

## **Minutes**

### **Crook County Natural Resource Committee**

**October 9, 2019**

**Committee Members Present:** Teresa Rodriquez, Lynne Breese, Mike Lunn, Steve McGuire, John Dehler, Frank Porfily, Andy Gallagher, Ston McDaniel,

**Members absent:** Trent Smith

**Guests present:** Jeff Kitchens (BLM), Jacob Young (FS) Shane Jefferies (FS) , Robbie Piehl (FS), Kevin Keown (FS), Johanna Kavarik (FS), Bruce Scanlon (OID)

**Public present:** Gayle Hunt, Eric Newell, Melinda Kestler, Cliff Kiser, Jessica Lay, Mike Ervin, Barbara and D.W. Viue, Dan Hammond, John Breese, Phil Paterno, Jerry Brummer

Meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chair Andy Gallagher @ Crook County COCC Open Campus Conference Room.

#### **Pledge of Allegiance**

**Review of Minutes:** Andy moved to approve as corrected. Lynne seconded, Motion passed. Minutes were changed to reflect a increase in number of cattle still missing from the allotment in which the Canyon 66 burn occurred.

#### **Agency Updates:**

##### **BLM**

Jeff Kitchens reported the County's gravel pit permits were moving forward. Oct 4 was the beginning of public comment, comment period closes on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

Scott Allotment has a new well proposed for better livestock distribution. Oct 15<sup>th</sup> is the close for public comment. Project includes drilling well and placing buried pipe to a group of troughs.

BLM personnel participated in several projects during the National Public Lands Day, Sept 28<sup>th</sup>.

Prineville Lake Acres Homeowners worked with BLM on clean-up projects. Jeff reported this joint effort was very successful and BLM will be working with them closely in the future as a volunteer group.

##### **Forest Service**

Shane provided an update on planning projects. Ochoco Collaborative is hosting a public meeting on Oct 15. Beth Peer, FS Environmental Planner will be providing an update on the project then.

Black Mtn. Vegetation project received 5 objections. FS held an objections resolution meeting in late Sept to listen to all 5 groups review objections and possible solutions. FS plans to meet again with objectors to further discuss resolution opportunities.

Shane provided an overview of FS perspective on Canyon 66 fire. Acknowledged there were hot spots while other areas didn't burn within the area. 5000 ac. burn is the largest prescribed fire with the FS in central Oregon in the last 20 years.

City and County are working with the FS on a new rappelling base@ the airport. Concrete is being poured in the next few days. Plans are for this facility to be operational by next fire season.

Kevin talked about the Joint Chiefs proposal a joint application by USDA NRCS to do cross-boundary restoration work. 2 previous application attempts have not been successful but were positively received. If funded, this proposal would work in the south-central Ochoco's, through the Post, OR area (Maury Mtns) out towards Brothers, OR. It is a 12 million dollar proposal with work scheduled out over a 3 year time frame.

Mike Lunn asked about the torrefaction project. Kevin reported that the facility is still being built in John Day with 2 – 3 more months estimated until completion. Company is working on the supply chain for raw materials and will then create small test runs to use for marketing material.

Ston asked about the Canyon 66 fire. He and Crook County Judge Seth Crawford had toured the area. There is concern about the hot spots and the soil sterilization along with the loss of marketable timber. Ston reported that he had talked to 4 people who had driven through the area post burn and had expressed concerns. With those concerns, all 4 reported that their overall rating was positive. Shane's response was that anytime you burn in the fall, you always expect to have areas burn hotter than desired. FS personnel expect a good response from the vegetation while removing wildfire risk.

### **Sunflower Allotment AMP Renewal and Travel Management**

Johanna talked to the group that the FS is just in the beginning of the Scoping phase of this project. Jacob Young (Range Conservationist) and Robby Piehl (Wildlife Biologist) were introduced. Overview, this is a permit renewal for the Sunflower, Wind Creek and Dry Corner Allotments. FS has been meeting with the permittees over the last 3 years for ideas on projects. Project proposals included water development for better livestock distribution, juniper removal, small headcut repair, tree falling to open up riparian zones, create a holding pasture, create additional pastures within the Sunflower Allotment to modify grazing season in the riparian zones and adjusting grazing season 1 in 3 years to allow for later entry into the allotments (modify grazing start date).

FS is interested in having the NRAC come as a group for a tour and discuss the project on site. Robby handed out 2 maps, one showing existing roads and one showing reduced road density (possible proposed road closures). Deer and elk distribution in the Ochoco Herd Management Unit is a problem. There are currently about 4200 elk in the HMU which includes these 3 allotments. With high road density, FS believes that there is a heavy impact on adjoining private lands. The goal is to create area of

250 acres or larger that are greater than .5 miles from any road. FS believes that all other habitat parameters are there. A proposed 1000 ac juniper cut will add additional habitat.

FS Fire believes that the proposed road density would be adequate for fire response.

Existing road infrastructure is extensive and costly to maintain. Impact on permittees to management livestock would be minimal according to FS.

Mike asked if the FS was going to physically close roads? Gated or barricaded. Robby's response is that was the goal.

Andy asked if encouraging wildlife to access forest would impact livestock grazing carrying capacity within the allotments. Robby responded that it could be. Other vegetation management within the allotment (tree density and cover concerns) have been mostly addressed in other plans. Robby stated he felt that security cover is a limiting issue.

Teresa addressed the concern about predator control. She reported conversations with hunters and permittees about sightings of cougars and wolves.

ODF&W will be collaring elk and deer in the area to better understand distribution. Tim asked about work in the 90's that showed elk moving from this area to the Hampton Butte area annually.

Johanna will work with her staff to propose a couple of dates in November. Tim will distribute those dates and help get something scheduled.

### **Ochoco Irrigation District Modernization Project**

Bruce Scanlon, District Manager from OID addressed the group. Ochoco Irrigation District is working with several private NGO's and NRCS to prepare a proposal to update the District's delivery system. An application for PL 83-566 funds will be made through NRCS. This is a program which can provide up to \$25 million (75/25 match). The planning process includes the project initiation, scoping, draft preparation of the plan with environmental assessment, public comment and final adoption.

Currently OID loses about 30 percent of its water to canal loss and end spills. Pump stations are aging and are less efficient at pumping water. Open canals pose a risk of injury or drowning and water quality is negatively affected along with fish habitat.

The project currently envisions piping and pressurizing 56 miles of open canal. With the use of the McKay Creek Project (expansion of 600 acres) which is changing from natural flow rights for stored water rights. This project (dollars spent) can be used as the match for the modernization project. The project will install new pump stations, upgrade turnouts for pressurized water deliveries (60 psi) and construct the infrastructure for the McKay project.

Opportunities to the District with this project include saving water, improving water management and improve delivery reliability, reduce patron energy costs, reduce O&M costs, reduce risk of injury or

drowning, improve streamflows in Ochoco and McKay Creeks and improve water quality and fish habitat.

Scoping for this project ends October 18<sup>th</sup>.

Questions about this project

John said that studies show a potential savings of 20000 ac ft./year. What happens to the saved water? Bruce indicated that saved water provides opportunities for expansion of irrigated lands within the district vs. in-stream flow. State law allows up to 75 percent of saved water to be used to irrigate new lands.

Lynne asked about opportunities to make presentations to civic groups around the community. Bruce said that was on his list.

Frank asked if there had been any negative comments about the proposal. Bruce said not yet.

Ston asked what can the committee do? Bruce indicated that participating in public comments both as a group and as individuals. Throughout the process, continued support would be beneficial.

Farmers Conservation Alliance (FCA) is a nonprofit helping the District through the process.

### **Diligence Mine Update**

Mike handed out his email responses concerning correspondence with Mr. Bauer (mining permittee). Ston shared his draft letter, from subcommittee work that would be used by the County Court requesting the FS to resolve this issue. The sub-committee agreed to write the letter and present to the entire NRAC for approval, which supports continued use of the structures (cabin) on the claim. As a result of the sub-committees research, they believe that the FS has the authority to make a decision that allows for the continued use of the cabin (i.e. special use permit).

The committee reviewed its role in this matter. Andy asked if this was in the committee's jurisdiction. Discussion was held that since the NRAC had created the subcommittee and tasked them with this issue that this was OK.

Frank moved to accept the letter and forward to the County. Mike seconded. Motion passed. 6/2 vote

### **Committee activities**

Frank reported that the Flat Rock Road Association is meeting with BLM on October 29 to address application for road access across BLM for 83 lots. Tim indicated that Commissioner Jerry Brummer would be present to represent the County.

Andy addressed the East Side Screens. He asked that the committee should address these. The Ochoco Collaborative has begun a conversation and created a draft letter. Look for someone to come and address the committee in the next couple of meetings. Ultimate goal is to seek multi-county support for the FS to initiate a formal review.

## **Public Comment**

Dan Hammond addressed the group. He requested a time with the committee to make a formal presentation on the Canyon 66 fire and its impacts. He shared that the study used to plan the fire was 10 years old and vegetation conditions had changed since then and were not accounted for.

Barb mentioned the destruction of springs and forage and asked about the original ranger station house and barn at Rager. What is the FS plan to preserve them? She also asked about the OID canals, once piped and covered can they be used as public trails. John responded that canals have only an easement for access/maintenance, not owned by the District.

Dave questioned the process for starting the fire (Canyon 66). Torches vs ping pong balls. Indicated that they had started the fire down slope with torches and then went to the top and dropped ping pong balls via helicopter and created a draft, intensity fire burn. Asked out loud why the FS had not issued a contract thinning and allowed the public to remove firewood.

Marilyn was concerned about elevated risk of soil erosion and negative impacts on water quality with the burn.

Ston moved to find time in the next meeting for a citizen presentation. Teresa seconded. Motion passed.

John Breese expressed concern that the federal agencies were not staying of the entire meeting. They were giving their presentations and then leaving. The committee talked about them sitting at the table, engaging in the conversations in interacting with the discussions, not just giving a report. John felt that this was a public meeting and discussion should be public, not in-between meetings. Steve McGuire said there just needed to be some time for outside work because there is not enough time in our public meeting to address all issues.

Tim said he would share this information/concern with FS and BLM

Steve moved to adjourn. Ston seconded. Motion passed

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.