

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

January 8, 2025

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack (via zoom link), Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire, Andy Gallagher

Members Absent: Cliff Kiser, Casey Kaiser, Kim Vogel

Guests Present: Scott McFarland (FS), Jodie Barram (OLWF), Isabella Isaksen (FS), Lisa Clark (BLM)

Public Present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt, Mike Ervin, Justin Alderman (Prineville Review)

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes:

Mike Lunn moved to approve the minutes of the November 13, 2024 regularly scheduled meeting of the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee meeting. Frank Profily seconded. All members voted yes, no one voted no, no abstentions. Motion passed.

Mike Lunn moved to approve the minutes of the November 25, 2024 special meeting of the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee meeting. Lynne Breese seconded. All members voted yes, no one voted no, no abstentions. Motion Passed.

Agency Updates:

State Parks: No Report

BLM: Lisa Clark, Deschutes Resource Area Manager, Prineville BLM District provided the Committee with both a written update (attached) and addressed the Committee in person. Lisa reported that the BLM campgrounds on the Lower Crooked River are having problems with vandalism to the fee boxes. BLM is working on ways to address this, some of which include the installation of cameras, and hiring a camp host to be stationed at the Big Bend campground. BLM is reviewing current fee schedules for camping in its campgrounds. Current fees are \$8.00/night which is below other managed campgrounds in the area. BLM will be seeking input from the public as it moves forward with a decision. BLM is looking at increasing fees to \$12 - \$20/ night. BLM will use social media and campground surveys as part of its public outreach and data gathering process.

BLM continues to experience resource damage issues to public lands in the Juniper Canyon area. As development continues in this area on private lands, BLM is having to address trespass, right-of-way access and the creation of unauthorized routes. Lisa asked for thoughts on how to address these concerns. The Committee suggested BLM work with the County's Planning and Building Department as

well as the local Realtors Association. The Committee also suggested BLM request getting on the County's work session agenda to raise awareness of the issues with the County Commission.

Lisa said that horse captures for the wild horses impacted by the Rail Ridge fire are complete. BLM captured 210 horses and the Malheur National Forest captured 104. All horses were reported to be in poor body condition as a result of limited feed. BLM horses will be housed at their facility in Burns, OR until the impacted areas recover from the fire impacts. FS horses will be housed at the Modoc, CA facility.

Tim asked Lisa about the web-based interactive BLM map that was released late December. Lisa indicated that the map is new and over time, it will be updated. The purpose of the map is help the public know where authorized access points are to lands administered by the BLM nationwide.

John Breese asked about the timelines required to obtain an easement from BLM. Lisa said because of limited staff and the amount of applications, it could take up to 2 years. Ways to expedite the process is to bundle requests. Prineville BLM is in the early stages of developing a NEPA project that will look at multiple issues on the District, right-of-ways will most likely be a part of that project as well. Lisa also pointed out the benefit of bundling a right-of-way request (multiple users on one route) because then the applicants can share the cost of the annual fee.

Gayle Hunt asked if Lisa knew if the Malheur NFS would be conducting a feeding program for the horses that they could not capture. Lisa didn't know but said she would check into it and get back to Gayle.

Forest Service: Scott McFarland (District Ranger, ONF) provided updates to the Committee as well as a handout (attached) on FS post fire responses to the Rail Ridge Fire, Wiley Flat Fire and Crazy Creek Fire. Scott reported that they have been snowed out of the Rail Ridge Fire area and will have to wait to complete any further assessments. The FS will be planning a NEPA project on the Wiley Flat fire to salvage log on approximately 250 acres plus some hazard tree removal along roads. The Forest has applied for \$2.8 million dollars of rehabilitation projects related to the Crazy Creek Fire. Most of those projects are related to rangeland impacts and fence repair/replacement. Priority work is first focused on damages caused from suppression efforts fighting the fire and then on damage caused by the fire. Projects will either repair or replace damaged infrastructure and the intention is to use non-burnable materials. The FS will prioritize boundary fence repair over internal pasture fences. The FS is exploring with permittees opportunities to utilize virtual fence technology as appropriate.

Committee appointments by the Board of Commissioners was presented by Tim. Mike Lunn has been reappointed to a 4 year term, expiring December 31, 2028. Cliff Kiser's reappointment is pending Board action later this month.

Good of the Order:

Mike Lunn informed the Committee that Wayne Elmore (retired BLM and Riparian Specialist) had suffered a heart attack but was recovering.

Tim informed the Committee that the FS had withdrawn the Old Growth project that it has been working on nation-wide. Scott McFarland indicated that the effort would have had little impact on the Ochoco NF since the Forest already has a good inventory of old growth across the forest.

Frank asked if we are now legal with all public notices and meeting operations. Tim responded that all notices have been and as far as we know, we are.

Mike Lunn talked about the FS budget impacts on the ability to hire seasonal employees this coming summer and the impact on workloads of the permanent positions. Scott McFarland said yes, there is a budget shortfall. Part of the issue is related to COLA being given without new revenue to pay for them. FS will be limiting seasonal hires to just a few exceptions. One benefit of actions over the last couple of years is the conversion of some 1039 positions to permanent positions. Lisa Clark said that BLM budget impacts aren't as bad as FS but they also will be limiting seasonal hiring and will not be filling some permanent positions.

Public Comment:

John Breese asked if the salvage sales will be broken down by tree species. Scott responded by sharing that hazard tree sales are not split by species. Generally there is not enough volume to do that. The salvage sale being designed for the Wiley Flat area may be identified by species. Scott emphasized that the goal is to get NEPA work done and signed by spring. He also said litigation is always a concern so they are trying to only present the best possible sales.

Gayle Hunt let the Committee know that the "Strobble horse herd" a group of horses that were being developed to represent a long ago set of horse genetics from Europe. Following the death of Mr. Strobble, the herd was sold and moved around. The few remaining horses were recently located in Harney County and have been brought back to the area. Research on these horses and their genetics will now continue.

Justin Alderman, Prineville Review asked the Committee if any of them were aware that Cliff Kiser had active contracts with the Forest Service and if they did, they they think there was a conflict of interest or any other ethic issues? Justin asked that if they did, they could talk to him after the meeting. Steve McGuire said it was up to the individual to respond and that the Committee would provide no response.

Frank moved to adjourn the meeting. Mike seconded. All members voted yes. No one voted no. No abstentions.

Meeting was adjourned at 1:42 p.m.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Crook County NRAC Updates

January 8, 2025

Deschutes Field Office

Lower Crooked River - the Deschutes Field Office is having repeated issues with vandalism and theft at campgrounds along the river. Thieves are attempting to fish payment envelopes out with hangers (usually leaving the envelope and contents in shreds) or trying to cut locks and chains securing the fee tube inside the iron ranger. Staff are working with our BLM law enforcement on the issue and plan to add cameras to areas with repeated attempts. We have also added a winter camp host at Big Bend to help patrol and make public contacts.

Lower Crooked River campgrounds - the Deschutes Field Office is doing an analysis of campgrounds in Oregon with similar amenities to determine a reasonable increase to the cost of overnight stays. Based on a preliminary look, campgrounds with similar or fewer amenities are charging \$15-20/night and the current rate for our campgrounds is \$8/night. The field office received no funding for recreation operations last year and don't anticipate operations funding this year. Increasing the fee to \$15/night would provide fiscal support for supplies like toilet paper, water testing, minor campground improvements (replacing fire rings, signs, etc.), garbage service, vandalism/repairs/maintenance; as well as helping fund our seasonal employees, which are generally paid out of operations funding or fee dollars.

Juniper Canyon development - the Deschutes Field Office is struggling to address the significant amount of trespass due to rapid development in the canyon as well as old trespass that hasn't been addressed. New builders are unaware of requirements to obtain rights-of-way to construct roads and driveways across BLM and are building without authorization. The field office is planning on completing a thorough assessment of public lands in the canyon and will address existing trespass on a case-by-case basis. Working with the NRAC, we would like suggestions as to how to pair county building permits with a requirement to demonstrate proof of access; as well as to be able to work with the county to plan ingress/egress to large blocks of land where access is required across public land.

The BLM is willing to work to authorize a main entrance and an alternate exit in a way that minimizes fragmentation of public lands; however, often individuals buying lots want "their own" access and expect individual routes across public land. At the same time not everyone in the development is willing to share the cost of obtaining a right-of-way. As a result, those that don't get a ROW benefit from the work that their neighbors do to get a ROW and build access.



**Crook County Natural Resources Advisory
Committee**

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National
Grassland
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Fire Updates

Rail Fire:

The forest is currently gathering data to support a Burned Area Rehabilitation funding proposal.

Wiley Flat Fire:

Planning for Hazard Tree abatement along MVUM roads within the Wiley Flat Fire area will begin this winter/spring. Additionally, the forest is exploring a potential 250-acre salvage opportunity near critical infrastructure.

Crazy Creek Fire:

A Burned Area Rehabilitation funding request of approximately \$2.8 million has been submitted. The proposal primarily focuses on range improvement and infrastructure repairs. This funding source is competitive, and approval is not guaranteed.

Project Planning Updates

Mill Creek Vegetation Project:

Bids for the first timber sale from this project will be accepted starting Monday, January 13, 2025.

North Fork Crooked River Resiliency Project:

The project is currently in the Objection Resolution phase.

Jackson Watershed Fuelbreaks CE Project:

The project is being rescoped based on public feedback, impacts from the Crazy Creek Fire, and specialist input. The scoping period is expected to begin the week of January 6, 2025.

Crazy Creek Roadside Hazard Tree Abatement Project:

A public scoping letter is expected to be released by next week.

Wiley Flat Roadside Hazard Tree and Salvage Projects:

Tribal notification for these projects was sent out this week, with public scoping planned for a later date.

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>

