

## Minutes

### Crook County Natural Resources Committee

July 10, 2024

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

**Members Absent:** Casey Kaiser

**Guests Present:** Kyle Hensley (BLM), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Charles Brown (BLM), Clarinda Wilson (BLM)

**Public Present:** Gayle Hunt

**Meeting was called to order** at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Steve McGuire

#### **Pledge of Allegiance**

**Minutes:** Frank Porfily moved to approve the minutes of the May 8, 2024 meeting with correction. Lynne Breese seconded. Motion Passed.

#### **Agency Updates:**

**State Parks: No Report**

**Forest Service: No Report**

**Kyle Hensley (BLM)** provided the BLM updates. Kyle reported that over the years, staff have been monitoring annual changes in vegetation across the District. Last year, one photo point in the Powell Butte area showed bare ground, this year, same location, the picture shows a very dense and productive cheatgrass stand. Point is, this year's conditions for wildfire are extremely high. Kyle reported that BLM still has resources for fire response stationed in Prineville. He reported large fires in northern California and in the Medford, Oregon area. In regards to the fire east of the Redmond Airport, the cause of the fire is still under investigation. They know the place of origin. Amanda Roberts, Prineville District Manager has issued a closure for the area. There is no timeline for when the area will reopen.

As of today, Kyle reported that there are no updates on the BLM Programmatic EIS for Solar.

Stephanie McKinney reported that the BLM District will be hiring a water rights specialist. This is a new position and will also be available to all Districts within the Oregon Washington Region. The District is also working with the Burns Paiute Tribe for additional cultural resource monitoring.

Agenda:

**Camp Creek Grazing Allotment Permit Renewal** process was discussed by Tim. Tim reviewed the sub-committee work done the end of June and the draft letter presented to the Board of Commissioners on

June 20<sup>th</sup>. The County adopted the letter and will provide BLM with its response to this permit renewal EA and draft decision notice. In addition to addressing specific concerns about the EA and the impact of the draft decision notice if made final, the County also requested the comment period be extended 90 days and that BLM enter into Coordination with the County. As of today, the County is awaiting a response on that request.

Cliff Kiser asked about the timeline for response to the concerns and the request. Kyle said that since the letter had come from the County, that Amanda Roberts would be the person responding to the County and that response should be coming any day. Kyle also said that they had received over 100 comments to the EA, most of them were generic in nature and were asking for even more reductions in permitted AUMs over the life of the new permit (10 years).

Kim Vogel asked about the development of an alternative that addresses the options to 10 years of rest. Kyle responded that his final decision could include a modification of the EA alternatives. BLM did address monitoring/pasture objectives that had been addressed in the County's letter. Kyle said that buried in the EA, that information already exists. He said it is difficult to find but it is there. Questions about the impacts of the horse population found in the area were discussed. Kyle said he wished he had the impact information regarding the horses but due to lack of resources and time, they weren't able to include it in this EA. As soon as the BLM completes the Murderers Creek Herd Management plan with the Malheur National Forest, that Ligget Table Herd Management Plan will be addressed.

Kyle mentioned that the timeline for the grazing permit renewal will be soon. The EA will be finalized and the renewal decision will probably be split into 2 decisions. One decision for the other 6 allotments covered under the EA and one decision for the Camp Creek Community Allotment. Kim expressed her concerns about a possible "Takings" issue and hopes that the BLM will work with the County and the Permittee.

Melinda asked about why this renewal process had not been brought to the NRAC before the June meeting? From the perspective of the BLM, what is the difference between Coordination and Cooperating Agency Status? For BLM, Cooperating Agency Status offers a seat at the table during EA and decision notice development, Coordination is a public process specific to the County and the BLM.

Cliff Kiser reviewed the existence of the County's Natural Resources Policy, its development and adoption by the County (2017) and the request to Federal Agencies for Coordination Status on all future projects (2018). The policy addresses grazing permit renewals and impacts. Kyle mentioned that under FLPMA, he could just renew the permit. But utilizing the EA process, range improvement practices can be identified and implemented over the next 10 years, an option that is not available through the outright renewal of the existing permit. Kyle believes the new "Public Lands Rule" with its new restrictions would prevent certain actions and is not a good idea to start the EA over.

Mike Lunn talked about the value of working together for getting the right thing done. It doesn't matter what we call the process. Mike stated that he believes this NRAC provides the community and the Agency an excellent opportunity to engage with the public, providing information about what is going on and to get to better conversations and decisions by the Agencies.

Melinda stated again that she does not believe the BLM conversation on this topic (Camp Creek Area Allotment renewal) was specific enough with the Committee over time and that the EA/Decision notice

doesn't clearly state what the cause of resource degradation is. Melinda stated that through Coordination, the Agency can use the County's Policy to respond to other organizations and their ambitions to remove grazing from public lands.

Steve McGuire asked Kyle, if the County accepts Coordination Agency Status, does it preclude the County from also using Coordination for the same use? Kyle said he didn't know.

Discussion was held about the value of a training opportunity for Agencies and the use of Coordination. It is time to send out the County's policy to Agencies again.

In an overview, Kyle talked about how to do things better in the future. He talked about better communication all around, and that BLM's doors are always open. Kim asked about the use of Public Affairs Officers to work with the community and most importantly, to work with the Interdisciplinary teams to make sure they are addressing community concerns, custom and culture.

**Ochoco Forest Tour** (June 18, 2024) was recapped by members of the NRAC that were able to attend.

**Mill Creek Objection** hearing was discussed by Tim and Kim. Kim had filed her own objection letter as a private individual and resident of the Mill Creek Watershed. There were 7 objectors present for the hearing. Shane Jeffries, ONF Supervisor ran the hearing with Beth Peer, NEPA Coordinator for ONF took notes. Objections were issued by 4 environmental groups, 1 forest industry group (AFRC), 1 individual and the County. The hearing was an opportunity for each objector to provide an overview of their concerns and possible areas of compromise. Not much compromise was offered. The County received an offer for resolution today (July 10), and upon reviewing all information made available to the Committee, Kim Vogel moved to recommend to the Board of Commissioners reject the offer for resolution and to proceed with points made in the Objection Letter written in May, 2024. Cliff seconded. Motion passed. Tim will prepare a draft letter for County consideration at their July 17<sup>th</sup> public meeting.

#### **Good of the Order:**

Tim reviewed Committee opportunities for tours with OFRC and the SWCD next week (July 16 and July 17). OFRC will be touring the Jackson Watershed Fuel Break planning area and the SWCD is partnering with the Crooked River Watershed Council to highlight conservation work with private landowners in the upper Paulina area. The Committee asked about the Jackson Fuel Project and wondered by the Forest Service hadn't shared that project with the Committee?

#### **Public Comment:**

Gayle Hunt expressed concern that the Agencies are not making much progress to improved communication with the public about Agency Actions. Timelines for Agencies issuing notices, gathering information from the public and then providing responses are extremely restricted given the months and sometimes years the Agencies have to develop projects internally. In regards to the wildhorse management issues on Ligget Table, Gayle told BLM that she is a member of the Central Oregon Wildhorse Coalition and that they want to be involved in updating this HMA plan. She suggested the Committee may need to amend the County's policy to add wildhorse management on BLM administered lands within the County.

Tim will review with Kyle/Stephanie later about how to make sure the County and the NRAC is on the BLM project notification list for both Resource Areas within the District.

Kim moved to adjourn the meeting. Melinda seconded. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.