**Minutes**

**Crook County Natural Resource Committee**

**January 13, 2021**

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

**Members absent:** Trent Smith

**Guests present:** Slater Turner (FS), Kevin Keown (FS), Jon Kocherberger (FS), Sarah Kaschberger (FS), Beth Peer (FS), Jona Ensley (FS), Mike Tilden (FS), Jeff Kitchens (BLM), Chris Ryan (BLM)

**Public Present:** Melinda Kestler, Dan Hammond, Mikayla Mills (FS), Tory Kurtz (FS), John Breese, Eric Bush, Tom Casselman, Irene Jerome

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 accept the December 9th, 2020 draft minute. John seconded. Motion passed.

**Agency Reports:**

**BLM**

Jeff Kitchens and Chris Ryan provided the Bureau of Land Management report. Staffing updates were given. Jeff and Amanda Roberts will be covering communications with the 13 counties encompassed within the Prineville District (BLM). Either one will be attending our meetings. For the Deschutes Field Office, the categorical exclusion was signed for Chimney Rock Campground. Upgrades to this campground will include a well, restrooms and other upgrades. All campgrounds on the lower Crooked River are being planned for updates. Funding approval is still pending. The office has received many applications for right-of-ways. It is taking up to 2-3 weeks for processing those applications.

Chris provided an update on Central Oregon Field Office. Indian Creek AMP grazing renewal was signed Dec. 21, 2020. It is now in the protest period, ending January 19, 2021. Office is now accessing Rangeland Health and updating the Standard and Guidelines for the following allotments: Camp Creek Community, Bennet Field, Flat Top Butte, Dry Lake and Butler.

**FS**

Slater Turner provided the FS update. Walton Lake project is now dealing with objections. The Wild Horse project is now in the objection phase and Bellwether project is moving forward. This spring, the FS will be meeting with project partners on the Joint Chief’s project, developing a plan of work for the summer. Two Chief’s is the jointly funded project with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, USDA) and focused on conservation work on public (FS) and private lands located in the south end of the Ochoco National Forest (south of Big Summit Prairie, Maury Mtns., out to Brothers, OR).

Black Mtn project is still in litigation. On January 25th, FS begins its hiring process for summer temporary help. Beth Peer reported that the Sunflower comment period resulted in 10 letters. FS is reviewing and responding to those comments.

Irene Jerome asked if the closure would continue at Walton Lake through the summer. Slater responded that the closure would continue through the summer with work scheduled to begin in October.

Prescribed burns were conducted this past fall but weather prevented their completion. Spring burns are planned for the Grasslands and the Maury’s.

**Presentation on the Mill Creek Dry Forest Project** was given by the Forest. Presenters included Sarah Kaschberger, Jona Ensley, Jon Kocherberger and Beth Peer. Sarah provided an overview of the project, the history of the Blue Mtn. Resiliency Project and an overview of the scoping document. A review of the area and past treatments were discussed as well as the status of the current conditions and why here, why now. The project as proposed covers approximately 36,000 acres, of that, approximately 23,000 acres is being proposed for some type of treatment. None of the treatment area includes the Mill Creek Wilderness. The project area does include the Stein Pillar Recreation Area and some general winter range.

Current conditions of this project area are stands of trees which are denser with less open areas when compared to historical levels. There are less grassy/shrubby areas then historically present and there are more conifers within riparian and aspen stands when compared to historical levels. As a result, the project area is less resilient to disturbances (wildfire) than in the past. Returning the project area to historical levels may never be the goal but it is important to understand the differences. Under current conditions, the project area is at a higher risk for insect infestation (bark beetles and defoliators) and with climate changing, the warmer and drier summers combined with lower snow pack in the winter adds further stress to the system. The project proposal takes into account the Ochoco Forest Collaborative zones of agreements for dry forest recommendations, aspen restoration and category 4 riparian areas. The proposal incorporates most of the Collaborative’s dry forest recommendations except that no tree over 21” is being proposed for harvest. The project proposal includes approximately 8000 acres of commercial thinning, 5000 acres of pre-commercial thinning and 12,000 acres of prescribed fire treatments.

Jona Ensley talked about the fuels and fire management being proposed. Wildfire history from 2000 – 2017 was discussed. The project area is within the Crook County Community Wildfire Protection Planning area and therefore all work will be coordinated with those partners. Most fuel work done to date in the project area has been mechanical treatments, not with the use of fire. Fuel treatments will include approximately 15,600 acres and is divided into blocks of land, making it possible to accomplish more on the ground work while making better use of available resources. Proposed burns will overlap areas where commercial and pre-commercial harvest is planned. Burns will occur following timber harvest activities.

Jon Kocherberger, hydrologist on the Ochoco National Forest spoke about the proposed changes in the road systems within the project area as well as the proposed stream and riparian restoration activities. Changes in road systems includes the closure of 1.7 miles of road, 4.13 miles to be decommissioned, construction of .89 miles of new road and 1.25 miles of other activities (access issues to private in-holdings and changing maintenance level designations).

Riparian and stream enhancement work is being proposed on 23 miles of stream. Additions of large wood to the upper and middle portions of Mill Creek and some mechanical treatments in the lower portion are being proposed. 2 miles of flood plain manipulation to reconnect stream to flood plain would also occur.

Beth Peer talked about the NEPA review of this project. NEPA will be conducted at the Environmental Assessment (EA) level. The timeline proposed would result in the FS being able to offer timber sales as early as fiscal year 2022. The EA is scheduled for public review and comment this summer (2021). Scoping will end January 31, 2021.

Questions about the project:

There are no Forest Plan amendments being proposed as a part of this project. No work on slopes greater than 35% will occur. The question was asked about if the Regional Office modifies the Eastside Screens could the EA be written to allow trees over 21” to be harvested, the answer was most likely no.

How will fires be ignited? Jona talked about the use of aerial ignition as well as ground ignition. Due to the size of the proposed burn blocks, aerial is the preferred method if possible.

What are the impacts of smoke to Prineville? Jona talked about both State and Federal regulations around air quality. They will be addressed during the planning and implementation phases. The proximity of the project area provides the opportunity for lots of outreach, education on the role of fire and consequences. Slater Turner talked about their need to engage partners to help with that outreach throughout the community.

Question about mistletoe in the project area. Sarah shared that the proposal does not specifically target mistletoe. There is some in the project area.

**Committee size and new appointments**

Tim talked to the committee about the recent vacancy on the Advisory Committee, left by the resignation of Teresa Rumble. The County Court is open to thoughts from the Committee about recommendations on the qualifications (types) and skills of future committee members, the size of the committee (up to 11) and suggestions as to whom to fill those slots. After a brief discussion, Chair Steve recommended that this item be discussed at the February meeting. Lynne moved to table until February, John seconded. Motion passed.

**Committee updates:**

Steve read into the record, the email that Frank sent in regards to the WildHorse project.

*The second public comment period is closed and now it is being submitted to Region in Portland.  In Summary,  126 comments were submitted: 114 were for maintaining  the herd at the current  level, and 12 agreed with Shane to cut the herd down to a minimum of 12 head.*

*Get this..... If you look at it from a voting prospect*

*11,381 signatures were actually presented to preserve the herd at current level !!!!*

*12 signatures were presented to cut it down  to a minimum  of 12 head.*

*Interesting decision for today's world, wouldn't  you say. Frank*

**Public Comment: NONE**

John moved to adjourn. Lynne Seconded. Motion Passed

Meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.