

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

November 10, 2021

Committee Members Present: Andy Gallagher, John Dehler, Lynne Breese, Cliff Kiser, Casey Kiser, Steve McGuire, Ston McDaniel, Tim Deboodt, Mike Lunn

Members absent: Trent Smith, Jace Rhoden, Frank Profily

Guests present: Brianna Goehring (FS), Slater Turner (FS), Monty Gregg (FS)

Public Present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of previous meeting minutes:

John moved to approve the September 8, 2021 minutes as presented. Lynne Seconded. Motion passed.

Mike moved to approve the October 13, 2021 minutes as presented. Lynne Seconded. Motion passed.

Agency reports:

No BLM report

Forest Service: Slater Turner led the presentation on Forest Service activities. The Lemon Gulch project is still in review and the Walton Lake decision is being suspended pending Court action. Work is proceeding on the Categorical Exclusion (CE) for the danger tree removal project associated with the Grandview fire. The CE for the Frog Fire was signed on Nov. 10, 2021 for fire restoration and reforestation on the Frog Fire. FS is finishing up work with ODOT on funding for plowing winter roads to Walton Lake. FS will be looking for a contractor to do the plowing.

Monty Gregg (FS) spoke about the 2 Chief's project, FS and private lands works is being wrapped up for year 2. Project planning has begun for year 3 projects. FS is planning to do some pile burning in the Maurys as conditions allow.

North Fork Crooked River Planning Area: Brianna Goehring (FS), NEPA Planner and coordinator of this project provided an overview (history of the planning area) and current conditions. FS has been working internally on gathering existing information for the planning area for several months. The NF Crooked River Planning Area is 1 of 4 planning areas on the Ochoco National Forest that were identified in the Blue Mountain Forest Resiliency project several years ago. The summer of 2021 was spend in the

field gathering and consolidating existing information about the area. The Boundary of the area includes the lower North Fork Crooked River above the Forest Boundary and to the north is bordered by Upper Paulina Creek. The planning area includes a variety of management areas including:

General Forest

General Winter Range

Winter Range

Wild and Scenic Corridor

Old Growth

Visual Corridor

Grazing allotments in the planning area include Fox Canyon, Big Summit, North Fork and the Roba.

Planning area includes approximately 15,000 acres of non-forest (variety of scablands) and about 19,000 acres of a variety of forest types.

Issues identified so far include overstocked trees in late and old structure (LOS) and understocked stands in single structure. Insect and disease issues. Invasive plants (Hounds tongue and winter annual grasses (ventenata and medusahead rye). Riparian habitat conservation areas (category 4 – intermittent streams) lack wood, vigorous riparian vegetation and ground cover. Sensitive plants and aquatics and animal and animal like (ex. Pollinators).

Conditions which depart from historical conditions include changes in tree density and composition, overall decrease in LOS, imbalance in habitats, decreased forage availability and fire regime conditions. Additionally FS personnel identified a decrease in security for big game due to roads, invasive plants, scablands vulnerable to invasive plant and off-road vehicle damage, a decline in riparian and aquatic habitats. The North Fork Crooked River (a federally listed wild and scenic river) is wide and shallow and is water quality limited (high stream temperatures).

Mike Lunn asked if the FS had used the Proper Functioning Condition assessment done by the National Riparian Team in 2004. A group of community members and FS staff accompanied the Team during the assessment from Williams Prairie at the headwaters of the N. Fork down to the Forest Service Boundary over a 4-5 day period. The PFC report, broken into stream reaches, noted at the time the system was rated as Functional at risk with an upward trend on some reaches and properly functioning on several others. The first reach below Big Summit Prairie was an exception; as quoted in the 7.24.04 summary report: "Below Big Summit Prairie, the N. Fork enters a canyon environment and is much narrower than above. The first mile or so below the bridge shows damage by livestock, both legacy and current. The problem comes not from utilization levels, but rather trampling damage that has caved off banks and compacted soils. We found this reach to be right on the margin between functioning at risk and non-functional, and could not determine if it was getting worse or just holding its own. The good news is that the needed vegetation (sedges, rushes, a few willows) are present, and with a change in management can recover fairly rapidly. The riparian vegetation has adequate soil moisture for substantial recovery." The District Ranger took immediate action to require this section to be ungrazed for several years after being made aware of the issue.

Large wood and complexity was lacking from there down to the final 3 miles above the FS boundary. “The final 3 or so miles above the Forest boundary began to show some desired changes. We entered a section where the river valley was a series of big “S” curves as opposed to the relatively straight sections in the five miles above. Alder and willow increased in both quantity and size, and we started to note large wood hanging up in the patches of trees and also on the terraces. For a substantial section of this final part, we finally began to see how wood adds to the physical functioning. Habitat became much more complex, with some pools and scouring. And we noted on the 1995 aerial photos that many of the well-vegetated bars and stream edges were essentially bare at that time, so vegetation recovery has been relatively rapid.” 2004 summary report.

Brianna reviewed a variety of desired conditions that would be a result of proposed activities. These included dry forest conditions would be within historic ranges of variability, that there would be a low risk of uncharacteristic high severity fires, an abundance of native upland and riparian plant species including hardwoods. Finally, that the landscape would provide security and habitats for wildlife.

For the Wild and Scenic Corridor, Brianna mentioned that the Outstanding and Remarkable Values were botanical, fisheries and visuals below the Forest boundary.

Potential activities that might be evaluated as part of the NEPA process include commercial and noncommercial harvest/thinning, prescribed fire, riparian restoration, reduced density of functionally open roads, cross fencing in the Roba Allotment, and promotion of native shrubs, hardwoods, grasses and wildflowers. Steve asked if the FS had yet identified any RS 2477 roads within the planning area.

Timeline: Brianna indicated that the FS plans to finalize the summary of resources by the end of November, 2021. FS will then begin to develop a set of alternatives and proposals. Those will be shared with the community in January, 2022. Following these activities, the FS will develop a NEPA timeline. Currently the thought is that FY 2022-23 will be spent analyzing proposed alternatives.

Mike asked Monty if the FS had revisited photo points taken and set in the 2004 PFC document. Monty said he didn’t think so and asked if the points had been monumented. Mike said the photo point coordinates were in the document.

Andy asked if cross fencing didn’t have a negative effect on wildlife movement. Closing roads but then adding fencing didn’t make sense. Monty responded that fencing had been done in riparian areas with some impact. Monty said that no action yet was proposed for this project area. Andy suggested that riparian fencing in the Roba Allotment didn’t work and it may be best to just enforce the grazing rules.

It was suggested to the FS that permittee involvement in this project should be now, not later. Tim asked if the west half of the Roba Allotment was still in non-use by the permittee because of the efforts by the FS to control Hounds-tongue. Brianna didn’t know and said she would find out the answer.

Williams Prairie Presentation: Mike Lunn made a presentation on the tour with Wayne Elmore, Janice Staats, Kevin Keown and Rob Tanner on Williams Prairie. As part of the Gap planning project, significant work was approved to occur in Williams Prairie to fix head cuts and gullies that resulted from work done in the late 1990s. Mike reported that in 1998, FS imposed a fix on Williams Prairie that created a new

channel. The fix included a technique of plug and pond. The project created a new channel with a 2:1 channel width/depth ration. Depth of the channel was approximately 10 – 12 inches. Today the channel is down cut (in some cases nearly 10 ft) and the FS reports that 95% of the water in Williams Prairie exists in this channel as springtime flow.

Mike reviewed the federal law on wild and scenic streams/rivers as it pertains to forbidding modifications of the stream channel. Project language speaks to “re-plumbing” the flow path through the meadow. Project cost estimate is \$200,000. Mike has asked Oregon’s two Senators (Merkley and Wyden) how their new W&S legislation would deal with this. So far, Mike has not gotten a response to his question.

Cliff Kiser wondered if riparian plants were still present in the old channels or streambeds. He also asked about the use of willows as a part of the project. The permittee will be taking non-use of this part of the allotment both during construction and post-construction to allow plants to become established.

The Committee discussed concerns about the “stage zero” approach to this project. A high risk of failure exists for the first 3 – 5 years as vegetation becomes established. What are the plans for protection and maintenance of the work?

Cliff also mentioned the use of this process (stage zero) to fix Whychus Creek near Sisters. He felt the difference was that Whychus Creek was in much worse shape therefore the consequence of failure was less. He mentioned that he was on a tour of the area and was impressed with the success he saw. He felt this was the wrong choice for Williams Prairie since much of the plant community there was still intact.

Monty responded that the Williams Project was not a full Stage Zero project. This is due to the condition of Williams Prairie and the desire to keep desirable vegetation in place. Monty also mentioned that while this project was supposed to have been done this fall, due to the late fire season, it has been delayed until the fall of 2022. The group expressed an interest in visiting the site next summer/fall.

Committee member comments:

Lynne reported that there was an article in the Bend Bulletin. It stated that Wyden hopes to get a vote on his Wild and Scenic Rivers bill in 2022.

John Dehler reported that the FS was still talking to permittees on the Lemon Gulch Trail project.

Tim reported that there still was no definitive action by BOR and Oregon State Parks regarding the Prineville Reservoir Resort and that Oregon Department of Water Resources had not announced any decision on the application by BOR for a water right (release) from Prineville Reservoir.

Public Comment:

Gayle Hunt spoke about the use of trail systems in the Ochocos by bicycles and horses. Her experience on FS Road 42 was that mountain biking in that area had overtaken the trail systems and that the risk to horse riders was extremely high. The old ranger station parking lot, once full of horse trailers is now full of cars with bike racks. Her belief is that the 42 trail is now a bike trail, no longer useable by horse riders.

Cliff Kiser moved to adjourn the meeting @ 2:45 p.m. John Seconded. Motion passed.