

## **Minutes**

### **Crook County Natural Resources Committee**

**April 9, 2025**

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

**Members Absent:** Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher

**Guests Present:** Bruce Scanlon (OID), Zach Slick (ODFW), Stephanie McKinney (BLM), Holly Jewkes (FS), Kevin Larkin (FS) Isabella Isaksen (FS), Kevin Keown (FS)

**Public Present:** John Dehler III, Joe Dehler, Gayle Hunt, John Breese, Mike Ervin

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

#### **Pledge of Allegiance**

**Minutes:** Bill McCormack moved to approve as presented. Lynne Breese seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No Committee members present voted no. Motion Passed.

#### **Agency Updates:**

**Holly Jewkes, Interim Co-Forest Supervisor** announced that Jeff Marszal will be the new Forest Supervisor for the Ochoco National Forest. A public announcement will be made tomorrow, April 10. He currently serves as Deputy Forest Supervisor on the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico and began his Forest Service career in 2011 as an Environmental Coordinator on the Ochoco National Forest. He will begin his new position on June 1.

Mike asked about the proposed Oregon legislation that would have Oregon Department of Forestry lease the Ochoco National Forest for 15 years (HB 3846). Holly said the FS has no position but that the FS actively works with ODF in using the Good Neighbor Authority (NGA) agreements. John Dehler asked about continued road closures in fire impacted areas on the forest. Kevin Keown said that most closures were lifted last fall. After snow melt this spring, they will be checking on how runoff impacted roads and other infrastructure.

**Stephanie McKinney (BLM)** reported that the Central Oregon Area Office was working on salvage logging (1.4 mbf) from impacts of the Crazy Creek Fire. The BLM had received no opposition to the proposal and timber will be put up for sale soon. Stephanie also reported that Decision of Records had been signed for herbicide work for all 3 2024 fire areas. Grazing closures (due to fire) were signed and that the Butler grazing permit renewal is now signed as well.

With a request by ODFW, BLM has extended the Murders Creek Wildlife Closure due to the poor condition of deer. ODFW has reported low doe weights. Low doe weights will have a direct impact on fawning and fawn weights.

Stephanie also reported that BLM is now working with APHIS, USDA to add the Prineville District to their NEPA review for grasshopper control. The landowners in the Paulina area are working with ODA for possible treatment this year due to the high numbers of grasshoppers in 2024.

Mike Lunn asked Holly about the Presidential Executive Order on increased timber output. Holly said the direction for implementation will come from the Region 6 office. As of this time, she is not aware of a national team/plan put in place yet. Kim asked about the employee reductions and impact on work load. Isabella (FS) responded that there were no reductions yet due to Court decisions in March. Stephanie (BLM) responded that BLM continues to see a push for reduction in staff numbers but there are no details out yet in regards to the process or target levels. Stephanie also mentioned that BLM is trying to create sale plans for more BLM timber sales. Both FS and BLM reported that employee stress levels and fatigue were high.

#### **Business:**

**Bruce Scanlon, District Manager, Ochoco Irrigation District** provided an update to the Committee in regards to winter snow pack, reservoir operations (winter and spring) and infrastructure improvements. Bruce shared that as of today, all three sno-tel sites in the Ochoco's were at or above 180% of normal for snow water equivalents. Snow pack was at a high water density and ready to come off. Operations this past winter for flood control have been active, with several early releases already with the possibility of a few more to come before the end of May. Currently Ochoco Reservoir is storing 38,250 ac. ft. (full is 44,000 ac ft). Prineville Reservoir is at 136,000 ac. ft. (full is 148,500 ac. ft.).

Calista asked if the HCP (Habitat Conservation Plan) impacts operations for Ochoco reservoir. Bruce responded that nothing more than 3 cfs, very little. Bruce said that the BOR River Operations has been very helpful to the District in directing daily flood control operations. The District and BOR will continue to monitor inflows and storage and modify releases accordingly.

OID is preparing for the 2025 irrigation season. 120 miles of canals and laterals are being cleaned and prepped. Flushing of the canals began on March 24 for Ochoco and April 7 for the Crooked River. In 2024, OID completed the upgrade of pumps behind Rite-Aid. 2025, working in partnership with the City installed new pipe through Iron Horse. In 2025-26, OID will be upgrading a second pump station. In 2026, the McKay Switch will occur. This will expand OID deliveries to upper McKay Creek and those existing water rights will be placed in-stream. The benefit will be to those landowners, they will now have irrigation water through the end of September (or end of irrigation season) and their water will be pressurized, reducing their electrical pumping costs.

Melinda Kestler asked about those people who are irrigating before the official start date. Bruce responded that some people aren't paying attention, they see water in the ditch and think it is ok to start. Some are approved to start irrigating due to crop demands and the dry soil conditions, and some are just checking their systems.

Bruce said the McKay switch involves 15 landowners and approximately 580 acres. 11.2 cfs will now remain in-stream. The McKay switch was made possible through the 2014 Crooked River legislation passed by Congress.

**Zach Slick, Assistant District Biologist, ODFW Prineville District** provided an overview of the new deer management units (2026). In 2026, ODFW will move away from the old management units to deer hunt units that better reflect deer herds and how they utilize their habitats. The old system was set in the 1960's but new research on deer habitat areas provide a better understanding of deer movements and should allow ODFW to better manage deer populations. **See Attachments**

Impacts to the public and the hunt areas is that the current Ochoco Management Unit will be split into 3 units (combined with adjoining areas). ODFW is wanting to help hunters identify how the changes will impact the areas they like to hunt in. Preference points will still be available since they are not tied to a specific hunt unit.

Zach shared that the new, deer habitat areas will be larger than the old management units. As far as tag numbers, ODFW is predicting that they will continue to be decreased throughout eastern Oregon. Deer numbers are down 40 percent from historical highs. Zach shared that in the 1990's, deer population estimates in the Ochoco MU were 20,500. Today, they are less than 5000.

Bill asked about the cost of the change and how it will impact hunters. Zach said there would be some cost associated with the educational outreach and publications that they will be producing. Zach also shared there will be public meetings held throughout the area before 2026. He emphasized that the 2025 hunting season will see no changes.

Mike Lunn asked John Dehler (Oregon Hunters Association, Ochoco Chapter) about OHA's involvement. John shared that OHA has been actively involved, helping to cover the cost of collaring animals for movement studies.

The question of when the Prineville office would be closed and moved to Redmond. Zach said there was no official effort at the moment to move. The new Redmond office (Bend moving) will be operational in the next 2 years.

#### **Good of the order:**

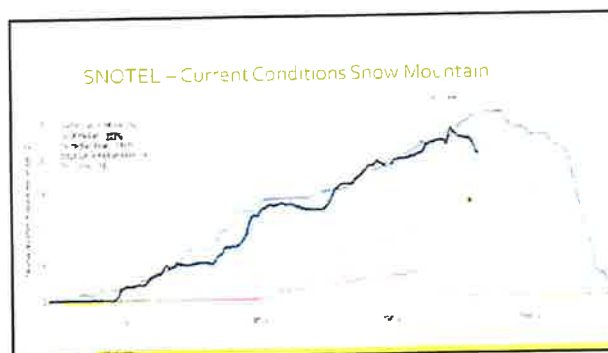
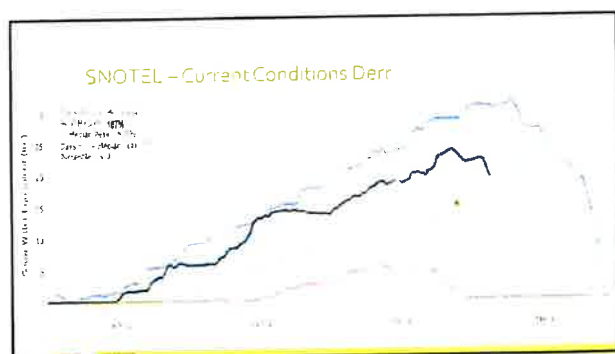
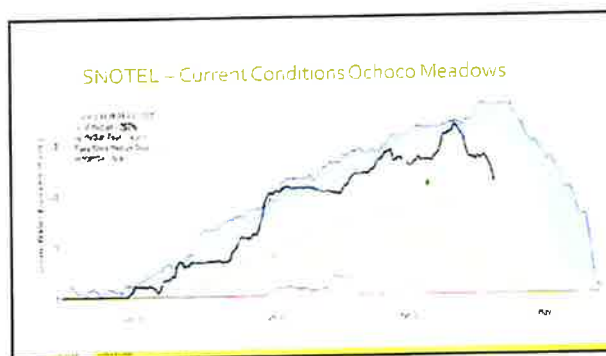
Steve thanked Lynne for chairing the March meeting in his absence.

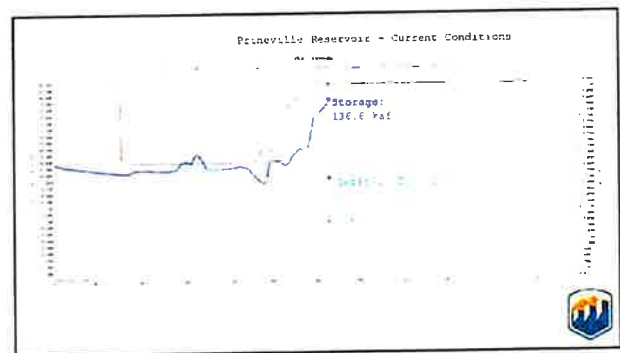
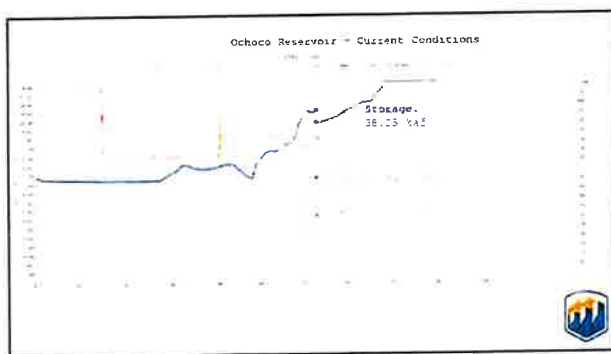
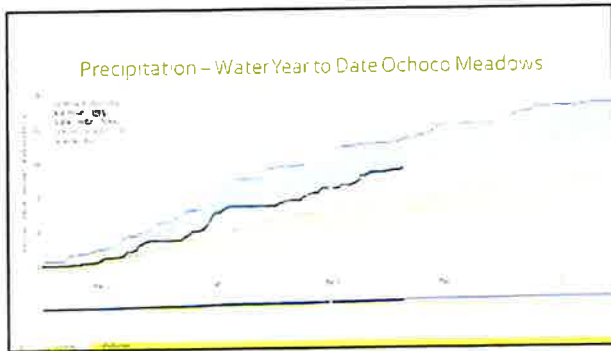
#### **Public Comment:**

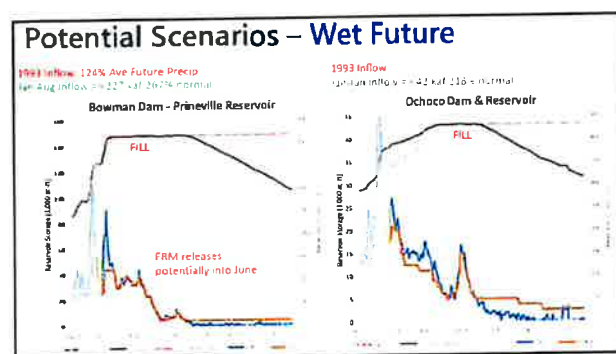
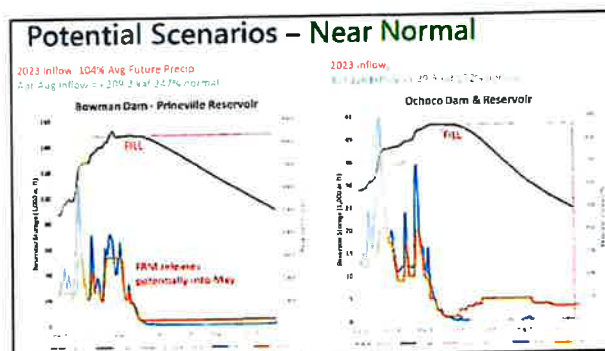
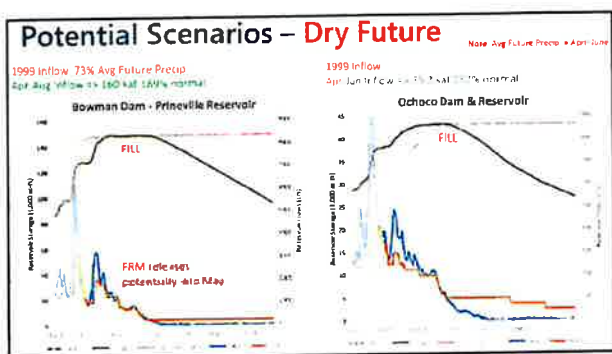
None

Frank moved to adjourn. Kim seconded. All Committee members present voted yes. No committee member voted no. Motion passed.

Meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.







## Forecasts

**PRVO**  
**Apr 1 Forecast**  
Prelim. Forecast: 185 kaf Apr-Aug (218% of Average)

Forecasts	Volume (kaf)	% 91-20 Ave
9120 Average	163.2	100%
MLR	154.2	183%
Py Forced PCA	192.2	224%
Py Forced Z	158.4	222%
Py Top PCA	194.9	230%
Py Top Z	198.3	232%
KWRFC ESP 10	169	154%
KWRFC MEFS	167.7	153%
KWRFC ESP 0	167.2	141%

**OCHO**  
**Apr 1 Forecast**  
Prelim. Forecast: 35 kaf Apr-Jun (187% of Average)

Forecasts	Volume (kaf)	% 91-20 Ave
9120 Average	19.4	100%
MLR	34.5	178%
Py Forced PCA	37.32	192%
Py Forced Z	36.89	190%
Py Top PCA	36.80	186%
Py Top Z	36.18	186%
KWRFC ESP 10	24.4	124%
KWRFC MEFS	24.4	124%
KWRFC ESP 0	27.4	141%

#### Water Year Releases as of April 7th

- We have released 257 kaf from PRV (320% of normal)
- PRV saw 302 kaf in
- We have released 40 kaf from OCHO (380% of normal)
- OCHO saw 55 kaf in

#### OID Startup and Operations

- Official Start Date for Irrigation Season is April 21, 2025 (3 af initial allocation)
- Started the Ochoco Main Canal on March 24 to take pressure off Ochoco Creek
- Crooked River Diversion started on April 7th
- Will continue flushing all canals and laterals to Meet 4/21 startup goal while continuing with flood control operations

#### OID Irrigation Modernization Project

CRPS#1



Iron Horse Pipeline



CRPS#2:  
Construction Winter 2025/26

McKay Switch:  
McKay Pipeline and  
Cox Pump Station  
RFP June 2025

#### Questions?





# Proposed 2026 Transition from Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) to Deer Hunt Areas

## Key Information About the New Proposed Deer Hunt Areas

### Big Thanks to Hunters!

ODFW thanks Oregon hunters for their invaluable input in shaping the updated Mule Deer Management Plan! Your voices and dedication to conservation are making a real impact.

Starting with the 2026 season, we're transitioning from Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) to Deer Hunt Areas to better align hunting boundaries with Oregon's mule deer populations and management goals. Your support helps ensure a strong future for mule deer and hunting in Oregon.

The change, set to be adopted in September 2025, will affect how you apply for mule deer hunts and navigate hunting regulations. Changes may also affect where you can hunt once you have drawn your tag.

### What's Changing and Why:

In June 2024, ODFW finalized the state's Mule Deer Management Plan. The plan focuses on managing and harvesting mule deer based on biological herd ranges. ODFW utilized GPS collar data from more than 1,400 mule deer to delineate 22 unique mule deer herd ranges in eastern Oregon.

Part of the 2024 mule deer plan was implementation of an improved population model which will allow improved monitoring of mule deer population trends, identification of declining populations, and rapid management response to population declines. These models require accurate harvest data within a herd range. Delaying implementation of new hunt areas further delays collection of accurate herd range scale harvest data and reduces the accuracy of new monitoring and modeling techniques.

By re-defining our Deer Hunt Areas to reflect natural herd range boundaries, ODFW can improve harvest and herd management, set more accurate tag totals, and more effectively assess population responses to management actions.

### Got Questions About the New Proposed Deer Hunt Areas?

Your local district wildlife staff is your best resource for information. If you're unsure about access or how changes to hunt area boundaries may impact your favorite hunting spots, don't hesitate to reach out. More information will be posted online as it becomes available.

### What Hunters Need to Know: —

**New Naming System:** Deer Hunt Areas will use a new alphanumeric system to identify hunt areas within herd ranges. For example, hunt area #1 within the Northeast herd range would be NE 01.

**Larger Hunt Areas:** Expect hunting areas that are larger than the traditional WMUs. These larger hunt areas will be less impacted by closures and allow hunters more flexibility in response to wildfire or hunting pressure.

**Tag Adjustments:** In the short term, there may be slight tag changes to manage hunter pressure. Adjustments could fluctuate over the next few years as hunters and ODFW adapt to these new hunt areas.

**What will be affected:** New hunt areas will apply to all eastern Oregon deer hunting including bucks, does, and all weapon types.

**Fewer Total Hunts:** Larger hunt areas mean fewer individual hunts overall.

**Preference Points:** There are no changes to preference points but like all new hunts, there will be a period of uncertainty regarding preference points needed to hunt a given area. Hunters should consider this uncertainty when deciding how to use preference points over the next few years.

**Landowner Preference Tags:** These tags may also change based on how properties fall within new herd ranges and hunt areas.

### How to determine which hunt to apply for:

Written descriptions for each new hunt area will be provided in the 2026 Big Game Hunting Regulations and on MyODFW.com. In addition, maps are available showing the relationship between Wildlife Management Units and 2026 Deer Hunt Areas. Follow the links below for an interactive map or check out the printed version on the back of this document.

To view the new map, scan the QR code or visit:

[go.MyODFW.com/MuleDeerPlan](https://go.MyODFW.com/MuleDeerPlan)



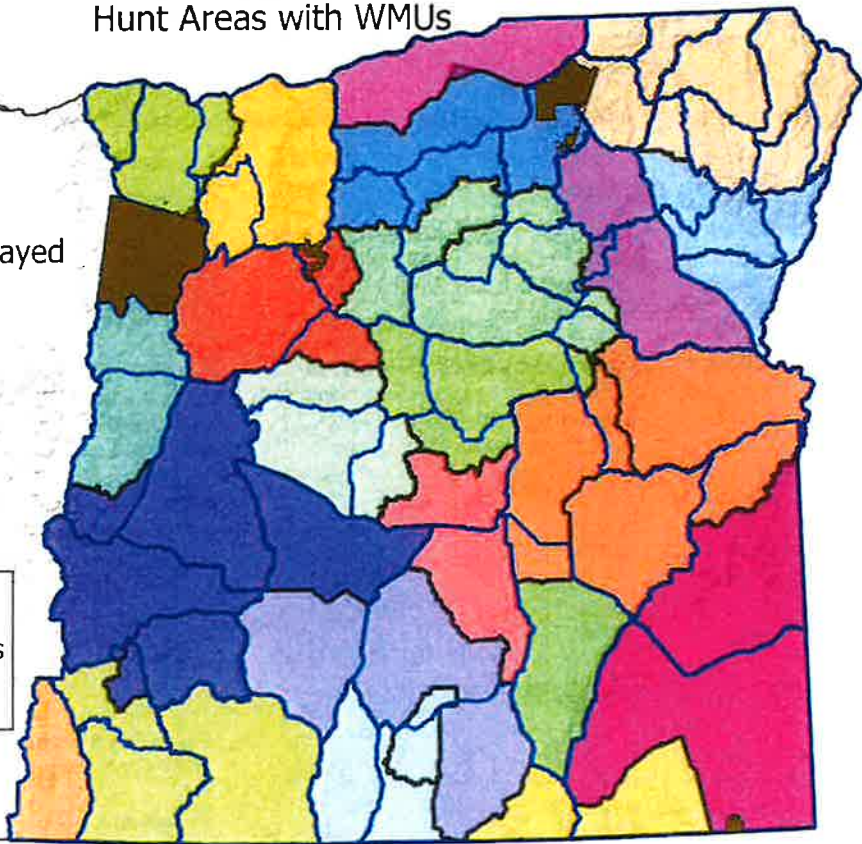


## 2026 Proposed Eastern Oregon Deer Hunt Areas with WMUs

Map displays traditional WMUs (blue lines) overlaid on proposed Deer Hunt Areas.

### Legend

- Eastern Oregon WMUs
- 2026 Deer Hunt Areas
- Tribal Lands



## 2026 Proposed Eastern Oregon Deer Hunt Areas

### Legend

- 2026 Deer Hunt Areas
- Tribal Lands

