

Minutes

Crook County Natural Resources Committee

September 10, 2025

Committee Members Present: Bill McCormack, Frank Porfily, Lynne Breese, Calista Songstad, Tim Deboodt, Melinda Kestler, Steve McGuire

Members Absent: Casey Kaiser, Andy Gallagher, Cliff Kiser, Kim Vogel, Mike Lunn

Guests Present: Jeff Marszel (FS), Jeff Priest (FS), Isabella Isaksen (FS), Tory Kurtz (BLM), Jona Ensley (BLM), Chris Gerdes (OPRD)

Public Present: Mary Opperman, Janet Hutchison, Gayle Hunt, Gayle Casselman

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Minutes: Lynne Breese moved to approve amended minutes (added discussion by Melinda Kestler on public engagement under new NEPA process). Melinda seconded. Votes Yes: Bill, Frank, Melinda, Calista, Lynne, Steve. Votes No: None Motion passed.

Agency Updates:

Jeff Marszel, ONF Supervisor introduced Jeff Priest to provide the fire update on the Ochoco's. Jeff reported on the busy summer fire season, and the success in keeping most of the fire starts very small. Large fires ONF personnel responded to include Juniper Hills (private lands), Pine fire (Maury) and the Boulder Fire (Ochocos).

Jeff reported that the Marks Creek Fire was approximately 1700 acres in size but not moving outside of its established containment lines. A 150 ft perimeter around the fire had been built and the administration of the fire will be turned over to the local team on Friday (Sept 12). Current administration is a type 2 team from Oregon Department of Forestry. Cause of the fire was human, but it is still under investigation.

In the last 10 days, there have been 16 fire starts on the Forest with an additional 7 fires on private (ODF) and all were put out. Melinda asked where the aerial support came from, and Jeff responded that the small planes came out of Medford with the larger planes being from locations in Washington state.

During additional conversation, Jeff reported that he had toured some of the area impacted by the Marks Creek fire with State Representative Vikki Breese Iverson. Jeff commented that the ONF is committed to working with the community and their actions are to reflect the values and interests of our local community. Isabella reported that the ONF has prioritized public outreach and sharing of information.

Calista asked how firefighting priority changes during deployment when a lightening storm comes through. Jeff shared that communication with crews is on-going during deployment and weather is

constantly monitored. Crews deployed to the fire, continue their fire-fighting efforts and local crews are dispatched to go out and find any new, reported fires.

Frank asked about lightening strikes around Walton Lake. Jeff Priest reported that that weather event started 4 new fires but were very small and all successful extinguished.

Melinda thanked all those involved in fire fighting and saving the Ochocos.

Jeff Marszel reported on the restoration activities from the 2024 fires. 15000 acres have been identified for replanting with fire adaptive species. 1000 acres will be planted this fall, with additional acres scheduled to be planted next year.

Timber contracts for the Coyote salvage are being written and will result in 2.3 mbf (million board feet) of timber to be salvaged. Jeff shared that the Mountain Creek Watershed and Trout Creek Watershed projects are proceeding with planning activities. There is the possibility of a fall field trip to either of these projects and Isabella and Tim will organize. Dates of hunting seasons were discussed so that tour dates could avoid any conflicts with hunting seasons.

Jeff Marszel spent some time addressing the Committee in regard to USDA reorganization and the impact on USDA agencies (ex. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, etc). On July 24, the Secretary of Agriculture (USDA) announced the 4 pillars of re-organization. 1) USDA will align priorities with budget and size of workforce. USDA has implemented a 15 % reduction in workforce since January. 2) Eliminate management layers and bureaucracy – regional offices are going away and stand-alone research stations will be consolidated to Fort Collins, CO while maintaining the Forest Products lab and Forest Fire research facilities. 3) Regional offices will be consolidated to 5 USDA hubs, with the western most hubs being located in Fort Collins, CO and Salt Lake City, UT. These hubs are to also co-locate NRCS and FSA, etc. 4) There will be a consolidation of internal services like the HR center in Albuquerque, NM.

Jeff shared that the original 30-day public comment period for the reorganization has been extended an additional 30 days and that period will end September 30. Outcomes are not yet known but we expect a flatter organization with more decision authority given to the unit level. Administration, HR, grant agreements, etc. will be decentralized. Accountability will be measured on outputs and conduct. Priorities in the future will be public safety, timber and fuels, range management, public access (recreation) improving the human environment and rural prosperity. Jeff anticipates that the ONF will see minimal impacts.

Steve McGuire expressed concern that there are no regional hubs located in the states with the most public lands. He is concerned that work won't get accomplished under the new hub configuration.

Lynne asked what does “supportive of rural communities” mean? Jeff shared that activities like increased timber harvest, range emphasis, more recreational opportunities and watershed health are all part of supporting rural communities.

Bill asked about timelines for implementation. Jeff thought that most changes will be in place a year from now, after the 2026 fire season. Jeff did share that while implementation may be a year away, the plan will be known much sooner than that.

Frank asked Jeff about any aerial counts of horses in the Big Summit management unit. Isabella shared that there might be flights scheduled for later this fall. Gayle Hunt shared that the 2019 count was 125 head plus/minus 5.

Mary Opperman asked who purchased the Coyote salvage sale. Jeff said he couldn’t remember the Company’s name, but it was in the valley.

Tory Kurtz, Assistant Field Manager – Deschutes Resource Area (Prineville BLM District) provided the update for BLM. Tory shared that Amanda Roberts, Prineville BLM District Manager, is currently on the Black Rock Fire and is not available today to be with the Committee. For the Deschutes Resource Area, Tory shared that Brasada Ranch is interested in applying for a special use permit for the purpose of trail rides but has not yet requested one. BLM continues to work with the Flat Rock Road District (Upper Juniper Canyon) on a road easement. BLM State office has made it possible to move forward with the easement analysis without requiring and receiving the engineered drawings from the Road District ahead of time. Tory also shared that “Lead Agency” designation for the talked about Pacific Power transmission line (Klamath Falls to central Oregon) has not yet been determined. Lead Agency status will be determined once Pacific Power decides its preferred route and the federal agencies can determine which administrative authority has the greatest amount of public lands involved.

Tory introduced Joan Ensley with the Prineville BLM to talk about the new “fuels reduction” permit and process which landowners, adjoining lands administered by BLM to create fuel breaks on public lands. This program is a part of the District’s Hazard Fuels Mitigation efforts. The permit (\$10) would allow adjoining, private landowners to remove fuels (remove brush and trees under 6” dbh, limb larger trees up to 6’ above the ground and mow grasses) within 150 feet of the property line. The permit allows for the removal of up to 200 lbs of material and all material must be removed from the public land being treated. Permit applications are either available by paper or QR code. BLM will review applications and issue the permit within 30 days of its receipt. Frank asked to clarify that trees larger than 6” diameter at breast height (dbh) could not be removed under this permit. Jona said that was correct. Jona also emphasized that this was different than a firewood permit because

within the Deschutes resource area, BLM can only issue firewood permits in areas designated firewood collection areas. In the Central Oregon Resource Area, firewood permits are good on all lands administered by BLM.

Chris Gerdes, Oregon State Parks shared updates on Prineville Reservoir camping and specifically on Prineville Resort. Prineville Resort is a historical campground whose jurisdiction is the Bureau of Reclamation but until about 5 years ago, was operated by a private contractor. That contractor was no longer operating the campground and BOR had approached Oregon State Parks to seek their interest in contracting the operations. State Parks has studied the needs and costs to upgrade and operate this park (they already operate Jasper Point campground and Prineville Reservoir State Park on Prineville Reservoir. Chris announced that OSP has decided to not pursue administrative responsibilities of Prineville Resort due to the lack of funding for required upgrades necessary for health and human safety along with camper benefits. Chris said he did not know what BOR intentions for the property are moving forward.

Chris shared that upgrades are nearing completion at Jasper Point. Juniper thinning and new construction of a cabin with handicap accessibility were highlighted. Completion of the cabin is expected to occur soon. The goal for the cabins at Jasper Point is that they will become rentable year-round, they are now only available during the summer camping season.

Work will be started soon at Prineville State Park and will include the removal of dead trees, limbing/thinning of juniper and the creation of some drought tolerant landscaping to reduce water use. The initiation of the project is awaiting the completion of NEPA.

Good of the Order:

Lynne reported that they have been successful in keeping pack rats out of their firefighting equipment.

Tim reported that the County and now the Committee (Chair and Vice Chair) have signed the new Bylaws as approved by the Committee and the County Commission early this summer.

Public Comment: None

Frank moved to adjourn the meeting. Bill seconded. Votes yes: Lynne, Bill, Calista, Melinda, Frank, and Steve. Votes no: None

Meeting Adjourned @ 2:15 p.m.

Video link of meeting: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCtCsAPZfrg>



**Crook County Natural Resources Advisory
Committee**

Ochoco National Forest & Crooked River National
Grassland

September 10, 2025

I. Overview

The Ochoco National Forest has been focused on wildfire response this past month. Multiple fires across the Forest and surrounding landscapes have required significant commitment of resources. The Forest continues to coordinate closely with interagency partners to protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources.

II. 2025 Fire

- Marks Creek Fire – Approximately 1,700 acres, with containment steadily improving. Crews are focused on mop-up and suppression repair. Area closures remain in place for public safety.
- Flat Fire – Burned more than 23,000 acres northeast of Sisters. Containment has reached 97%, and the fire is now in patrol and suppression repair status.
- Overall – Engines, crews, aircraft, and heavy equipment remain committed across the landscape, supported by interagency partners.

III. Projects and Forest Management

- 3 Fires Reforestation Initiative: Under development to replant native, fire-adapted species in high mortality areas within the 2024 Crazy Creek, Wiley Flat, and Rail Ridge Fire footprints. The project prioritizes areas with over 75% tree mortality.
- Lower Derr Restoration Project: Aims to improve watershed health and have a positive long-term benefit to grazing in the Jackson and Derr Creek areas through beaver dam analogs, native riparian plantings, large woody debris placement, meadow restoration, fencing improvements. A decision was signed on September 9th, 2025.
- North Fork Crooked River Stream Restoration: This project focuses on restoring 1.95 miles of degraded stream within the North Fork Crooked River. Work will include in-stream placement of wood and/or rock, filling gullies with earthen material and construction of beaver dam analogs. In addition, this project will include planting of diverse upland and riparian species. The instream portion of the project has been completed.
- Longer Stewardship Agreement: This is a partnership project with the Oregon Wildlife Foundation. It consists of commercial and non-commercial thinning as well as hand piling slash. Work is being completed adjacent to Williams Prairie and the Upper North Fork of the Crooked River restoration projects.
- Mill Creek and North Fork Crooked River Projects: Implementation will occur over the next





several years.

- Jackson Fuel Break Project: Decision signed in April 2025; treatments will begin this season.
- Sunflower Restoration Project: A thinning contract for 1,200 acres began on August 12th; operations are ongoing.

IV. Timber Sales

- Coyote RS Salvage Sale: Sale awarded July 28th.
- Rock Deck Sale: Sale went no bid.
- Pond Deck Sale: Apparent high bidder has been referred to the Contracting Officer.
- The Slab Timber Sale and Detour Salvage Sale are scheduled to be advertised in Q1 of FY26.

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 email us through the Ochoco's Mailbox, comments-pacificnorthwest-ochoco@usda.gov and please put *Project Notification* in the subject line. For more information for all current planning projects please visit <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/ochoco/projects>

