

**CROOK COUNTY COURT MINUTES
OF DECEMBER 15, 2022 SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING
Open Portion**

Be It Remembered that the Crook County Court met in a scheduled Special Public meeting on December 15, 2022, at 1:45 p.m. in the City Council room located at 387 NE 3rd Street, Prineville, Oregon 97754.

Court Members Present: Judge Seth Crawford, Commissioner Jerry Brummer and Commissioner Brian Barney

Absentees: None

Others Present in Person or Via WebEx: Legal Counsel Eric Blaine; Administration Executive Assistant Sarah Puerner; Human Resources Generalist Amy Albert; Sheriff John Gautney; Tim Deboodt; Liz Patterson; Larry and Nettie Downing; Calista Songstad; Sean Santucci; John Tombleson; Ted Lister; Ray Sessler; Jennifer Sandoval; Kim Vogel; Mike Lunn; Mike Ervin and members of the public.

SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING

The County Court called a Special Public Meeting convened under ORS 192.640, on Thursday, December 15, 2022. The principal subject that was discussed was the findings and possible responses regarding natural resources and the proposed Lemon Gulch recreation development in the Ochoco National Forest.

The meeting was **called to order at 1:45 p.m.**

Public Comment:

Liz Patterson stated that she joined the board to fight from the inside. She has received nasty emails from the previous meeting and has provided a list of grievances. She is very concerned that the Forest Service is currently hiring lawyers, and this is the same group that was in favor of zero wildfire mitigation in the National Forest. Liz would like the Forest Service to select a different location for the Lemon Gulch project.

Larry Downing stated that his concern is the amount of foot traffic and vehicle traffic that would arise if a recreational complex was built in the Lemon Gulch proposed location. He remembers the amount of traffic that was associated with the Eclipse event back in 2017. It would be too many people and it wouldn't be ideal for a town with a population of 11,000.

Calista Songstad stated that she has seen downhill mountain biking areas that are developed, and her concern is the number of injuries associated with these recreational complexes as well as the ability to provide medical care/emergency care to the proposed location. There is not a hospital or a helicopter pad in proximity to the proposed Lemon Gulch location. In addition, these bike trails would not be maintained/groomed and there doesn't appear to be a proposed fire evacuation process in case a fire was to start in the proposed location.

Sean Santucci stated that his family has background in logging and farming and this Lemon Gulch proposal reminds him of the Mount Emily recreational area in LaGrande, which has been completely unaccommodating. Cattle used to be run on that area and now they are no where to be found. The Forest Service's goal is for the ranchers/farmers to be gone.

John Tombleson stated that he was up on Grizzly cutting firewood on the side of the road when he was approached by a crew of brand-new police trucks. He was told to remove his truck from the side of the road, and he was offended by this request as these folks are expecting higher volumes of people if the Lemon Gulch proposal passes. He is very against the proposal.

Ted Lister stated that he purchased property in the Prineville area in 2020. This property is about 7,000 acres and is near Mill Creek Road. The area will be impacted by increased traffic, increased trash/littering, and would need an increase in wildfire safety. He learned about the Lemon Gulch project June 2021; however, negotiations with this proposal started in 2017. He has read the environmental assessment and is opposed to this.

Ray Sessler stated that he has been in Crook County since 1983 and this next spring, he will turn cattle out on two land permits. These permits will be adjacent to the Lemon Gulch proposed location. He has always taken care of the land, he paid \$186,000 for the two permits when he brought the ranch and pays almost \$37,000 a year in taxes. He loves the land and the community in this area and doesn't want to see Ochoco National Forest turn into Deschutes National Forest. If the bike trails start, they will spread like cancer, cancer to the Ochoco Mountains. He has about 77 miles of road on his two permits, the bike riders can use that instead of developing a recreational complex.

Jennifer Sandoval stated that she is an American citizen, a Crook County resident, a taxpayer, and has been in Crook County since 2007. She noted that we may all be annoyed by the public land in our backyard but that is also why people chose to live in this area. Demographics are changing, more people are moving to Crook County, and we have to share the land that we value. It is a National Forest, which means it is a resource for everyone and not just the residents of Crook County. She is in favor of the current proposal (#6) of 27.5 miles of mountain bike trails placed in Lemon Creek because it will have the least impact on wildlife. She trusts the judgement of the biologists and recreational planners and is in favor of the proposal.

Kim Vogel stated that she lives in Crook County and is a retired forest service employee. Her opinion is lack of science within the proposal and lack of formal proposal process with notifying local communities and members. This proposal did not follow those guidelines. Extreme recreation can affect the land, and has no place in the National Forest, except in developed areas such as ski resorts. The infrastructure for these bike trails is not in place in this proposed location. Sharing the area is not the issue. She is not opposed to mountain biking in Lemon Gulch but is opposed to the development of an extreme/expert complex of bike trails. Lemon Gulch is not the place for this development.

Mike Lunn stated that he was in the forest service and at one point, there was consideration for combining the Deschutes National Forest and the Ochoco National Forest. That idea never moved forward, and we are still separate national forests thankfully. The Deschutes National Forest is more known for its higher recreational area and higher budget where the Ochoco National Forest is where you go to collect your firewood, go to get away from people, and will typically find less people out on the trails. We don't want to be like Deschutes. The Ochoco National Forest is valued differently than Deschutes.

Mike Ervin stated that he doesn't want the extreme complex that is being proposed in Lemon Gulch. It will be difficult to communicate with anyone in the area as reception is quite spotty, and difficult to provide emergency services to anyone in the proposed location if they are injured. We would need to purchase another ambulance to assist with additional medical injuries and emergencies.

End of Public Comment.

Letter from Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

The Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee constructed a letter to respond to the Draft EA for the Proposed Lemon Gulch Trails Project #58831. Committee members voted unanimously for this letter; however, upon further review, the Crook County Court decided a final draft of the letter was required to correct grammatical errors / misrepresentation of tenor. The final letter is due to the Forest Service by 5 pm on Monday, December 19, 2022.

MOTION to fix any grammatical errors within the document. Motion seconded. No discussion. Motion carried 3-0.

MOTION to direct staff to prepare a final draft of the letter to the forest service regarding Lemon Gulch proposed trail project and to delegate to Judge Crawford to authorize the final draft and sign on behalf of the County Court. Motion seconded. No discussion. Motion carried 3-0.

Public Comment:

Nettie Downing stated that the Forest Service hours are 8 am-4 pm and they are not open at 5 pm. She also asked if the letter was going to be available for the public to view.

Eric Blaine stated that the hard deadline for the final draft of the letter would be Monday by noon.

Jennifer Sandoval mentioned that she looked up the FAQs for the Lemon Gulch proposed project and the preferred alternative is 27.5 miles of non-motorized with no wording of "extreme" attached to the project. The proposal mentions 9.8 miles of beginner trails, 11.2 miles of intermediate trails, and 6.5 miles of advanced trails. This would not be considered an "extreme complex".

Liz Patterson stated that the proposal mentions the word “expert”. The Forest Service has plans to create a complex that they have already advertised in two mountain biking magazines for competitions.

Kim Vogel mentioned that she is glad that the Crook County Court is working with the Forest Service. The Forest Service wouldn’t let others speak previously which is why we are here now. There are quite a few misconceptions about the Lemon Gulch proposed project. Larger complexes are better suited to ski areas with the necessary infrastructure. Kim recommended a forest wide assessment to review/determine the best location.

Ray Sessler stated that he doesn’t think we should refrain from getting to the point in the letter and we shouldn’t sugar-coat anything. One can still say “no” and be a “gentleman.”

End of Public Comment.

Judge Crawford will be responsible for signing and submitting the letter on behalf of Crook County Court.

There being no further business before the Court, the meeting was **adjourned at 2:58 p.m.**

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Puerner