

## Minutes

### Crook County Natural Resources Committee

May 8, 2024

**Committee Members Present:** Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Mike Lunn, Kim Vogel, Lynne Breese, Cliff Kiser, Melinda Kestler, Andy Gallagher, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt

**Members Absent:** Casey Kaiser, Steve McGuire

**Guests Present:** Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Sheriff Gautney,

**Public Present:** Gayle Hunt, Monty Kurtz, John Breese

**Meeting was called to order** at 1:00 p.m. by Vice-Chair Lynne Breese @ COCC Crook County Open Campus

#### **Pledge of Allegiance**

**Minutes:** Bill McCormack moved to approve the minutes of the March 13, 2024 meeting as presented. Mike Lunn seconded. Motion passed.

#### **Agency Updates:**

**Forest Service: No Report**

**State Parks: No Report**

**BLM update was given by Stephanie McKinney**, Assistant District Manager, Prineville District. Stephanie announced her new appointment as Assistant District Manager. Grazing permit renewals are continuing with the Paulina Grazing EA moving forward, they are currently reviewing all comments. The National Sage Grouse plan is being updated and public comments are being accepted through June 13. This is a multi-state plan update.

Andy Gallagher mentioned that the Crook County SWCD has been awarded several sage grouse grants in partnership with 3 other counties. Grants will provide landowners cost-share dollars for habitat work along with providing the District with dollars for plan implementation and monitoring.

**Sheriff Gautney provided an update regarding the discussion in April on the new BLM Public Land Closures policy.** As originally presented, Sheriff Gautney shared that the Western States Sheriff's Association had opposed the new policy. The original policy allowed for indefinite closures and without communication with local governments and law enforcement. As now amended, the WSSA supports the new policy which states it must be used for emergency purposes only and the closure notice must have a defined time frame for the closure.

**The Mill Creek Vegetation Management Plan and the County's letter of Objection were discussed.** The Committee continues to be frustrated by the lack of participation of the Forest Service at the County's NRAC meetings. Multiple questions were discussed regarding the process of Objection and without FS

representation, the committee could only speculate about procedures, ability to access other objector letters, who can attend, what is the purpose of the Objection meeting, and when is a final decision notice made? Possible topics for other objector letters was discussed: the desire to have smaller treatments, management of Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas, forest management on steep slopes, thinning of large, mature, and old growth trees, along with wildfire risk mitigation and other forest health issues.

The Committee expressed concern that a move to smaller treatments (less acreage) does not address the increased impacts of insect and disease issues being expressed in the Mill Creek drainage along with other areas of the Ochocos. Also, treating smaller areas reduces the economic value of the material to be removed resulting in increased requirements for more tax payer dollars to accomplish outcomes.

The Forest does have all objection letters posted on the web.

<https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//ReadingRoom?Project=58081>

Kim Vogel expressed concern that the Forest Service is not following its own directives and processes. The National Forest Policy on Healthy Forests and the National Wildfire Strategy were mentioned as a couple of examples. At a time when the Forest has the resources (dollars) to be more aggressive they are stepping back in order to avoid litigation. Mike Lunn expressed concern that they are not meeting the Purpose and Need stated in the EA for this project. He said the Forest needs to take full advantage of the federal dollars now available to do as much as possible. Urgency requires more and immediate actions.

Melinda shared that the FS lacks research (data) but is given difference (given the benefit of doubt). There was some concern expressed that since the FS is providing 2 different dates for the Objection process and those utilizing the later date have the benefits of hearing arguments from the first hearing. Some Committee members had been involved in Objection hearings years ago. There was no clear consensus about how effective they were. Gayle Hunt expressed from her view, the Objection process was just an exercise. Response to the meeting is a letter from the FS summarizing comments and FS response. Groups tend to base their arguments on the potential for supporting future litigation. It was summarized that the process felt like "listen and then make your decision based on who you least want to be sued by". The Objection meetings are scheduled for May 16 and 22.

### **Good of the Order**

Melinda shared that there was a social media post circulating of a picture of 3 wolves crossing Hwy 26 at Ochoco Summit. Gayle and Melinda shared that in the Juniper Canyon area (Longhorn Ridge Subdivision) they had collected fecal samples that could be wolf hybrid. Concern was expressed about the existence of wolf hybrids and that they are allowed to run loose. So far, little concern was expressed by ODFW.

### **Public Comment:**

Monty Kurtz asked if this Committee could help with the discussion of the 2<sup>nd</sup> access out of Juniper Canyon. The Committee shared the history of Committee meetings on this topic.

Mike moved to adjourn. Andy seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45 p.m.