

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

September 11, 2024

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

Members Absent: Steve McGuire, Cliff Kiser, Casey Kaiser

Guests Present: Susie Hermreck (Crook County Commissioner), Shane Jeffries (Ochoco National Forest), Jamie Bowles (ODFW), McKayla Bivena (ODFW), Jodie Barram (Oregon Living with Fire)

Public Present: John Breese, Gayle Hunt

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Vice Chair Lynn Breese

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Bill McCormack moved to approve the minutes of the August 14, 2024 meeting as presented. Mike Lunn seconded. Motion passed.

Agency Updates:

State Parks: No Report

BLM: No Report

Forest Service: Shane Jeffries, Forest Supervisor, Ochoco National Forest share the FS updates. A review of the fire activity during the last month included the Rail Ridge Fire, Wiley Flat Fire and the Crazy Creek Fire. The Rail Ridge Fire and Wiley Flat Fire are currently burning with less than 50% contained. Crazy Creek Fire which started in July is at approximately 87,000 acres and 95 % contained. The BAER (burn assessment and recovery report) work has been started and the report should be finished soon.

Calista asked about the Incident Management Teams and how many there are nationwide and how many are headquarter in Oregon. Shane and Jodie shared there were 44 nationwide teams and that there are 8 PNW based teams. Frank shared that while making equipment deliveries to fire camps, he has met fire fighters from Mexico. Shane shared that there are international fire fighters from Canada and Australia as well.

Melinda asked about how fire lines are constructed and is there a 'width' that is normal. Shane shared that there is no set direction and is dependent on fuels and fire behavior. Susie Hermreck shared that for the Crazy Creek fire, there was a spot that the fire line was 10 dozer blades wide and the fire jumped it. Shane mentioned that the FS is also utilizing logging companies and equipment to construct shaded fuel breaks. The FS is already starting to sell log decks that were created while fighting the Crazy Creek fire.

Discussion was also held in regards to the change in how the structure and names of the fire incident management (CIM) teams. Shane said that the administrative structure has been changing over the last 3 years and that under the new structure, the old teams had to improve their credentials for the new designations. Shane also shared that the size of CIM teams can change depending on the complexity of the fire.

Mike asked if the teams stay together during the entire firefighting season. The answer was no, people are moving in and out of the team during the summer depending on personal time off, other duties as required during the season and other reasons.

Susie shared that she is working with Vikki Breese-Iverson (State Representative) and the Governor's office. Issues around fighting large fires and the difficulty of working across private property when the owners all have different views about fire and the use of fire to fight fire. Susie particularly wanted to thank the local RFPAs for all their hard work and dedication. Susie also wanted to thank the Crook County Food Insecurity Group for providing food and drink to the firefighters.

Shane mentioned that the FS is moving on implementation of the Mill Creek Vegetation Management Plan. Shane said the plan is to have the first timber sales from this planning effort out still this fall.

The Jackson Shaded Fuel project as proposed will have an extended scoping period. This planning area was significantly overlapped by the Crazy Creek Fire. Also, the North Fork Crooked River project has been impacted by the Crazy Creek Fire on the east side of the planning area. The FS will be moving forward with a proposed decision on the west half soon.

Kim asked Shane to remember to reach out and work with the private land owners in Mill Creek as timber and burning activities gear up.

Mike shared with Shane and the Committee his recent trip to Williams Prairie and that project that he saw plants starting to grow and that the project area is looking good.

Jamie Bowles (ODFW Acting District Wildlife Biologist, Prineville) introduced herself along with McKayla Bivena. Jamie shared that Greg Jackle was working as the interim State Sage Grouse Coordinator for a year. Currently, ODFW will not be staffing the office management specialist position in the Prineville office and the office will have limited access to the public. Staff will be out in the field during the hunting seasons. Aaron is still the State Wildlife Coordinator and is the contact for landowners with wolf contacts. Bill McCormack shared that building a working relationship with landowners is important and needs to exist. He emphasized that communication needs to work both ways.

Big Summit Prairie

Susie Hermreck, Crook County Commissioner talked about her conversation with FS personnel in regards to the potential for public ownership of the east portion of Big Summit Prairie, historically owned by Les Schwab. This property is approximately 9000 acres and has been on the market for sale for \$20 million dollars. In August, FS personnel visited with many of the County and City elected

officials, gauging local support for public ownership of this property. The scenario under discussion was to have 3rd party purchase of the property with the eventual purchase by the FS. Numerous NGO's were exploring their role in transferring the property from private to public ownership. Federal dollars, set aside by Congress would be applied for by the FS for the final transfer. Questions raised during these local discussions included water concerns (water rights), the continuation of grazing and the issue of private property rights and their ability to sell to whomever (willing seller, willing buyer). It was clearly stated that this is not a process that would involve federal condemnation of the property in order to move it into public ownership.

Commissioner Hermreck shared that in her conversations with the FS, she said she could not speak for the public and that she strongly encouraged the FS to go slow, meet with the public through a series of public meetings and listening sessions and then to proceed only if there was public support.

Shane Jeffries shared that as Forest Supervisor, he would not move forward without public support. He also shared that the Prairie is outside of the congressionally drawn boundary for the Ochoco National Forest and that the acreage exceeded the 3000 acre maximum for such an addition. In order to bring it into the Forest, the public support is required. As part of the process for developing a management plan, Shane also assured the Committee that it would trigger the requirement for the FS to Coordinate with the County in the development and adoption of that plan.

The Committee held discussion about the idea. Asking what role the Committee could/would take and if a subcommittee should be formed to discuss the idea. Committee members supported Commissioner Hermreck's point about community involvement and public outreach.

The Committee decided to add this topic to the October agenda for further discussion and possible action.

Old Growth and Mature Tree, FS NEPA response

Discussion was held in regards to the draft response to the Nation-wide NEPA on Old Growth and Mature tree management strategies by the USFS. The Draft response was written by the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) of which the County is a member. Bill moved to support the AFRC letter and to let the County know the Committee did support it. Frank Seconded. Motion Passed.

Public Comment:

John Breese mentioned that the \$20 million dollar price tag for the Big Summit property made the property not economical from a ranching standpoint.

Good of the order:

No reports

Bill moved to adjourn the meeting. Frank Seconded. Motion passed. Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.



**Crook County Natural Resources Advisory
Committee**

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National
Grassland September 11, 2024

There are currently multiple active fire incidents within the Ochoco National, including the Crazy Creek Fire, Rail Ridge Fire, and the Wiley Flat Fire. Many previously planned projects have been paused or are being reevaluated due to the unprecedented activity.

Fire Updates

Rail Fire:

Caused by multiple lightning starts on September 2nd, the Powell Butte (fire 779), Rail Ridge (fire 761), Black Canyon (fire 786), and fire 778 and are currently being managed as one fire (Rail Fire) under the California Complex Incident Management Team 10. At the time of this report, the acreage is 146,601 and is 7% contained.

Wiley Flat Fire:

Started on September 2nd, caused by lightning, the Wiley Flat is currently 28,396 acres and is located within the Maury Mountains on ONF, BLM, and private land. This incident is currently being managed under the California Complex Incident Management Team 1 and is 13% contained.

Crazy Creek Fire

Started on July 22nd caused by lightning, the fire is 86,968 acres and 95% contained. The suppression repair stage of the fire has been completed, and BAER projects are being conducted. This incident is currently being managed by a local Type 4 Team.

*This information was reported on September 9th, and statistics may have changed since the production of this document. *

PROJECT PLANNING UPDATES

Mill Creek Restoration Project

The ONF's Mill Creek Dry Forest Restoration Project (Mill Creek) was developed with the intent of actively managing conifer stands to restore historic composition, structure, and density; reducing activity generated and naturally occurring fuels; and restoring streams, floodplains, and Riparian Habitat Conservation Areas (RHCA's). The project area is located on the Lookout Mountain Ranger District east of Prineville, Oregon, adjacent to the Mill Creek Wilderness. The project area is approximately 36,430 acres





in size. The Decision Notice was signed on August 12th. Timber sales are being prepped and the first timber sale is scheduled to be auctioned this fall

North Fork Crooked River Resiliency Project

The Paulina Ranger District is proposing landscape restoration with the North Fork Crooked River Forest Resilience Project including commercial and noncommercial thinning, prescribed fire, and road system changes. The larger "planning area" includes about 37,554 acres (although activities are only proposed across about 10,000 acres) and is located about 31 miles east of Prineville, Oregon, and 9 miles north of Paulina, Oregon. A final Environmental Assessment and draft Decision Notice will be issued for a 45-day objection period this month. The Crazy Creek fire has impacted the eastern portion of this project area which will not be included in the decision

Corral Flat Equestrian Trails Project

The Corral Flat Equestrian Trails Project proposes the designation of approximately 50 miles of trail for equestrians as part of the Forest non-motorized designated trail system. The project is about 25 miles northeast of Prineville on the Lookout Mountain and Paulina Ranger Districts. The trail routes are coincident with Forest Service system roads (both open and closed) and non-system two-track roads and closely follow the route of an annual equestrian endurance ride. This project would also involve rehabilitation of areas damaged by OHVs, and improvements of road closures to prevent future damage. The Forest issued a final EA and draft Decision for a 45-day objection period which will end on October 4th.

Jackson Watershed Fuelbreaks CE Project

The Paulina Ranger District issued a public scoping notice for a proposed fuelbreak project on July 29, 2024. The District hosted a public field trip with the Ochoco Forest Restoration Collaborative on July 16th. This project will create up to 3,000 acres of shaded fuelbreak along major roads around the Jackson Watershed by removing trees and brush, maintaining largest overstory trees, and conducting pile and broadcast burning. The Crazy Creek wildfire is currently impacting portions of this project area. Scoping has been extended to September 30th. When suppression activities are completed, the ID Team will assess the impacts of the fire and determine how the project proposal will need to be modified.

Stay up-to-date with forest information by visiting: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ochoco> or follow us on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/OchocoNatForestCrookedRiverNatGrassland>

To have your email added to the Forest's project mailing list, please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/ochoco/landmanagement/projects> and enter your email in the "Email Updates" box. You will then begin to receive notification of project announcements such as public comment periods. This link also provides information for all current planning projects.



