

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

August 12, 2020

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

Members absent: Teresa Rumble, Trent Smith, Frank Porfily, Andy Gallagher

Guests present: Steve Gibson (FS), Jeff Kitchen (BLM), Kevin Keown (FS), Jerry Brummer, Chris Ryan (BLM)

Public Present: John Breese, Melinda Kestler, Gayle Hunt, Eric Newell,

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Review of Minutes: John moved to approve the July 8th draft minutes as modified. Lynne seconded. Motion Passed.

Agency Reports:

BLM: Chris and Jeff reported the Indian Creek AMP is in the process of renewal. It is 2000 ac with 81 AUM's. The proposed action in no change in AUM's. Grazing objectives will be to use grazing to help control ventenata, an annual grass. A fence will be constructed on Paulina Creek.

Jeff reported that the completion of the draft decision for the Trespass case (McGrath) is due soon. New dollars are coming from Congress to address the backlog of deferred maintenance to recreational sites on the BLM. BLM is quickly doing an inventory of facility needs across the District. Significant upgrades are possible. Jeff mentioned that this is getting to be an active fire season. So far, fires in central Oregon have been mostly small ones (acreage) with the loss of a few structures. Jeff shared that fire conditions are extremely dry, exceeding 2018 conditions.

John Breese asked Jeff about BLM's participation in the "Two-Chief's Project". Jeff and Kevin Keown reported that there is an effort to coordinate conservation work in the next 2 years. BLM (an USDI agency) is not a financial participant. (Two Chiefs is a USDA project). John expressed a strong desire to see coordination between FS, private landowners and BLM. John asked about rumors of a small land exchange with BLM and a private landowner as part of the Trespass settlement. Jeff said there is no proposed land exchange.

FS: Kevin addressed FS projects. He reminded the Committee that the Region 6 FS office just released the DRAFT EA for the 21" rule amendment. This work could amend the existing rule when complete and if so, would affect 6 National Forests on the Eastside (Washington and Oregon).

Bellwether project is moving forward with planning almost complete. Possible field trip for those interested through the Ochoco Collaborative on August 26. Tour is limited to 10 people due to COVID restrictions.

Sunflower Draft EA is being circulated for internal review. Release to the public for formal comments is expected in September. Walton Lake decision is in the objection period which will end September 4, 2020. Ochoco Wild horse EA is in the process of responding to comments received during public comment period.

There is an ID team working on the Mill Creek project, developing a proposed action. Preliminary work is occurring in Paulina Creek/North Fork area. Tim asked if permittees in the area were being consulted. Kevin responded that he would ask. Finally, like BLM, the Great American Outdoors Act will help fund some deferred maintenance on FS campgrounds and recreational sites.

Presentation

Guest speaker Steve Gibson, Range and Wild Horse Program lead for the Ochoco and Deschutes National forests spoke to the group on the allocation and management of forage on the forest for livestock, wildlife and ecological needs. Steve has been on the Ochoco in various range leadership capacities since 2004.

Steve reviewed grazing and forage allocations on the forest. He reviewed the forest's forage utilization tables for riparian areas since they tend to be the most sensitive to use. Riparian areas are the most critical areas and most often are the controlling factor in use monitoring. Utilization monitoring is the accumulative use of both big game and livestock. Grazing on the Ochoco's is administered under the Ochoco Forest Plan adopted in 1989 and amended in 1996 (Pacfish and Infish guidelines).

Steve reviewed "Enclosure B (1995)" which speaks to management resulting in riparian restoration at 'near natural rates'. Enclosure B established guidelines for stubble height, bank stability and woody browse. Mike Lunn provided the Committee with some historical perspective into the meaning of "near natural rates" of recovery at the time of its adoption.

The Forest uses 2 methods to calculate forage availability. The use of computer modeling provides a rough estimate when empirical data is not available. Modeling utilizes plant associations, slopes (steepness) and tree canopy cover. Empirical data is the other method and uses some assumptions as well (ex. Access to terrain). Steve pointed out that is very difficult to differentiate between wildlife and livestock use. Use is monitored when livestock leave a pasture and then at the end of the grazing season.

Mike Lunn asked when standards aren't met, does a reduction in livestock AUM's occur. Steve responded that is correct. In regards to the horses on the Sunflower allotment, Steve responded that those horses are not part of the Ochoco's (belong to Murder's Creek group).

Bylaws Review: The bylaw changes sent out by the subcommittee were discussed. John Dehler moved to accept all changes. Lynne seconded. Vote was taken via roll call: Lynne – yes, John – yes, Ston – yes, Mike – yes, Steve – yes. Motion was approved. Tim will submit updated bylaws to County for their review and approval.

There were no other committee reports

Good of the Order: Mike asked about the access issue at Ochoco Reservoir (@ old restaurant). He noted that the shoreline access off the driveway is now blocked. Discussion held indicated that the driveway is private property and not a public access point.

No public input was provided

John moved to adjourn. Lynne seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Next meeting: September 9, 2020