

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resource Committee

January 11, 2023

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

Members absent: Mike Lunn, Casey Kaiser

Guests present: Stephanie McKinney (BLM)

Public present: John Dehler, Joe Dehler, John Breese, Bob Williams, Gayle Hunt

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:

Lynne moved to approve the Committee minutes from December 14, 2022 as corrected. Cliff seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting was opened with a welcome to new Committee members Melinda Kestler, Bill McCormack and Kim Vogel. Each of the new members took a moment to introduce themselves, share some of their backgrounds and interests and why they are looking forward to their participation on the Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

Agency Updates:

A Forest Service report was distributed amongst the Committee members and public. In reviewing the report, Andy asked if the kiosk being built at the Rager Ranger Station means that the buildings there could now be tore down? Specifically, does the Kiosk replace the buildings and note their historical existence such that it meets the preservation requirements? John Breese expressed his frustration in that without FS presence at these meetings, questions do not get answered in a timely manner.

Discussion amongst the Committee members was held in regards to how to get FS participation at these monthly County meetings restored. Committee members wondered if the FS understood the value of public involvement and the sharing of “what’s happening” in a manner in which the public could engage in a real time manner? Melinda expressed concern that the FS only relies on “scoping” as a way to engage the public. She shared her frustration that scoping is a one way conversation and limits conversations and the development of better ideas, better projects.

Frank asked about the Corral Flats Endurance Trail project and was it another trail project that promoted single use trails? Frank pointed out that if so, this project is contrary to the County’s Natural Resources Policy.

Stephanie McKinney (BLM Assistant Area Field Manager) provided the update for the Prineville BLM District. Stephanie reported that Amanda Roberts is currently serving as the Acting District Manager.

All but 1 rangeland specialist positions are vacant on the District and an active recruiting effort is underway. There is no new updates on the solar farm projects (or applications). Stephanie emphasized that public meetings would begin in early 2023. The Central Oregon Field Office is still working on trespass issues so that grazing permit renewals can be completed. John Dehler asked about the Grizzly Mtn tower complex and if the BLM was moving forward with NEPA efforts to deal with wildfire risks, grazing allotment and other issues. Stephanie said she didn't know of any movement on that project and then shared that the Deschutes Resource Area Office had a 40 percent vacancy in its positions and specifically, it didn't have any lands people on staff.

Cliff Kiser asked about grazing in relation to the solar farm applications. Since grazing was an authorized use in this area and grazing was the first use of these lands, how can grazing get excluded when the solar farms are approved? Cliff asked how can the County and the Advisory Committee get ahead of the discussion and make sure that the BLM fully addresses the Natural Resources Policy? It was suggested that the Policy be sent to Lisa Clark, Amanda Roberts and Stephanie McKinney.

Steve McGuire appointed Cliff Kiser to chair a sub-committee for active engagement on the Solar Farm applications. Lynne Breese and Melinda Kestler were appointed to the committee.

Kim Vogel asked if the BLM holds public meetings? Stephanie responded that it depended on the type and scale of a project. BLM utilizes its public affairs officer along with the Field Managers to make those decisions.

Upper Crooked River Water Users were represented by Bob Williams. Bob provided an update to the events that occurred since the Bureau of Reclamation and USFWS made application with Oregon Department of Water Resources for the release of water from Bowman Dam to enhance flows in the lower Crooked River for the benefit of fish and habitat during the summer of 2021. Water users in the upper country (upstream from Bowman Dam) have organized and formed the Upper Crooked River Conservationists (UCRC). This group will be sending a letter to State Legislators, Federal Congressional Delegation and the County Court expressing on-going opposition to this water rights request and the concern that irreparable harm will result to irrigated agriculture above Prineville Reservoir. Bob will make sure the Committee gets a copy of the letter as soon as it is available.

Good of the Order:

Steve reported that the Senators Wyden and Merkley have released version 2 of the Rivers Democracy Act (a bill to add 3000+ miles of Oregon streams to the wild and scenic designation). Steve expressed concern about the lack of involvement of local governments with this bill and the fact that it expands Wild and Scenic Act authority from ¼ mile on each side of a stream to ½ mile on each side. Steve would like to add this topic to February's agenda. Kim Vogel wondered if perhaps someone from Senator Wyden's regional office could participate.

Public Comments:

John Dehler raised concern about the access issues associated with Juniper Canyon (wildfires and safety) and wondered if it was a topic/issue that the NRAC could provide help to those residents who reside in this area of the County. There was much discussion about issues and options. The County Court has been engaged in this topic for some time. Stephanie McKinney (BLM) talked about Crooked River Ranch and their efforts to create an emergency exit. BLM helped with that solution.

No other comments, Cliff moved to adjourn. Lynne seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.



Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National Grassland

January 11, 2023

PILE BURNING PROGRAM

The Ochoco National Forest firefighters were able to complete 4,404 acres of pile burning of the 5,100 acre target across the forest. The piles are concentrations of leftover materials associated with previous vegetation management activities. Burning these piles is the most cost-efficient way to remove these accumulations of hazardous fuels that can burn during summer wildfires. Pile burning will continue on the grassland as conditions become favorable.

HERITAGE/ARCHEOLOGY

Roof replacement of Cold Springs Guard Station

Cold Springs Guard Station, constructed in 1934, is an historic site on the Ochoco National Forest that initially served a special role as the switchboard station connecting phone calls between various fire lookouts and guard stations during the summer months, as well as housing for the fire guard (and family.) The cedar shake roof was in desperate need of repair and while supply chain issues delayed the materials being delivered, the Guard Station was reroofed in October using fire resistant shingles and will now be protected for decades to come. It will continue to be available as a recreation rental cabin in May 2023.

Rager and Ochoco Ranger Station Kiosk project

The Forest competed for year-end Regional Office dollars in September and was awarded funding for Heritage Interpretive Panels to showcase the history of the Rager and Ochoco Ranger Stations. New kiosks and informational panels will be erected at both sites in the spring or early summer. This was part of mitigation measures agreed to between the Forest Service and the State Historic Preservation Office during the partial decommissioning process of the two administrative sites.

ENGINEERING/ROADS

Forest-wide Cattleguard reconstruction and replacement Project (funded by the Great American Outdoors Act)

The Forest Service has awarded a two year contract for the replacement or completion of deferred maintenance on approximately 35-40 cattleguards located across the Ochoco National Forest. Cattleguards were prioritized and selected based on health and safety concerns on our maintenance level 3-5 roads. A few high priority cattleguards on maintenance level 2 roads were also included based on those identified as needed by range staff. The first year of replacement and/or maintenance will begin in 2022 and short delays are expected.

Lamonta Compound

There are two large projects occurring at the Lamonta Compound. The Forest recently completed siding replacement, painting and exterior restoration of three (3) of the four (4) CCC era warehouses and storage buildings. The Forest is currently working with different youth education and employment programs to restore a fifth building used to store fire and lookout specific supplies. All these structures are part of or add to the historic significance of this compound. Cold Springs Guard Station will receive a new roof this fall as part of this historic facility restoration funding and in partnership with the Old Smokeys.

