

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

July 8, 2020

Committee Members Present: Lynne Breese, Steve McGuire, John Dehler, Frank Porfily, Ston McDaniel, Andy Gallagher, Mike Lunn, Tim Deboodt

Members absent: Teresa Rumble, Trent Smith

Guests present: Monty Gregg (FS), Jeff Kitchen (BLM), Kevin Keown (FS), Slater Turner (FS), Greg Jackle (ODFW)

Public Present: John Breese, Mike Ervin, Melinda Kestler, Cliff Kiser, Gayle Hunt, Eric Bush, Eric Newell, Teresa Ervin

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire @ Crook County 4H building.

Pledge of Allegiance

Review of Minutes: Lynne moved to approve the June 10th draft minutes as presented. John seconded. Motion Passed.

Frank moved to approve the July 1 special meeting with two changes, remove Trent Smith's name from those present at the meeting (he was not present) and to add to the record, a statement related to his email on the Wild Horse topic dated 5/13/2020. Mike seconded. Discussion as held, Lynne asked Frank to clarify his additions, did he want them added to the minutes in their entirety. Frank responded yes. Steve stated that he agreed with the way the minutes were written and that they represent the meeting. Motion failed 3 yes, 4 no

John moved to accept the July 1 minutes as corrected for Trent's status being absent from the meeting. Ston seconded. Motion passed 6 yes, 1 no.

Agency Reports

Kevin Keown provide a Forest Service update via zoom. While the Black Mtn Vegetation project is being litigated, the Forest just posted its first sale. There is no injunction as part of the litigation. Mill Creek project is in the development stage. This was once a part of the Blue Mountain Initiative, it is the Forest's next large vegetation and fuels project. It is separate from the large, prescribed fire planned for Mill Creek that has been discussed with the group before.

FS is starting field work on the North Fork/Paulina Creek project. This will be a vegetation management and fuels project. The Bell Weather project with Oregon Dept. of Forestry is about ready to go. Walton

Lake Project is expecting a signed decision by late July and the Wild Horse Management plan is scheduled for a signed decision by the end of August.

Sunflower Project is moving forward with a draft EA scheduled for some time this summer or early fall. Under Joint Chief's project, FS has award 1000 acres of treatment, NRCS is working with landowners and there is a coordination meeting July 22 to talk about workload in the next 2 fiscal years.

TEAM 21 (a review of the eastside screens) is getting close to releasing a draft EA. A representative from each forest involved will provide a review of the document.

The Ochoco Trails projects (Allen Creek Horse Trail, Bandit Springs Summer Trails and Dry Creek Equestrian Trail) are working with categorical exclusions and these projects were formally scoped with the public this spring. Frank asked the Committee if there was interest to engage with these projects. The Committee made no decision. The Ochoco Trails Collaborative group is working with the FS.

Jeff Kitchens provided an update on the Travel Management map updates. Currently, staffing shortfalls in the BLM (GIS specialist) are keeping this project from getting completed. As soon as this position is filled, the project will move forward.

Tim provided an update on the public hearing by the ODF&W Fish Passage Task Group regarding Ochoco Irrigation District/City of Prineville/Crook County application for waiver on passage for the Bowman Dam Hydro Project. The waiver was denied by the Task Group but there was no public testimony opposing the waiver and 2 federal fish agencies were in support of the waiver. The 3 project partners have decided to appeal to the ODF&W Commission in September.

New Business:

Monty Gregg, wildlife biologist with the Ochoco Nation Forest presented information about wildlife management on the Forest and how habitats are the responsibility of the Forest while the management of wildlife populations are the responsibility of ODF&W. Specific question to be addressed is how does forage allocation to wildlife work and how does that allocation impact grazing allotments (AUM's) issued to a permittee. Monty suggested a future presentation to the Committee by the Forest's range conservationists might be useful in helping to understand this question.

Monty reviewed the policy which provides guidance from the FS manual. Monty reviewed grazing guidelines for forage allocation in riparian areas and then for non-riparian areas. Monty reviewed the definitions of range condition and the terms of satisfactory and unsatisfactory conditions. Monty reported that through a conversation with Jacob Young (FS Range Conservationist) that most permittees get their allocated AUM's. If a permittee is asked to leave a pasture early, the permittee is compensated with other pasture. With the use of technology (ie game cameras) grazing competition can now be monitored remotely. FS is working with this tool in a couple of areas.

Monty reviewed the current Management Objectives for Elk on the Forest. The Forest plan adopted in 1989 has 2600 head of elk forest wide. Current population estimate for the Ochoco Management Unit alone (not Grizzly or Maury) is 4200 head. Current ODFW MO for the Ochoco is 4500 head. Monty

stated that with the increased in elk numbers since 1989, there are increased hunting/game related activities.

Monty provided the Committee with a question to ponder. With the basic knowledge and understanding that thinning and removal of overstory (tree canopy) will increase forage production, and since 1989 the FS management harvest levels have significantly changed with a reduction in clearcut and shelterwood harvest, resulting in increased tree canopy, elk numbers have increased WHY?

Since 1989, Monty believes that there has been a significant increase in irrigated acres on private lands adjoining the FS. This has provided increased forage (high quality) and water. Starkey Experimental Forest outside of La Grande is providing current science for elk and elk habitat management. Elk generally select areas greater than ½ mile from open, motorized roads. The focus of wildlife management now is to spatially arrange forest stand to maximize habitat effectiveness (forage production primarily) through thinning, burning and road closures where feasible. The Sunflower project is a current example of this type of planning.

Monty shared the tools the FS is using include the use of timber sales, aquatic restoration, invasive plant treatments along with others. FS is using its “Good Neighbor” authority and stewardship authority. FS is partnering with National Wild Turkey Federation, Rocky Mtn Elk Foundation, Oregon Hunters Assoc., and the Mule Deer Foundation. The Blue Mountain Elk Initiative has been a successful effort over the last couple of decades to address elk impacts on private property. This Initiative include 4 national forests in the Blue Mtn area, BLM, ODF&W, Tribes, Conservation Partners, and Cattlemen’s Assoc. The goal is to keep elk on public lands.

Andy asked Monty, specifically to the Sunflower Project, if we increase elk use on the Forest, then with a finite forage base, how will this affect livestock use (AUM’s allocated and used) in the allotments associated with this project? Monty encouraged the group to invite Steve Gibson (Forest Range Lead) or Jacob Young (Range Specialist) to address the group and these questions. In a follow-up question to the forage allocation/availability question, Andy asked if the goal to keep more elk on the forest failed to address forage availability? Monty mentioned the ODF&W study with collared elk and the hope to learn more about the resident time elk spend on the forest.

Jeff Kitchens provided a brief overview of forage allocation on lands administered by the BLM. Jeff mentioned the work BLM range conservationists do with the permittees to address forage use and availability. Jeff reiterated the policy that ODF&W manages the population numbers. BLM relies on vegetation studies, monitoring for rangeland health standards and specifically standard #5 as it relates to wildlife. He has not seen or heard of any issues within the District.

Eric Bush (public) asked how recreational impacts (illegal) are impacting forage availability through resource damage and its negative effect on wildlife and livestock. Jeff answered indicating a significant increase in off road use on public lands. BLM works to coordinate with local law enforcement, permittees and the public through education and enforcement. He recognizes that it is a challenge. BLM works with the permittee to mitigate any negative impact on the allotments.

Jeff mentioned that he has been serving as interim District Manager for a while. Dennis is due back next week. Wildland fire fighting agencies are working hard this summer to deal with COVID exposure issues with the fire fighting force.

Review of Bylaws:

Ston started the discussion with his review and recommendations for changes to the by-laws, specific to how the Committee uses subcommittee to discuss the details of a topic. His suggestions were emailed to Tim and Tim displayed them on the screen for the entire group to read. Ston reviewed the history of how the Committee has used subcommittees in the past.

Ston's first suggestion was dealing with Section 12. F: language about conducting business between regular meetings using email. Ston suggested that language be removed that authorizes email for voting.

Ston reviewed Section 13, its current wording and then offered some language for changes to subsections A and B.

In discussion, Steve wanted the language to reflect that subcommittee use was "a" method of conducting work but not the only method. Andy cautioned about taking the Chair out of the role of appointing subcommittee membership (Ston's draft proposal left it up to committee member to appoint). Frank asked if subcommittee work violated Oregon Public Meeting law? It was discussed that since there is specifically not a quorum of the Committee present and that the subcommittee's make no decision that it would not violate OPM laws. Ston asked Andy to clarify his concern about the Chair's role. Andy responded that the Chair in the past has asked for volunteers and then appointed. Steve agreed with Andy and then wanted to make sure that if a Committee member volunteered a non-Committee member (County citizen) for the subcommittee, that the entire Committee would have the opportunity to either approve or not that person.

Mike likes the idea that at the time of the sub-committee's creation, the motion contains a clear role/function/purpose. His example of the transportation subcommittee and the breadth of topics that could overwhelm that group.

John asked the question about what is the actual procedure on how a topic comes to the Committee in the first place, and if the Committee doesn't have the time to make a good judgement, does the Committee have the option of opting out? Frank stressed the roll of the Committee of advising the Court on interests of the Committee and the citizens of the County.

Andy moved to create a subcommittee to propose/create a process/procedures about how topics come before the Committee. Ston Seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Andy, Lynne and John volunteered to be on the committee. Steve appointed them and then appointed Andy to chair it. The subcommittee will meet before the next meeting (August). Mike asked that the Committee get a copy of the proposal ahead of the August meeting in order to have time to review it.

Good of the Order:

Frank asked about the Committee's interest in the proposed trail work on the Forest (noted earlier in the meeting by Kevin Keown). No action

Cliff Kiser (public) expressed concern that if the Committee wasn't engaged then we won't know what the issues are or what is being recommended. He stated that it was good to get involved in the creation of the alternatives.

Teresa Ervin (public) asked about the modification of the By-laws and to clarify was Section 12 and 13 being modified and what would these Sections be called? Steve responded that the subcommittee would propose the proper Section identifier as part of their proposal back to the entire Committee.

John moved to adjourn. Frank Seconded. Motion passed:

Meeting adjourned 2:45 p.m.

Next meeting, Wednesday, August 12, 2020