

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

October 11, 2023

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

Members Absent: Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher

Guests Present: Nick Weber (BLM), Gordon Jones (OSU Extension)

Public Present: Gayle Hunt, John Breese, Chuck McGrath, Mike Ervin

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill McCormack moved to approve the minutes of the August 9, 2023 meeting as presented. Cliff Kiser seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Updates: Nick Weber, Assistant Field Manager, Central Oregon Resource Area provided the BLM updates. Nick reported that the Deschutes Resource Area has been able to hire 2 positions in Range and Recreation. Other job offers have been made as well and are pending acceptance.

The Powell Butte Communication EA is finalized. The Decision (May, 2023) was appealed but appeal was overturned and Decision notice has been signed and is moving forward. New designs for the Chimney Rock campsite have been finalized and include a group camping site with new restrooms. There will be more accessibility for the public at this site.

BLM is planning a 4500 acre juniper thinning project in the Sanford Creek area. This is a CE project but public comment will be requested. The notice for public comment will be out soon.

Mike Lunn asked if the BLM is able to help pay for moving costs of new employees. Nick responded that they are.

Forest Service: No report

Oregon State Parks: No report

Business:

Lynne, Steve and Melinda reported on their participation in the State Parks listening sessions regarding future needs/desires/wants for the Prineville Resort project. Representatives from Portland State University conducted the listening sessions at the Crook County Library, September 29th. Prior to the meeting, Lynne reached out to the Crooked River Watershed Council, OSU Extension and the Crook County SWCD to attend also. As efforts to identify opportunities, natural resource education appears to be an option. During the meeting, it was discussed that most of the users of the old resort were visitors

to central Oregon, they did not live here. It was discussed how an educational effort about water, the purpose of Prineville Reservoir and agriculture could be included in the project's scope.

Steve commented that he was the only one at the meeting that had used the resort in the past. Steve wanted the facilities to remain accessible 24/7. Gates are currently closed at 10:00 p.m. Steve commented that fishing tournaments go through the night. Steve hoped that the campgrounds would remain with stays no longer than 2 weeks. Steve also hoped that management of the facility would continue to work with local, non-profit groups and their events. Historically, the campground provided 80 campsites. The day-use area needs to be friendlier to users. Currently this area is a long ways from the shoreline.

Melinda was concerned about the water for the facility. Water quality for drinking and concerns about deepening the wells and potential impact on neighbors in the upper Juniper Canyon area. Melinda wondered also if potential ORV/ATV use if allowed would increase erosion/sedimentation in the reservoir. Also, Melinda wondered if a NEPA process would be utilize as part of the decision making process since federal funds would be used.

Overall, the discussion focused on accessing current infrastructure and viability for use, needing to upgrade existing facilities before new stuff is built. At the closing of the meetings, PSU staff mentioned that there would a public survey developed that would be distributed at a later date. Lynne said she would let the Committee know when it was available.

Resent decisions on Prineville Reservoir Water rights by OWRD was discussed by Tim and Chuck McGrath. Chuck is a landowner just above Prineville Reservoir on the Crooked River and has represented individuals from the upper Country over the last couple of years on this topic. Water Resources in August, issued a water right to BOR/USFWS/North Unit Irrigation District for the purpose of releasing stored water from Prineville Reservoir for enhancing fish habitat below the reservoir within the Crooked River and for irrigation (North Unit). A priority date of June 21, 2021 was a part of the new water right.

A review of stored water rights and release water rights was discussed. Potential and perceived conflicts with water rights in the upper country are still a concern. According to OWRD (Phone conversation between Tim and Crooked River Watermaster) there is approximately 15,000 acres of stored water rights above Prineville Reservoir. 3 landowners hold a sum total of approximately 6000 acre ft. of that total 15,000. Most of these stored water rights are junior in position to the 1914 storage rights of Prineville Reservoir. It is not known if BOR or the State would ever "call" for that water in the years that the reservoir was projected to not fill to capacity. It would be a complicated process of timing, the State having to determine if the called water would make a significant contribution to the reservoir storage and many other issues. No action by the Committee were taken as a result of the discussion.

Good of the order: Lynne reported on her participation in the PNW Section annual meeting of the Society for Range Management meeting held in Burns, OR in mid-September. The highlight of the meeting was the tour of Steens Mtn. and their view from the top.

Public Comment: Mike Ervin asked if the City's Biomass Project was still moving forward. The group thought that it was but no one from the City was present.

Cliff moved to adjourn the meeting. Lynne seconded. Motion Passed. Meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.