

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

May 14, 2025

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad (via Zoom), Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser

Members Absent: Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher, Kim Vogel

Guests Present: Susie Hermreck (County Commissioner), Jeff Marszel (FS), Isabella Isaksen (FS), Kyle Hensley (BLM)

Public Present: Gayle Hunt, Mike Ervin

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill McCormack moved to approve as presented. Lynne Breese seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No Committee members present voted no. Motion Passed.

Agency Updates:

Jeff Marszel, Ochoco Forest Supervisor introduced himself to the Committee and provided a career update that included being on the Ochoco National Forest before, working with the Ochoco Forest Collaborative in its early days and the other Forests where he has served a variety of leadership roles. Jeff officially started on the Ochoco Forest June 2nd.

Jeff talked about the change in administrative people on the Ochoco. Kevin Keown retired, and Scott McFarlane retired and is now working for DNR in the state of Washington. Jeff provided a handout (attached) that highlights the activities on the Ochocos this month. The 2024 fires continue to impact on-going activities. 6 grazing allotments will not be grazed during the 2025 year and 5 additional allotments will have reduced use. Repairing infrastructure (water developments, fencing, etc) will be addressed during the year. Hazard tree abatement and minimal salvage logging are being planned. Salvage sales for the Crazy Creek fire were held on June 2, bids are being accepted for the Coyote sale (Wiley Flat fire) on June 23rd.

The 2025 fire season has already started. Fires have already occurred and FS has the authority to fill fire administrative positions with retired staff.

Questions from Committee members: Cliff expressed concern about “no-sales” that are resulting from the minimum bids being too high for the market. Jeff said that they will be reviewing the minimum bid criteria. Questions about how much of the Sunflower project area had been affected by the Rail Ridge Fire. Isabella (FS Information Officer) estimated that a third of the project area had been impacted and the Sunflower planned projects had been adjusted to account for that impact.

Cliff asked how much of the impacted area will have salvage activities. Jeff indicated that the priority is on roads and safety (hazard tree abatement). Frank asked about how the 21" rule is impacting salvage operations. Jeff reviewed the history of the east-side screens and the 21" rule and indicated the FS is reviewing future steps to take to be able to amend the rule when needed.

Frank discussed the history of the Big Summit Wild Horse Herd and the litigation of the adopted management plan. Jeff said he had not been briefed on the horse issue yet.

Kyle Hensley, Central Oregon Area Manager, Prineville BLM District provided the BLM update. Kyle reported that over the previous weekend, the District south of the Maury's into Lake County recorded over 5000 lightning strikes. 8 confirmed starts but all held to single trees. Kyle reported that Oregon Department of Forestry and the Federal agencies will be raising fire restrictions starting next Monday, June 16.

The District was able to once again work with the Crook County School District in providing "Chimney Rock Days" for 4th graders. This event was started around 1983 and suspended during the COVID period. This year is the first year since then. Big Bend campground has a volunteer host this summer and will help reduce workload on BLM staff on the lower Crooked River.

Kyle said that the HMA for the Liggett Table Horse herd will be starting its planning update soon. The BLM may ask for County representation as a part of the process. A census of the horses was conducted last fall. Cliff expressed concern about the impacts on the South Fork and Camp Creek that resulted in the non-use for one of the pastures (5 years). What monitoring does BLM have in place to identify cause and effect? Kyle said that the pasture already has 2 years of non-use with another 3 to go before an updated decision will be made. Current use is only by elk and horses.

Susie Hermreck spoke about safety issues and that a horse had been struck by a logging truck last summer. She was thankful it wasn't a car or the results could have been worse. She was told that she could not open a gate into her hay field; that the horses were federal property and that would be against the law. She said she did it anyway, out of concern for the horses and the safety of those people who drive the Paulina Hwy. Kyle acknowledge that the information was wrong that she had received and that this year (and in the coming years) the BLM will respond immediately to assure public safety. Melinda asked if the BLM was providing supplemental water to the horses. Kyle said the BLM was not.

Kyle shared that the sale of salvage from the Crazy Creek fire was a no sale. He shared that the BLM has scheduled another attempt to sell those logs later this month (June). In response to Cliff's question about minimum bids, Kyle said the minimum bid would be 1 cent.

BLM is working on an updated NEPA for the allowance of new herbicide chemistry. Products that will be helpful in targeting annual grasses. He hopes for a decision notice in 2026.

In regards to grasshopper control in the upper Country, BLM wasn't aware of the grasshopper issues that were impacting private lands in 2024. BLM contracted with USDA APHIS earlier this spring to do NEPA for hopper control. Giving the timing of insect development and when the document was completed, BLM will not be able to do any spraying in 2025 but will be prepared for 2026 if the infestation warrants it.

In regards to the 2025 fires and fire restoration activities, BLM is beginning to work with permittees to rebuild fences and other infrastructure. Some allotments will be rested in 2025 and 2026 while rehabilitation projects get under way. Post 2026, grazing will be determined based on site recovery. Rehabilitation treatments being scheduled include weed control and seeding. The Crazy Creek fire projects will begin in 2025 while the Rail Ridge Fire projects won't begin until 2026.

General Business:

Tim handed out the proposed by-law changes. The last changes occurred in 2019. Most changes are associated with changing "County Court" to "County Commission" with some additional edits. Significant language changes are being proposed to the membership section, clarifying City of Prineville appointment, and voting requirements. The Committee discussed some suggestions to proposed language. Tim will continue to incorporate those suggestions and will work with County Counsel to assure they meet all County and State requirements. The Committee will review again at the July meeting with possible adoption and recommendations to forward to the County Commission for their final approval.

Good of the Order:

Melinda spoke about some citizen groups that were patrolling the Forest for abandoned camp fires. There were many unattended camp fires discovered and put out by these volunteers. Specifically mentioned was one abandoned campsite with an active fire.

Kyle Hensley again mentioned the new fire restrictions that will go into place next Monday, June 16.

Public Comment:

None

Frank moved to adjourn the meeting. Lynne seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No one voted no.

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 p.m.



administratively determined (AD) hires and detailed personnel. Fire staff have expressed confidence in current staffing levels and overall preparedness. Seasonal hiring concluded on schedule, and hand crews and engines are well staffed.

IV. Projects and Forest Management

Sunflower Restoration Project:

This landscape-scale project is designed to improve big game habitat, forest health, and wildfire resilience across portions of the Paulina Ranger District. In spring 2025, thinning work for priority units was put out for bid in partnership with the Mule Deer Foundation. Additional implementation activities—including prescribed fire and invasive weed treatment—are scheduled for later this year, contingent on seasonal conditions and contract availability.

North Fork Crooked River Forest Resilience Project

Decision Notice signed April 24, 2025. Timber sales are anticipated to be offered for bid in Q3 of FY27.

The project area spans portions of the Paulina Ranger District. While the east side of the planning area was impacted by the 2024 Crazy Creek Fire (Paulina Creek Watershed), the Final Decision focuses on treatments within the Lower North Fork Crooked River Watershed. These treatments are designed to increase forest resilience to wildfires, insects, and other disturbances.

Key treatments include:

- Commercial thinning on up to 3,368 acres
- Non-commercial thinning on 3,252 acres
- Prescribed underburning on 159 acres
- Transportation system modifications to support implementation

Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project

Decision Notice signed August 12, 2024. The Shake DXP SBA Timber Sale was awarded in winter 2024; additional sales are anticipated to be advertised in Q1 of FY26.

The project encompasses over 36,000 acres in the Lookout Mountain Ranger District, with objectives focused on reducing wildfire risk, improving forest health, and restoring riparian and upland ecosystem function.

Key treatments include:

- 6,526 acres of commercial thinning
- 4,366 acres of non-commercial thinning
- Prescribed burning





- Modifications to the transportation network

Riparian restoration and floodplain enhancement along approximately 23 miles of stream channel

The project includes measures to protect large trees, sensitive riparian corridors, and critical wildlife habitat. The final decision reflects input from public stakeholders and environmental organizations.

Jackson Fuel Break Project

Decision Notice signed April 21, 2025.

This project establishes and maintains approximately 1,639 acres of shaded fuel break along 50 miles of roads in the Paulina Ranger District. The goal is to improve protection of nearby communities, natural resources, and firefighting personnel from high-severity wildfire.

Key treatments include:

- 721 acres of commercial thinning
- 1,639 acres of non-commercial thinning
- 421 acres designated for firewood cutting
- 111 acres designated for post and pole cutting (fence material)
- Slash treatment and prescribed burning across the full 1,639-acre footprint

V. Timber Sales

Roba RS Salvage:

Awarded following a bid opening June 2, 2025. It focuses on salvaging fire-damaged timber within the Crazy Creek Fire area to reduce hazards and recover economic value.

Coyote RS Salvage:

Sale scheduled for bid opening on June 23, 2025. It aims to address salvage loss logging needs within the Wiley Flat Fire area.

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.

