

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

February 8, 2023

Committee Members Present: Lynne Breese, Cliff Kiser, Steve McGuire, Frank Porfily, Andy Gallagher, Bill McCormack, Melinda Kestler, Kim Vogel, Tim Deboodt, Casey Kaiser, Mike Lunn

Members absent:

Guests present: Lisa Clark (BLM), Jimmy Eisner (BLM), Greg Jackle (ODFW), Chris Gerdes (State Parks)

Public present: John Breese, William Meltzen, Gayle Hunt, Barb Vice, Dave Vice, Kurt Lockhart, Ross Lockhart, Donna Standley, Jim Wood, Bob Williams

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire @ COCC Crook County Open Campus

Pledge of Allegiance

Approval of previous meeting minutes:

Frank moved to approve the Committee minutes from January 11, 2023 meeting as corrected. Bill seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Reports:

Lisa Clark, Acting Deschutes Resource Area Manager, provided the updates for BLM activities (handout). Lynne asked about an update on position vacancies, particularly related to the range conservation specialist positions. Lisa reported that 1 position was recently filled, 1 is open and 1 range tech position has been offered. The Deschutes Resource Area has 2 range vacancies to fill and 1 range tech position. Lisa also announced that the John Day RAC will be meeting in Prineville on Feb 22 – 23.

Chris Gerdes, Oregon State Parks introduced himself to the Committee and provided an update on State Parks activities at Prineville Reservoir. Oregon State Parks is now in charge of the “old” Prineville Resort. They are currently working with BOR on developing a list of improvements needed before this facility can reopen. Design work needs to get done so that an environmental review can be completed. It may be several years before the facility is fully operational again. It will take a significant investment of dollars to pay for the necessary upgrades.

Chris shared that there are some juniper thinning operations underway around Jasper campground and the main campground. Approximately 80 acres is the project area. NEPA will be completed by late March with work to be accomplished next fall.

Cliff Kiser asked how the water levels in the Reservoir affect State Parks campgrounds and boating. Chris responded that the low levels impact motorized boats but that non-motorized boating is unaffected to a large extent. Chris indicated that State Parks is looking at options for a low water boat

ramp. They are reaching out to the State Marine Board for assistance in design work. The State campground is very popular because of its "Dark Sky" designation for star gazing.

There was no Forest Service update.

"Old Business"

Solar farms. Cliff reported on the work of the sub-committee on reviewing the Natural Resources Policy and its relationship with proposed solar farm development on public lands. Cliff reminded the Committee that there are 2 different levels of Solar farm development on public lands. Currently there is a national review of the Programmatic Solar Development plan that currently covers the southwestern states. BLM is in the early stages of a NEPA review to expand that Programmatic Planning document to include the states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Wyoming.

The other solar farm development activity is the active applications (2 currently) for solar development in the Millican Plateau area southwest of Prineville.

Lisa Clark (BLM) stated that the Programmatic Review process will not impact the local NEPA process. Kim Vogel asked how the Programmatic Plan would be used in the future? Lisa stated that as specific projects are proposed across the west, it would be used for identifying concerns and guiding analysis. The deadline for submitting comments during the scoping of the Programmatic Plan is March 1, 2023.

Following discussion, the Committee felt it was important to recommend to the County that they comment during this scoping period. Kim moved to have the Committee (led by the sub-committee's recommendations) submit a request to the County for comments. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.

Following further discussion regarding content for the recommendation, Steve provided a draft introduction covering issues, possible mitigation requirements and conflicts with the County's Natural Resources Policy. The Sub-Committee was tasked with completing a white paper covering this background information and recommendations for content to the scoping letter. The Sub-committee will complete their work and submit it to Tim who will forward it onto the County Court.

Committee Elections

The Committee annually elects a Chair and Vice-Chair to provide leadership to the Committee and its meetings. Steve moved to re-elect Lynne Breese as Vice-Chair. Cliff Seconded. No other nominations, Motion Passed.

Lynne moved to nominate Steve McGuire as Chair. Mike Lunn seconded. No other nominations, Motion Passed.

Good of the Order:

Kim asked about adding to the monthly agenda, items to discuss that affect multiple counties.

Frank made the group aware of a Bend Bulletin article indicating that 11 of the 16 eastern Oregon counties have now held votes on whether to join the Move Oregon's Boundary effort.

Steve thanked the Solar sub-committee (Cliff, Lynne and Melinda) for all their work.

Mike Lunn moved to adjourn. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Crook County Project/Activity Briefing

Bureau of Land Management – Prineville District – February 2023

Fuels Accomplishments

The BLM fuels program completed Brothers Unit 1 for 280 acres of jackpot burning. They plan to continue more burning in that project area as conditions remain favorable. They also started pile burning the Williamson Creek RX out Millican Road for 510 acres and completed 310 acres last Monday.

Last week fuels staff made a tentative offer for the vacant Prevention, Mitigation & Education position. This position will provide added capacity for these programs, as well as with wildfire trespass and investigation.

Sanford/Eagle Rock Vegetation Treatments

Staff met with representatives from NRCS and ODFW to get an overview of vegetation in the Sanford Creek and Eagle Rock areas around the east end of Prineville Reservoir. The group looked at options for juniper thinning, as well as reviewed the condition of areas that had been treated in the past, to create a plan for improving deer winter range. Talks will continue this Friday to further outline specific treatment acres. These areas also have winter seasonal closures, and we continue to address cut locks/opened gates, trespass, and vandalism. With shed hunters heading out this time of year, game cameras have been added in areas to attempt to identify visitors that cut locks and enter on motorized vehicles as opposed to foot.

Local solar applications vs. the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

The Bureau of Land Management is developing an updated plan to guide responsible solar energy development on public lands through an updated Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

As part of its ongoing effort to support responsible development of renewable energy on public lands, the Bureau of Land Management held a series of public scoping meetings to solicit feedback for the BLM's national-scale solar energy planning. The BLM is considering updates to its 2012 Western Solar Plan that included six southwestern states—Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah—and is seeking comment regarding expanding its solar planning to include five additional states: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

This project is much more the 30,000 foot look at solar across the country and is asking for different input than what you might give at a local solar project, like the one we're starting to look at in Powell Butte. This one is looking to learn about issues as well as identify mitigations that may be applied.

As an example, you might comment for our local proposal that you don't want XX permittee to lose their grazing permit if a solar farm is approved. For the big PEIS, that comment might change to "if a permittee is going to lose their permit, that permittee should have a non-competitive option of acquiring another open/vacant allotment." The first answer is more specific to one situation, while the second looks to apply conditions that might exist across all the states.

