

**CROOK COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS MINUTES
OF MARCH 26, 2025, WORK SESSION
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Board of Commissioners met in a regularly scheduled Work Session on March 26, 2025, at 9:00 a.m. in the Administration Conference room located at 203 NE Court Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Board Members Present: Commissioner Brian Barney; Commissioner Susan Hermreck
Absentees: Commissioner Seth Crawford

Others Present in Person or Via Zoom: County Counsel Eric Blaine; Community Development Director John Eisler; Executive Assistant / Communications Officer Sarah Puerner; Executive Assistant Breyanna Cupp; Road Superintendent Brad Haynes; Finance Director Christina Haron; Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb; Weed Control Supervisor Thomas Laird; Landfill Manager Jacquie Davis; Payroll/Benefits Administrator Kathy Puckett; Building Official Randy Davis; Natural Resources Manager Tim Deboodt; Legal Assistant Alex Solterbeck; Appraiser Karen Bushnell; Undersheriff Bill Elliott; Systems Administrator Chelsea Watson; Assessor Jon Soliz; Sheriff Gautney; Assessment Technician Elsie Ray; Assessment Technician Linda Pepper; Clerk Cheryl Seely; HR Director Meghan McKee; Modernization Manager Stephanie O'Neal; Nick Kralj; Mike Ervin; John Dehler; Jerad Mitchell; Zach Perdue; Ryan Kingsbury; Ellie Gage; Hunter Neuharth; and members of the public.

WORK SESSION

The meeting was **called to order at 9:00 a.m.**

Public Comment:

John Dehler, a Crook County landowner, thanked the Board of Commissioners for being fiscally responsible with taxpayer funds and for maintaining a direct line of communication between landowners and USDA Wildlife Services. He emphasized the importance of preserving this connection, allowing landowners to quickly reach mitigation personnel. John cautioned against reverting to past systems that created delays and disconnects. He expressed concern that a single staff member is not enough to cover the needs of the entire county, especially during critical times like calving season, and encouraged the county to consider adding more personnel to ensure adequate coverage.

Ellie Gage, Chair of the Crook County Wolf Committee and Oregon Resource Coordinator for the Western Landowners Alliance, expressed strong support for expanding USDA Wildlife Services in Crook County. She highlighted the value of the current partnership between landowners, ODFW, and Wildlife Services, noting that the staff have been reliable and effective. Ellie pointed out a key limitation: the current predator control personnel cannot legally manage wolf conflicts, whereas Wildlife Services staff can. She sees the proposed contract as an important and necessary step for the county. When asked by Commissioner Hermreck about grant funding for salaries,

Ellie said she had applied for a grant to fund a dump trailer for carcass removal but had not yet sought funding for staff salaries though she is open to doing so in the future.

Bill Elliott expressed support for expanding USDA Wildlife Services in Crook County, stating it would be a great addition and that Zach is capable of assisting all residents, from handling problem animals like skunks to addressing wolf conflicts. He acknowledged that while the Sheriff's Office does its best, Wildlife Services would bring valuable support. When asked by Commissioner Hermreck if the Stockgrowers organization could help fund the service, Bill noted that while the group likely wouldn't oppose contributing, but doesn't believe there is much for them to provide financially.

Discussion item #1: Crook County 401k Plan Overview:

Requester: Kathy Puckett

Details: Nick Kralj from The Standard provided the Crook County Board of Commissioners with an overview of the County's 401k plan. He discussed current market trends, including inflation, interest rates, economic activity, and the performance of key stocks—highlighting the magnificent 7 stocks, which delivered a 48% return and drove much of the market's outperformance. Nick reviewed the County's investment allocations, which include U.S. equity, cash alternatives, fixed income, international/global equity, specialty investments, and asset allocation options. He emphasized that participants have diverse choices and shared a summary of plan flows, participant engagement, and web utilization. Nick also noted that he will be reaching out to employees directly to offer retirement planning guidance and support.

Discussion item #2: USDA Wildlife Services Presentation for Crook County Operations Expansion:

Requester: Jacquie Davis

Details: Landfill Manager Jacquie Davis attended the Work Session to present a USDA Wildlife Services Presentation for Crook County Operations Expansion. A previous conversation about the increasing volume of carcasses from wolf kills led to discussions with USDA Wildlife Services. She invited Wildlife Service Wolf Coordinator Jerad Mitchell and Prineville Wildlife Specialist Zach Perdue to present on what their agency can offer Crook County. The USDA team outlined available services, including predator conflict mitigation and non-lethal prevention efforts, noting that their work spans a variety of species such as wolves, coyotes, skunks, bears, and others. Jerad explained the current limitations of federally funded positions such as David Andrews, who can only perform non-lethal work. Zach, who previously worked in Crook County, shared examples of his work with local producers and at the landfill. They explained that USDA Wildlife Services can legally handle wolf conflicts, unlike current personnel, and noted the hourly rate for services is \$275. The current contract with private contractors ends on June 30, 2025, and if not renewed, those funds could potentially support a contract with USDA Wildlife Services. Tools used include helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft, depending on location.

Discussion item #3: Consider approval of annual financial assurance update and recertification for Landfill:

Requester: Christina Haron

Details: Finance Director Christina Haron requested Board approval for the annual financial assurance update and recertification for the Crook County Landfill, a requirement by DEQ to demonstrate the County's financial ability to close the landfill and cover the cells. The recertification must include a notarized signature from the Board Chair. The item will be placed on the April 2nd consent agenda for final approval.

Discussion item #4: Proposal to Allocate \$13,000 of Title III Funds for Continued Fire Prevention and Noxious Vegetation Control in Juniper Canyon under Firewise Communities Initiative:

Requester: Christina Haron

Details: Finance Director Christina Haron requested approval to expend up to \$13,000 in remaining Title III Secure Rural Schools funds, split evenly between Crook County Weed Control and the Crooked River Cooperative Weed Management Area. The funding would continue fire prevention and noxious vegetation control efforts in Juniper Canyon as part of the Firewise Communities project. This program, active since 2012/2013, aims to reduce wildfire risk and protect national forest lands and nearby communities in line with Title III guidelines. The request will move to the April 2nd consent agenda, triggering a required 45-day public notice period.

Discussion item #5: Request to expend up to \$115,000 of Title III (Secure Rural Schools) Federal funds to purchase and upfit a one-ton pickup for Search and Rescue:

Requester: Christina Haron

Details: Finance Director Christina Haron requested approval to expend up to \$115,000 in remaining Title III (Secure Rural Schools) funds to purchase and upfit a one-ton pickup truck for Crook County Search and Rescue. Existing SAR vehicles are aging and have high mileage, leading to increased maintenance and operational risk. The new vehicle would enhance emergency response capabilities for missions on federal lands, including search and rescue, wildfires, floods, and medical emergencies. The request aligns with Title III guidelines under P.L. 115-141, allowing reimbursement for emergency equipment used on national forests or BLM lands. The purchase would fully utilize the County's remaining Title III funds and require a supplemental budget to reallocate funds from Materials and Services to Capital Outlay. The item will move to the April 2nd consent agenda, beginning the required 45-day public notice period.

Discussion item #6: Recommendation for Community Health Advisory Council Appointments:

Requester: Katie Plumb

Details: Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb recommended the appointment of four individuals—Bill Elliott, Erika Frickey, Kimberli Munn, and April Pham—to the Community Health Advisory Council (CHAC). An Order will be created for their appointments, and the item will be placed on the April 2nd consent agenda for final approval.

Discussion item #7: Community Mental Health Provider Contract 2025 Amendment with Pacific Source:

Requester: Katie Plumb

Details: Health and Human Services Director Katie Plumb and BestCare CEO Steve Treleven attended the Work Session to review the FY26 contract amendment for Crook County's Community Mental Health Provider agreement with BestCare. Although the contract is between Crook County and PacificSource, BestCare delivers the required services. The amendment primarily updates fees and performance percentages, including an 8% risk withhold. The contract structure remains the same, with three payment models: administrative funding for county service coordination, mobile crisis services, and fee-for-service billing. The item will move to the April 2nd consent agenda for final approval.

Discussion item #8: Consider approval of Amendment 1 to formative intergovernmental agreement creating the Crook County Road Agency

Requester: Eric Blaine

Details: County Counsel Eric Blaine presented a proposed Amendment 1 to the intergovernmental agreement with the City of Prineville that established the Crook County Road Agency. The amendment reflects the Board's March 5th interest in revising the agreement and would update several aspects of the ORS Chapter 190 entity, including the Agency's office location, budget adoption process, and revenue/expenditure language. A key change would modify the structure of the governing board: one member appointed by the County, one by the City, and a third selected by those two appointees. The City of Prineville is expected to consider the amendment at their March 25th Council meeting.

MOTION to approve Amendment 1 to the Intergovernmental Agreement forming the Crook County Road Agency. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

Discussion item #9: Community Development Monthly Update:

Requester: John Eisler

Details: Community Development Director John Eisler and Building Official Randy Davis provided an update to the Board of Commissioners. Residential permitting was slow in February, with only 9 permits issued, while 46 commercial permits were processed. A total of 489 inspections were conducted for both residential and commercial projects. Commissioner Hermreck inquired about the Chamber of Commerce's construction status; Randy noted interior remodeling had occurred, but the final inspection is still pending. Planning activity is up 70% compared to last year, with major projects including Moffett Road Solar, Hegele, Lester rezoning, and the UGB expansion. Onsite inspections were slow, and Code Compliance had 11 open cases, mostly building violations, with only one case closed last month.

Manager Report: None

Commissioner Updates:

Commissioner Hermreck shared that the Board received a response from Senator Wyden regarding their recent letter in support of continued Secure Rural Schools (SRS) funding. Senator Wyden indicated that reauthorizing SRS remains a priority, and efforts

are ongoing to move the legislation forward. However, progress has been hindered by a lack of support from Republican leadership in the House. Commissioner Hermreck emphasized the importance of reaching out to Representative Cliff Bentz to help build bipartisan support for the measure. Commissioner Hermreck also noted that she testified yesterday in support of House Bills 3349 and 3350, which the County had previously submitted letters of support for. She testified both as a Crook County Commissioner and as a rancher from Paulina. This marked her first time providing legislative testimony via Zoom.

Commissioner Barney noted that a letter of support had been written for the CORE3 project. The letter expresses the County's strong support for the CORE3 Center, a vital initiative aimed at significantly strengthening emergency response capabilities throughout the state.

MOTION to send the CORE3 emergency response letter to Representative Janelle Bynum. Motion seconded by Commissioner Barney. No discussion. Commissioner Hermreck votes Aye, Commissioner Barney votes Aye. Motion carried 2-0.

County Counsel Eric Blaine briefed the Board of Commissioners on Senate Bill 65, which proposes a state-level version of the federal Section 1983 statute—allowing individuals to sue for violations of constitutional rights. Mr. Blaine provided copies of the bill and its amendment dashboard for review and asked whether the County would like to take a formal position. Sheriff Gautney expressed concern, noting that enforcing such provisions at the state level would be more difficult than at the federal level and could increase legal exposure for counties. He added that the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association has not yet offered much guidance. Eric also raised concerns about the bill's attorney fee provisions and the financial impact on local governments, particularly regarding lawsuits from individuals in custody. He plans to draft bullet points outlining potential impacts for the Board's consideration before deciding on whether to submit testimony.

Commissioner Hermreck also brought up Senate Bill 1153, which would add sensitive habitat considerations at points of diversion in the water resources system. Both Commissioner Hermreck and Commissioner Barney are working on an opposition letter to the bill. Tim Deboodt has provided resources to assist in crafting the letter.

Public Comment:

Tim Deboodt discussed the historical role of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) in providing Animal Damage Control (APA) services, which were previously supported through cost-sharing arrangements. He questioned whether those funding mechanisms still exist or if the financial responsibility now falls entirely on counties. He noted that state legislators have struggled in recent years to secure funding for these programs, and resistance from wildlife or animal rights groups is not unexpected. Tim also provided an overview of

upcoming legislation relevant to these issues and mentioned past collaborations between Crook County and neighboring counties to share costs for wildlife services. Commissioners Hermreck and Barney added that they use a bill tracker to stay informed on the legislative items Tim referenced.

There being no further business before the Board of Commissioners, the meeting was **adjourned at 10:45 a.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner / Breyanna Cupp