11, 2024 meeting as presented. Cliff Kiser seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Updates:

State Parks: No Report

Shane Jeffries (Ochoco National Forest Forest Supervisor) introduced Isabella Isaksen as the new Public Information Officer for the Ochoco National Forest. Shane shared updates on the Rail Ridge, Crazy Creek and Wiley Flat fires. The Rail Ridge fire is still an active fire, approximately 171,000 ac with approximately 700+ individuals on the fire line. The BAER report for both the Crazy Creek and Wiley Flat fires are completed. BAER reports identify immediate actions required for resource stabilization and post fire recovery. Kyle Hensley (BLM) reported that the Pine fire ignited on Monday and went to 6500+ acres overnight. As part of the Rail Ridge fire, Cliff Kiser asked about fire impacts in the Black Canyon Wilderness. Shane said that early reports indicate that many acres burned under a low intensity fire and that they expect a mosaic of mixed impacts. Cliff asked about salvage harvest. Shane shared that the FS is currently conducting a rapid assessment on salvage opportunities, and that the FS is looking at what tools are available for moving forward quickly. New tools include expanded Categorical Exclusion authorities, roadside safety and other NEPA requirements. Anything requiring expanded NEPA consideration will be done by spring.

Shane reported that Walton Lake rehab project is underway again, the campground and area is under a temporary closure while treatment activities are underway.

Kyle Hensley, Central Oregon Resource Area Manager (BLM) shared BLM activities. BLM has its own BAER process and is underway for lands administered by BLM and impacted by wildfires. There will be some salvage logging and expanded firewood opportunities.

Kyle reported that the Chimney Rock campground project is now complete. There are no new updates on local or national solar projects.

Kyle shared that in regards to the Camp Creek Allotments permit renewal process, 2 of the 4 allotments have signed renewals, the other 2 renewals are not signed, one of which has a formal protest filed on it. In regards to the Ligget Table Wild Horse group, BLM is flying the area this week for herd inventory. Updated herd counts will be used in an upcoming NEPA project renewal of the Herd Management Plan. Melinda Kestler asked if most of the riparian damage reported in the NEPA review for these allotments was connected to livestock trespass issues and not horse population issues or permitted grazing within the allotments. Kyle shared that the EA addresses the trespass issue and that BLM has 2 documented cases of trespass for this area.

BIG Summit Prairie and the possibility of public ownership of part of it was discussed. This topic was originally a part of the September 11, 2024 meeting of the County's Natural Resource Advisory Committee. The discussion again reviewed what is known about the current proposal by ONF and its partners. Frank Porfily asked if it was necessary for County support in order for FS to move forward with its plan. Shane emphasized that he will not move the proposal forward within the FS unless there is local elected support to do so.

Shane again shared the 3 major issues associated with acquisition of this property. Those issues are:

- 1) Acreage size – property is approximately 9020 ac and FS guidelines limit their ability to add acreage to 3000 ac.
- 2) Split estate – surface rights and mineral rights are not currently owned by the same parties.
- 3) Competitive application for federal dollars. There is a need for bridge funding/purchase by 3rd parties for the initial purchase followed by successfully obtaining the federal funds to reimburse the bridge funders. Also, property must be appraised and purchase price cannot exceed appraised value.

Frank expressed concern about FS ownership and the ability of the FS to complete a management plan in a timely manner. He pointed out the example of the Walton Lake project taking almost 9 years to complete followed by on-going litigation that has delayed on the ground actions.

Mike Lunn expressed his concern that none of us have the right to question the sale of private lands by willing sellers. Kim Vogel asked Shane about future management and expressed concern that there are no guarantees. Shane said that until there is a signed management plan for the property in question, there are no preconceived plans. He said that usually, management of new lands mimics management of surrounding lands. Kim is concerned that there will be a push to remove grazing as a use. She also expressed concern that sale to another private party could also result in no more ag use and possible subdivision of a large parcel into many, smaller ones and the impact that will have on wildlife, the unique environmental conditions of the Prairie and water.

Melinda expressed concern that the Committee could be exposed to possible lawsuits by private parties by taking a position on this issue and impacts to the current landowner and others. She asked what is

the legal liability/exposure of individual members of the Committee. Commissioner Crawford said that the Committee is advisory only to the Board of Commissioners.

Calista Songstad asked how the FS will move forward. Shane again said that the FS is just exploring the option of public ownership. There are numerous issues the agency faces in order to move forward. The acreage limitation, the fact that the property is outside of the Congressional boundary of the Ochoco National Forest, the excess acreage (over 3000 ac), the split estate, and the procurement of federal funds and finding interim bridge funders (3rd party) that can complete the initial purchase.

Cliff asked if bridge funding inflates the value of the property. Does the bridge funder make money on the deal? Shane shared that no property can be bought by the government without a formal appraisal. Appraisal guidelines must be followed. Kim wondered if the purchase could include special designations, guiding future uses because of clear intent stated as part of the purchase agreement (ie continued grazing). Seth asked how guarantees would be assured.

Mike wondered if there isn't an opportunity for a private/public partnership in the purchase and management of the property. Melinda asked what the Board of Commissioners wants from the Committee. Seth shared that he is looking for the Committee to provide the Board with input from the community. Susie shared that she is looking for public input. What does the citizens of the County want? If the citizens want this, then she will fight for it.

Seth shared that he has collected over 450 signatures of people who do not want this property in public ownership, that being a part of the Ochoco National Forest. Mike Lunn asked Seth that if he already opposes the idea, then why seek Committee involvement. Seth shared that it takes 2 out of 3 commissioners to move any ideas forward.

Melinda shared that she felt the Committee should use its sub-committee format to develop questions, explore options, seek information and report back to the whole Committee.

Cliff moved to have the Committee explore the topic of public ownership of this portion of the Prairie by the FS. Kim seconded. Motion passed.

Mike moved to create a sub-committee to do the leg work. Calista seconded. Motion passed.

Vice-chair Lynne Breese appointed Mike Lunn (sub-committee chair), Cliff Kiser, Melinda Kestler, Kim Vogel and Calista Songstad to the sub-committee.

For the November meeting, Tim asked Shane if he could provide an update on the Sunflower Allotment management plan (since its ROD), activities completed, impacts of the Rail Ridge fire. Also an update on Crazy Creek fire impacts and associated management plans (ex. Fuel breaks and NFCR plans).

Mike Lunn moved to adjourn. Frank seconded. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 3:08 p.m.



**Crook County Natural Resources Advisory
Committee**

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National
Grassland
October 09, 2024

Multiple fires have impacted the Ochoco National, including the Crazy Creek Fire, Rail Ridge Fire, and the Wiley Flat Fire. Many previously planned projects have been paused or are being reevaluated due to the unprecedented activity.

Fire Updates

Rail Fire:

Caused by multiple lightning starts on September 2nd, the Rail Ridge is currently being managed by Northwest Complex Incident Management Team 8. At the time of this report, the acreage is 171,087 and is fire 89% contained. A Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) team will begin their assessment this week.

Wiley Flat Fire:

Started on September 2nd, caused by lightning, the Wiley Flat is currently 28,396 acres and is located within the Maury Mountains on ONF, BLM, and private land. This incident is currently being managed by a local type 4 team and is 100% contained. A BAER team has completed their assessment and submitted their findings for approval.

Crazy Creek Fire

Started on July 22nd caused by lightning, the fire is 86,968 acres and 100% contained. BAER assessments have been completed and they have submitted their findings.

*This information was reported on October 8th, and statistics may have changed since the production of this document. *

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 Decision Notice was signed on August 12th. Timber sales are being prepped and the first timber sale (Shake DXP) is scheduled to be auctioned this fall

North Fork Crooked River Resiliency Project

The Paulina Ranger District is proposing landscape restoration with the North Fork Crooked River Forest Resiliency 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. A final Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice will be issued for a 45-day objection period this month. The Crazy Creek fire has impacted the eastern portion of this project area which will not be included in the decision

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 a longstanding 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 issued a final EA and draft Decision for a 45-day objection period which will end on October 4th.

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. Scoping was extended to September 30th. 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.

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.

